

LUCIEN L. CHAMPAGNE
NMRA #92796
1945-2021

I was deeply saddened to recently learn that our dear friend, Lu Champagne, had passed away on December 15, 2021. Over the past decade, I have enjoyed Lu's companionship while sharing our favorite hobby, model railroading. Lu liked what I liked, realistic looking model railroad scenes with good looking and smooth operating model trains running through them. He was most enthusiastic, though, about enjoying the challenges and successes of realistic train operations, especially on his Cape Porpoise and Western Railroad in the basement of his Kennebunkport, Maine, home.

When I first met Lu at a quarterly meeting of the Seacoast Division NMRA, an "Event" as we have come to call them, I recognized a wonderfully friendly and helpful individual who seemed to go out of his way to address other people's needs. During our time together in the division, Lu helped promote realistic train operations among the members, was on the Maine Model Railroad Tour 2016 Steering Committee and put his layout on the Tour, and he did a fantastic job as Membership Committee Chair for three years. In his role as Membership Chair, he helped staff the division's promotional table at train shows, published articles for the division newsletter encouraging member recruitment, and was a regular cheerleader for the NMRA and the division everywhere he met model railroaders. He frequently sent unique messages to newly recruited members as well as to members who had renewed their memberships, always asking for their input on how the division could make their model railroad experiences better. By the time of his passing, Lu was a thirty-year member of the National Model Railroad Association, having joined in October 1991.

Lu was proud of his layout and made it available to anyone who wanted to see it. He earned the Golden Spike Award for his model railroad in July 2015. The next year he started hosting operating sessions on it. Lu wanted the whole experience to be fun, starting with his invitations. Receiving an invitation to an operating session on his layout involved a tongue-in-cheek, officious email message from his "OPS Dept." The message was addressed to "All CP&W Crew Members." The subject line contained highly unlikely to be respected specific: "CP&W trains are scheduled to roll on Tuesday, 6/20/17, at 09:17." [Emphasis added by me.] Then came the standard body of the message:

"This is the first crew call. Please advise the OPS Dept. ASAP regarding your availability for assignment. Requests for specific assignment will be considered based on timely response and seniority. Crew members should report for duty at 09:00."

Five to seven of us would join Lu and operate on his Cape Porpoise and Western Railroad and have a blast for 3 or so hours. Lu was extremely well-organized and a gracious host. His operating scheme was heavier on paperwork than most model railroads. Lu's ops procedure required operators to supply written reports like those the prototype railroads had their conductors prepare. Because we had month-long or longer gaps between operating sessions, we would often forget when or how to perform many of the paperwork tasks he asked us to do. He had a keen eye out to spot when one of us had failed to document something. There were some light-hearted words between operators and the "superintendent," but it was all in fun. Lu took the edge off the paperwork requirements by providing

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us with ample supplies of cookies, beverages, and other treats to keep our energy up as needed to perform all the arduous work he assigned us on his model railroad empire.

The CP&W was a freelanced HO scale layout, approximately 32 by 13 feet with about 100 feet of mainline track. Its theme was a short line railroad in southern Maine running from Westbrook Maine to Dover New Hampshire in 1957. This gave him a rationale to run Maine Central, Boston & Maine, Canadian National, and even the Bangor and Aroostook, which was a considerable geographical stretch of Lu's imagination. Remember Rule #1, though; *it was his railroad*. He loved the blue-grey livery of his BAR diesel engines. He had both steam and diesel engines, ran passenger trains in addition to freights, and controlled all engines with digital command control by NCE. Most locomotives had sound decoders, too, so the layout room was alive with the sounds of whistles, horns, chuffing steamers, and growling diesels. He purposely built the layout for lots of switching and had a schedule of 25 trains "per day," only a subset of which would be run during an individual session. Lu's trains were generally only 5-10 cars in length which helped us expeditiously move through our switching assignments and move on to our next destination without holding up other trains excessively. This was particularly helpful for the yardmaster of the major yard. The yardmaster in Dayton Yard had a plethora of trains entering and leaving his yard, but only had three easily accessible tracks to classify inbound cars and build outbound trains, plus one long track adjacent to the backdrop which had to be cleared from time to time to allow access to some industry tracks. The Dayton yardmaster also had to deal with passenger trains, the adjacent busy engine facility, and the East Dayton industrial area. On the other end of the spectrum, a more sedate assignment would be serving the paper mill which was at the end of a branch line. At the end of each session, Lu had a huge smile on his face with satisfaction that his guests had enjoyed themselves and that his railroad had performed well. In a debriefing afterwards, he would mention things he would expand upon or refine before we came back for the next session. He was driven to make future events ever more satisfying.

