

Garden Steam



Visitors watch a Gauge 1 live steam locomotive on a passenger train while a child gets to blow the whistle on Mike Moore's remote control.

Steam Heaven in Delaware

by Charlie Zimmerman

Nestled along Red Clay Creek in the bucolic woods on the border of Delaware and Pennsylvania, the Marshall Steam Museum (online at auburnheights.org) is heaven for fans of steam. The museum itself is part of Auburn Valley State Park, Delaware's newest state park. The museum boasts the world's largest collection of operating Stanley Steamer autos, along with many treats for local historians and fans of steam power.

Visitors are greeted by a friendly staff that assists with parking and touring the grounds. Crossing the street from the parking area, the Queen Anne-style mansion comes into view; but attention quickly shifts to the miniature railroad crossing of the Auburn Valley Railroad.

Circling the museum property, the 7.5"-gauge railroad gives rides many weekends throughout the summer and for special events. Built through the 1950s and 60s, this line goes through a tunnel, passes a stately pond, and traverses trestles. Highlighting the ride are the two Little Engines 4-8-4s and a fleet of comfortable coaches. The recent addition of an F7 pair helps supplement power on the line.

The state park itself extends beyond the museum, with 360 acres of nature and hiking trails. Donated to the state in 2008 by local philanthropist Thomas C. Marshall Jr., and his wife Ruth, the museum grounds were his childhood home. Tom and his father T. Clarence Marshall collected the steam cars seen in the museum, and they constructed the live steam railroad.



The museum's collection of operating Stanley Steamer cars is the largest in the world.

Many surprises can be found for the steam enthusiast during a visit, including a steam-operated popcorn machine providing tasty snacks. Clarence built a smaller-scale live steam 4-8-4 which often toured with a Stanley Steamer. Operated on rollers as a display, the 3.5"-gauge loco was fed steam from the Stanley car parked nearby. This locomotive is on display in the museum along with numerous other steam items, like a 15"-gauge 1905 Cagney. Clarence traded a 1916 Packard Twin Six with singer James Melton to get the Cagney in the 1950s.

One possible addition to the museum grounds could be a live steam garden railroad. To help judge interest in such a feature, May of 2021 saw a steam-up in conjunction with the Aikenback Live Steam group run by Mike Moore. This display was done on the same weekend as one of the museum's "Train Days" which, it should be noted, differs from the museum's "Steamin' Days." The Aikenback Live Steam group put on a show of steam in various scales and gauges on a portable, elevated, dual-gauge track.

The members of the Aikenback group come from many parts of the globe to set up and operate their trains at various gatherings. From steam-ups at the Pennsylvania Live Steamers to the Trolley Museum in Scranton (near Steamtown) to The Howard County Living Farm Heritage Museum's Summerfest in Maryland, this group is passionate about small-scale live steam.

At the museum display, some members even let visitors operate the controls of their locomotives via radio control. Many children's faces showed delight as they got to blow the miniature whistle. Smaller-scale coal-fired locos ran just feet from the ride-on coal-fired 4-8-4s, filling the air with the smell of steam oil and

