

ANDREW BENSON TESTIMONIAL

Celebrate the 100th Birthday of Frank Sinatra!
Special FREE concert

Saturday, Dec 12th • 6:30 - 9:30pm at Depot Barbecue
Featuring... Matt Snow, The Cincinnati Sinatra



Frank Sinatra visits a toy train store

SAVOR A
WONDERFUL
PHOTO TAKEN
THE DAY HE WENT
BROWSING IN
THE 1940S

By Roger Carp

Journalism, just like sports and politics, can slingshot you from the heights of hope and achievement to the depths of worry and desperation. This view seems true even for someone writing in the field of new and vintage toy trains.

Ever heard the song where the blue-eyed singer laments about riding high in April and being shot down in May? That lyric – flipped on its head – applied to me this past summer. Only I experienced my low period in July and enjoyed my high weeks later in August. And everything related to the story I was writing for the November issue about Frank Sinatra and his love of toy trains.

Let me tell you about the emotional roller coaster ride I recently took. Everything ended on the right note – with a fantastic story to tell.

A picture to die for

The article about Sinatra and his appreciation of electric trains represented many months of research. Finding anyone who had memories of spending time in the hobby with the legendary entertainer proved to be quite a challenge. More difficult was gaining access to members of his family, especially during the year when the world was commemorating the centennial of his birth.

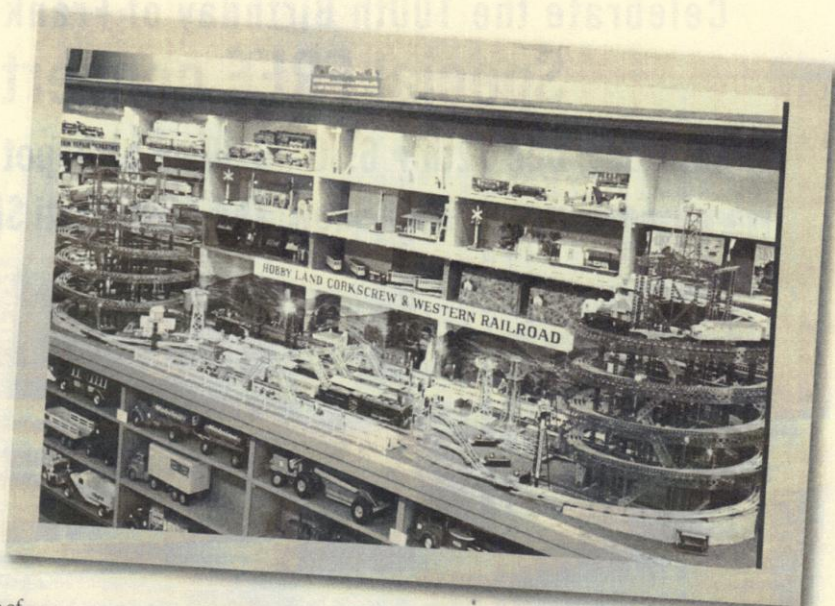
Image courtesy of The Sinatra Family Archive

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◀ Frank Sinatra, already a celebrity in the U.S. and abroad, stopped in a toy train store sometime in the 1940s. He had been introduced to Lionel trains and was probably building the collection that would always be an important part of his life.

▶ Our quest to identify the store with a helix where the picture of Frank Sinatra was taken led us to a shot of the interior of Hobby-Land, a major retailer in New York City.



As my deadline loomed in July, I received an email from Amanda Erlinger, a granddaughter of the singer. Though consumed with requests for information and interviews, she had reserved time to discuss her grandfather and what she knew about his background in trains, notably the collection on display at his home in Rancho Mirage, Calif.

I was absolutely stunned when Amanda described an old black-and-white of her grandfather in a train store in the 1940s.

Then Amanda told me the best she could do was send a low-resolution image. Anything better, meaning of the quality and size necessary for publication in *Classic Toy Trains*, was highly unlikely. Sadly, the file was so tiny I could barely discern a young Frank Sinatra, much less figure out where he was standing.