My last operating experience on Lu's layout was in October 2018 as thereafter I spent peak model railroad operating months of October through May each year in our Florida home. Nevertheless, Lu would send me invitations to all his operating sessions and tack on a query of when I would be returning to Maine for the summer. He always wanted to give me another chance to operate on the CP&W. I last visited him in October 2020, just days before Susan and I left for Florida once again. Lu wanted me to see the improvements he had made since my last visit two years earlier, plus he wanted me to sign off as witness on a Chief Dispatcher Operating Log for sessions that he and I had participated together. Sadly, by then, Lu's health had declined so that he was no longer able to model and not comfortable going to model railroad activities, yet he still wanted to advance in the Achievement Program to the extent that he could. And he still wanted me to take a train around his layout!

As I think back about my socializing with Lu, I recall that he tended to focus overwhelmingly on the topic of model railroading during our discussions. I do not recall him speaking much about himself. I understand that he grew up in Lewiston, Maine, and went to Colby College in Waterville. He spent most of his working years as a pharmaceutical representative for a large company visiting medical service providers in his territory which included New Hampshire and Maine. Consequently, he was on the road a lot. His close friend, Mike Pedersen, recalled that he and Lu first became involved together over 25 years ago with a modular model railroad club, the York County Model Railroad Club with a

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home in Biddeford, but it was not in existence long. Mike also mentioned that Lu was a volunteer fireman for many years. After our division hosted the Northeastern Regional Convention in Laconia, NH, in 2013, Lu began participating much more regularly in division activities. Nevertheless, he faithfully prioritized his adopted sons' activities over model railroad activities. Lu made sure he was available for Alex and Noah's Saturday activities and missed many of the division events, train shows, and operating sessions to support them during their sporting activities.

Lu Champagne is one of many fine people that I have met during my nearly 24 years in the National Model Railroad Association. We are blessed to have such an organization and the many volunteers like Lu who keep it functioning for our benefit. Hopefully, our model railroad hobby will go on forever, but we know that our time will come when we join Lu at the end of the tracks. Rest in peace, Lu, until our trains pull into the station to join you.

Peter McKenney



Lu happily holding his framed certificate of his Golden Spike Award presented to him by Larry Cannon, MMR, during a Seacoast Division NMRA event held at the Great Falls Model Railroad Club, Auburn, Maine, July 18, 2015.



Lu graciously opened his beloved layout for visitors during Maine Model Railroad Tour 2016 on September 25, 2016. In this scene, Lu is entertaining a visitor (center) with the aid of his fellow Seacoast Division NMRA member Chip Faulter (1958-2019). Chip was a frequent operator on Lu's layout and was highly regarded as the yardmaster in Dayton Yard (to the left of Lu in this scene). Behind the guest is the East Dayton industrial area and Chip's left hand is on the control panel for Newport, another interesting switching area on the layout. International trains would appear in this area from hidden staging behind the blue backdrop.



May 3, 2016, operating session on Lu's CP&W. Crew members, l to r: Mike Pedersen, Chip Faulter, Lu, Ralph Brown, Peter Amershadian, and Larry Cannon. All photos by Peter McKenney.