

C & R Railroad

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

The train emerges from the tunnel and speeds down the mountain track, overlooking a bustling village in the valley below. There aren't a lot of mountains in Kansas, but this scene features a model train. It is part of a remarkable model railroad museum in rural Kansas. This is today's Kansas Profile.

The C&R Railroad is a model railroad museum, part of the Huck Boyd Community Center in Phillipsburg. The center, named for long-time Kansas journalist and civic leader Huck Boyd, celebrated its twentieth anniversary in 2017.

One wing of the community center houses the C&R Railroad, a legacy of local citizen Bill Clarke. The C in the name stands for Clarke. The R stands for his wife's maiden name, Reiss.

Bill Clarke grew up in the rural Phillips County town of Kirwin, population 171 people. Now, that's rural

Bill said it was exciting when the train came to Kirwin each day. In fact, he even pretended that his little red wagon was a train. He painted Missouri Pacific and Union Pacific on the side and pulled his wagon around town as if it was the train and he was the locomotive.

Bill grew up and went on to a long and successful career as a family photographer. He established a photo studio in the county seat town of Phillipsburg.

Meanwhile, he never lost his interest in trains. One day in 1966, Bill was in Denver and he came across a model railroad engine of a Santa Fe Super Chief so he bought it. That was the beginning of his incredible collection of railroad memorabilia.

For the next thirty years, Bill collected all types of model railroads and related souvenirs. He stored and displayed them in the back room of his photo studio. When the Huck Boyd Foundation built a new community center in Phillipsburg, that became a natural place to display his railroad memorabilia and photo archives for the future.

It was Huck Boyd who had successfully led the fight to maintain rail service through the region when the Rock Island Railroad closed down and abandoned the track. Bill knew Huck Boyd well and so he donated this remarkable collection to the Huck Boyd Foundation.

The foundation built a special museum for the model railroad collection. Steven Krauss of Denver designed the layout and Jim Talbott, a model railroad builder from Montana, built the multilevel model landscape. After nearly three months of labor, the project welcomed the whistles of locomotives. It was Mr. Talbott's largest ever privately funded model railroad project.

It was named the C&R Railroad. Bill and his wife are now deceased, but the legacy of Bill's passion for railroads lives on.

In 2017, Huck Boyd Foundation Board Chair Mike James and other volunteers upgraded the C&R Railroad. Today, this incredible display of model railroad cars features 143 engines, 259 cars, and 39 cabooses. There are also 136 railroad lanterns, 162 timetables, and many other railroad artifacts through the years.

The model trains are displayed in a room featuring special lighting with day and nighttime effects. The track winds through model mountain tunnels near a waterfall,

crosses bridges and passes through the village below. It includes a turntable and roundhouse, a quarter-mile of track, two miles of wiring, and 4,000 track screws. Wow.

Thanks to the extensive work of Mike James and the other volunteers, these train cars all operate. It is exciting when the lights go down and visitors gather around to see the trains take off. The center also houses Bill Clarke's tremendous archives of photos and vintage photographic equipment.

The C&R Railroad is open by appointment. Private shows last approximately 45 minutes. For more information, contact the Huck Boyd Foundation at 785-543-5535.

Also found in the collection: An old red wagon, with Missouri Pacific and Union Pacific painted on the sides. Yes, this is Bill Clarke's red wagon, which miraculously had been rescued and returned to him from the junkyard in Kirwin.

We commend Mike James and all those who support the C&R Railroad for making a difference by preserving and sharing this railroad history. I believe they are on the right track.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.