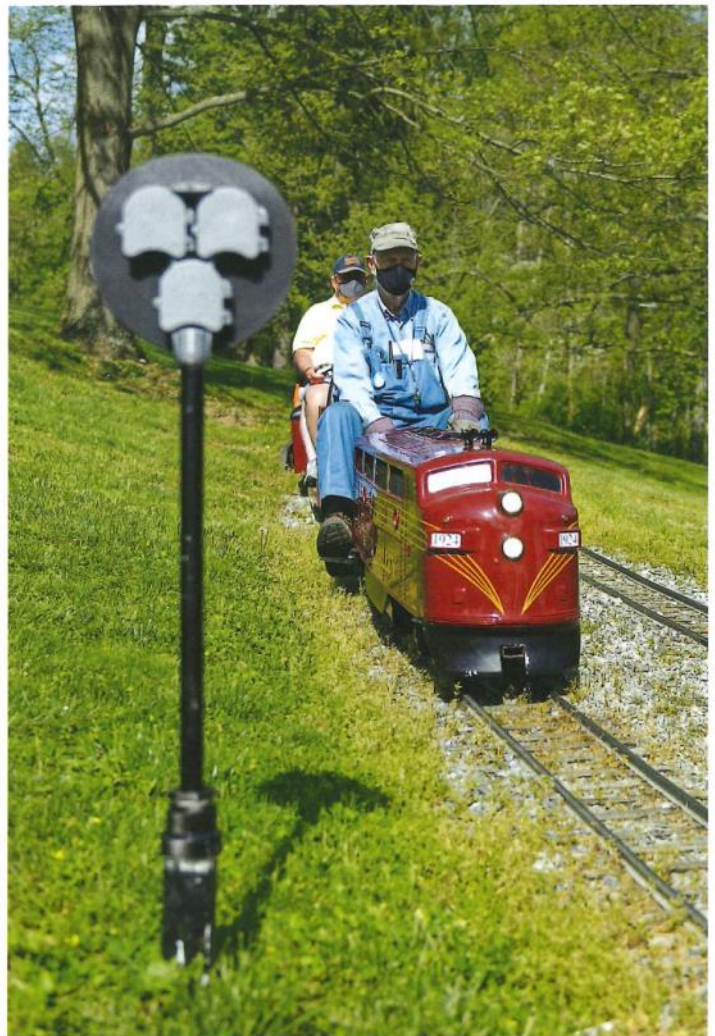


Number 401, built from Little Engine's castings, is ready to depart the station.

coal smoke. During the pleasant afternoon, crowds were deep around the live steam display despite the COVID-19 concerns.

Because this is a state park, special permission will be needed to change anything on the property, such as adding a permanent Gauge 1 railroad. Hopes are high for the groundbreaking in the spring of 2022 for a ground-level route.

A location next to the station for the ride-on train has been targeted to tempt the interest of visitors standing in line for, or



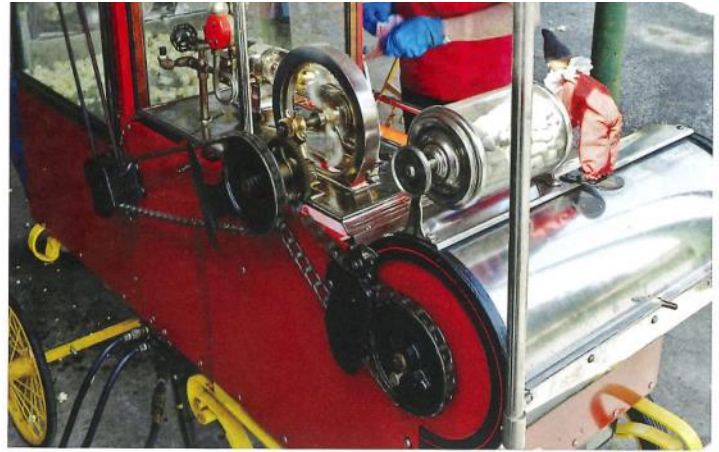
Newer motive power to the line, the pair of F7-style locos gave rides in the opposite direction to the steam-powered passenger trains. Seen here approaching one of the many working signals along the line, the train will pull onto a siding at the station to let the other train depart.



Built in 1897 by the grandparents of Tom Marshall Jr., the stately mansion overlooks the Marshall Steam Museum.



A steam-operated popcorn machine offered delicious snacks to the numerous guests.



A closer look at the mechanics of the popcorn machine.



Mike Gates opens the throttle on his PRR loco as he increases speed on the mainline.



Boris Rasputnis' Forney is seen in this pan shot.



The author lights the fire in his coal-fired 0-6-0, which started life as a basic Accucraft *Wrekin* before alterations like a new boiler and axle pump were added.

departing from, the ride. This area also features some hills that could afford ground-level tracks as well as elevated steaming bays. This approach could provide picturesque views of G-scale steam trains running along ballasted main lines, next to scale trees and buildings, while enabling modelers to work on their trains without bending over too much.

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This two-cylinder Accucraft Shay ran steady and smooth.



This scratch-built PRR 0-4-0 ran as beautifully as it looks on the Aikenback portable railroad.

This effort is being spearheaded by Mike Gates, who has offered to donate all of the track necessary to make the railroad happen. Mike points out that a permanent Gauge 1 railroad can help engage young visitors. Steam education is a major mission of the museum, so igniting interest in younger visitors is key. The museum serves to educate not only through their regular schedule of operation, but also through summer camps.

Mike operated his PRR 4-6-0 on the Aikenback tracks, pulling several scale cars. This locomotive would look great snaking around a future mainline on the ground at the museum. European and American narrow-gauge as well as standard-gauge models all plied the rails in the afternoon sun.

Bob Koury, Board President of the Friends of Auburn Heights, is set to make a presentation to the state this year. If things go well, the museum can start fundraising for the project soon. If successful, this will lead to more steam at a first-rate museum and state park.

While the addition of a permanent Gauge 1 railroad would surely enhance the museum's reach to guests of all ages, the facility should be a stop for any steam enthusiast. Hopefully, the Aikenback Live Steam group can remain involved in steam-ups at the museum. Check out the museum's website for dates and times, and for more information on their impressive collection.

Photos by Author.

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