

'Choo Choo' Charley likes little trains



"I'm ashamed to admit it, but all my stuff at home is packed in boxes. I'm not strange, though. A lot of collectors don't run their sets."

— Charley Burt

By JOHN BOZZO

The first person who called Charles Burt "Choo Choo" thought he was giving Charley the needle.

It didn't work. Charley liked the nickname. Now he even has "Choo Choo" printed on a desk nameplate.

Choo Choo refers to Burt's lifetime avocation—toy trains.

"As far back as I can remember I've been interested in toy trains," Burt said. "In 1924 my brother, who is three and a half years older than me, received an American Flyer wind-up for Christmas."

"From then on I was sold," Burt said. "I can still see myself pushing that train along the floor and going 'Choo Choo.'"

An electrician by trade, Burt began collecting the antique toy trains 26 years ago. He now has 200 locomotives, about 1,500 cars and six miles of track in his Redford Township home.

Most of Burt's collection is on display through Feb. 11 at the Burg Museum in Southfield. The museum is open 2-5 p.m., Saturdays and Sundays. Visitors may arrange an appointment by calling 646-2845.

BURT'S FAVORITE piece is the first train he ever owned, a Lionel No. 33 Locomotive.

One of the more valuable items on display is a burgundy-and-olive-colored replica of a 1931 Ives Lines locomotive. Although the replica is only one year old, it is worth \$500. The original is worth \$1,500.

"I have an average size collection," Burt said. "Some guys have enormous collections. In total mine's worth about \$7,000."

Dollar values of the items may vary with as minor a consideration as color.

A Lionel No. 8 is common in red or orange but rare in majole. Just because of the color it will go from a \$50 item to a \$150."

Choo Choo has the identical train his brother received in 1924, which initially tickled his fancy. The American Flyer locomotive has U.S. Mail, Pennsylvania R&R and an Express Baggage cars.

There are also some old train catalogs on display. A 1926 Ives catalog explains, "An Ives invention. Push the button and any Ives Series R locomotive will reverse itself at your will, wherever it is on the track. Marvelous!"

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ALTHOUGH HE IS AN avid collector, no one will ever find Choo Choo Charley wearing an engineer's hat and running toy trains in his basement.

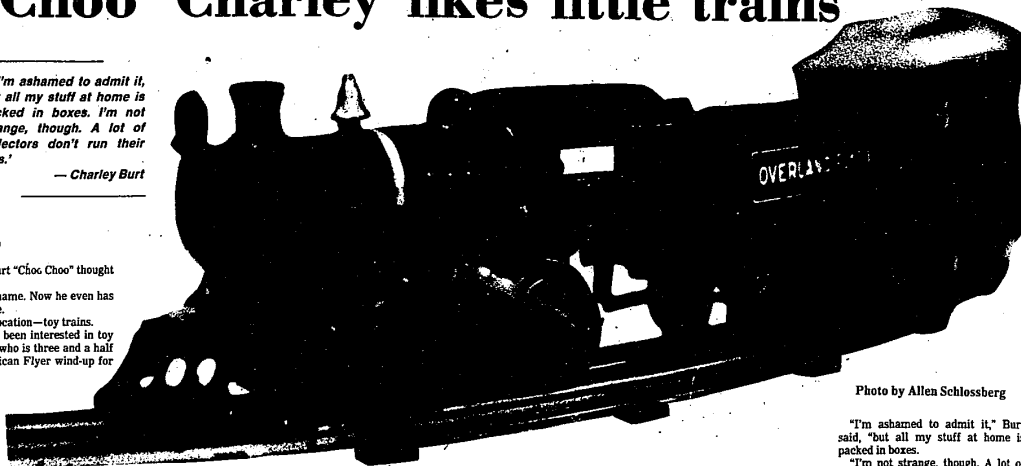


Photo by Allen Schlossberg

"I'm ashamed to admit it," Burt said, "but all my stuff at home is packed in boxes."

"I'm not strange, though. A lot of collectors don't run their sets. The scale model men, who collect replicas of real things, go in for running their sets."

"What I really enjoy is working on the stuff and repairing them more than anything. I have a repair service, mostly by mail order. I rewind antique motors and also do specialized repair on them."

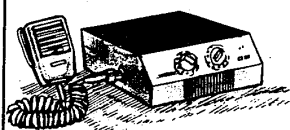
The first toy train was a wooden model built in the early 1860s, Burt said. Early trains were also made of tin and cast iron. Now, like everything else in the modern age, toy trains are constructed from plastic.

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