I had flown so close to heaven and being given access to the perfect shot to enhance my story. It was so tough to hide my disappointment at missing out.

Saved almost in time

Meanwhile, I rushed to finish writing the article Carl Swanson, the editor of CTT, had decided would be the cover feature for November. I gathered my notes, including the reminiscences of John Aaron and Allen Drucker, both of whom had spent many hours swapping stories and sharing trains with Sinatra.

My deadline for turning over the manuscript and related photos to our art director arrived shortly before the end of July. Good as I thought everything was, I wished we could have added the vintage picture of Sinatra in a train store. But it seemed we were destined to go to press without that jewel snapped in the 1940s.

Indeed, the article as designed went to the printer in early August, and I had no hope of ever being able to publish the photo. I felt dejected, as though I had let down our many thousands of readers, all of whom would have loved it.

Persistence pays off, or so I had learned from my parents while growing up. Amanda sent another email, saying that family attorneys had authorized her sending a high-resolution image for us to put in the magazine. Well, we missed the November issue but here it is for the December issue. A real holiday gift!

I was absolutely stunned when Amanda described an old black-and-white of her grandfather in a train store.

Questions linger

What do we discover in this fascinating black-and-white picture? A young Sinatra examines an odd assortment of O gauge models from the pre-World War II era. The majority of models appear to be scale replicas rather than toys. A Lionel observation car in the center ended up being the only one we could identify with any certainty. You can see laying next to it a Skyline structure kit.

The helix of track in the background intrigued me. I was reminded of one standing out in a photograph published in an article I had written about Hobby-Land, a legendary toy train store in Manhattan after World War II.

Take a look at that picture (objects enable me to date it to 1952 or '53). The helix on the Corkscrew & Western RR, as

original owner Frank Ajello had named the O gauge railroad there, didn't quite match the one seen behind Sinatra.

However, knowing from Amanda that the photo with her grandfather had been taken sometime in the 1940s (at least 5 years before the Hobby-Land image) opened the possibility that the helix in the later shot represented a rebuilt version of what Ajello had initially constructed using pieces from Meccano sets.

Also relevant was the jumbled group of models being examined by Sinatra. Ajello

had boasted of his willingness to purchase any and all used trains and then offer them to customers at discounted prices. Maybe the singer was searching for a bargain or something different to run behind his Lionel engines.

Your turn!

Please help us! We'd love to hear from anyone who can identify models in the fantastic photograph shared by the Sinatra family or who has ideas about where the picture was taken and when. Contact me at rcarp@classictoytrains.com.

Regardless of whether we gather enough clues to reach conclusions about the picture, we are grateful to Amanda Erlinger and her family for sharing it. We can only wish we had been in that store the day Frank Sinatra dropped in. **CTT**

Review received on 12-14-2015 at 12:39 pm (PDT)



Matt Snow's pays tribute to Sinatra's 100th birthday

Wow! Matt delivered again a professional show filled with the passion and love he has for the Frank Sinatra collection and the artist himself. He came early on Dec. 12th to set up and stayed late to fulfill requests of admirers who flock to his performances. I was grateful that he offered his external speakers to broadcast his music onto our patio. The showmanship he brings is well worth twice his fee, though we are also grateful that he priced the show appropriately for our small venue. I will definitely be bringing him back for more appearances!

Reviewer: Andrew Benson

Event Date: December 12th, 2015

Event Type: Nightclub Event

Event City: Madeira, OH

Serviced Provided: 1940s Era Entertainment, 1950s Era Entertainment, 1960s Era Entertainment, Crooner, Dean Martin Impersonator, Frank Sinatra Impersonator, Holiday Entertainment, Las Vegas Style Entertainment, Marilyn Monroe Impersonator

Overall Rating: 5 out of 5

Expertise: ★★★★★

Communication: ★★★★★

Professionalism: ★★★★★

Priced Fairly: ★★★★★

Adaptability: ★★★★★