

Through an Interview with *Jim Gates*, CM #1, Here's How the LCCA Began!

(Editor's Note: This is the first of a six part series of your Club's background and history. We start with an interview of Jim Gates, the LCCA's founder, conducted/transcribed recently by Dennis De Vito, RM #6758. Jim is shown on the front cover, to the right, receiving a plaque from President Chuck Seddon acknowledging the founding and commemorating our 25th Anniversary. So, here's how the Club first began, straight from CM #1. Enjoy!)

DD: Well, let's begin with you talking about the start up and early history of the Club.

JG: OK, first of all, I came from a railroad family, lived in a small town of about 6,000 called Perry, Iowa. I was the only train collector I knew of in town, but I had played with kids who had Lionel trains and, my family was railroaders, my grandpa my dad, so naturally I was interested in trains. Eventually I ended up in Des Moines many years later. Again I knew no train collectors, so I watched the Sunday paper and one day I saw an ad in the paper for some trains so I called and went over to his house and that is how I met Ed Houck, my first train collector. We had such a nice chat that I told him why can't we do this again. Ed said he thought that would be a good idea. So then we invited J. B. Snyder who, at the time, owned the one and only 'Brute' in the state of Iowa. That was the first get together like a 'club', just the three of us. We had so much fun that we developed the idea, or I guess I developed the idea that why couldn't we meet once a month in somebody's house and rotate. So that's the way my first local club started. Then, the first local meeting was held in my garage a short time later and about twenty collectors showed up.

And that was very successful and pretty soon the local club grew, but I still wasn't satisfied. I wanted to have a Lionel club because I used to buy *Model Railroader Magazine* and *Railroad Model Craftsman* and I'd get so peeved that there wouldn't ever be anything about Lionel in there but when you looked in the back of the magazine all that was for sale and want ads was

Lionel. Finally one day I just got tired of it and I decided the only way to put an end to that was to organize and start our own club, a national club. Of course I met resistance right away with negative attitudes from the local toy collectors who said it couldn't be done. Even my wife said it couldn't be done. Everybody seemed against me. But that helped me because I'm stubborn. I started getting response right away, it grew real slow at first but I finally ran into difficulty because I called the first club the Lionel Collectors Club - period. Then one day the meeting had rotated back to my house, it was in my garage, and somebody invited an American Flyer collector and he stands up there and says "I think you ought to change the name to American Flyer Collectors Club". He was making his point that he wasn't a Lionel collector and by golly they all voted to do that, to change the name. I was dumbfounded. Even though I was President, I was outvoted and they changed the name to Toy Train Club. I was just shot down. I felt defeated and sulked as I sat in my basement. Finally I took responsibility on myself and decided to start a second time.

That's when I put the ad in *Model Railroader Magazine*. The first time I just tried to call the local club the Lionel's Collector's Club. So the second time in order to start again, I changed the name slightly to Lionel Collectors Club of America. And of course, I got immediate response but it was slow. I think after six months of advertising, the new Club only had thirty or forty members so it was pretty slow growing. So, in 1971, when I got around to trying to get the first Annual Convention, I was very worried because I still only had about sixty or seventy members and this was spread out over the whole nation. When I rented the Howard Johnson on Grand Avenue I had to put out a lot of propaganda to try to get anybody to come. I was very worried that maybe nobody would show up. But anyway, there were fifty-two who showed up and I think we only had like eighty members. That was astounding because they came from places like Washington, Oregon, New York, Connecticut and Massachusetts. They came

from all over. And then there was another twenty or so joined at the door so when the first Annual Convention was over, we had about one hundred and ten members.

At the first Convention I told them I wasn't going to run for office. I started the Club mainly because I felt it was needed. Before the Convention was over they elected Van Stockdale as President and the reason he was elected is there was a good sized bunch who came from Kansas City. They thought he was a good guy, I knew nothing about it so anyway when the second Convention came they naturally took it to Kansas City because he was the President and that was what was voted on at the first Convention. Well, as you know, Van Stockdale did not pan out so good and eventually he was replaced by Chuck Seddon. Years later I asked some of the Kansas City guys why did you vote this guy in. They told me they didn't know anything about him. I guess they just did it because he was from Kansas City and they were from Kansas City, that's basically what it amounted to. But the Club was kind of slow growing there in its first years, but when Chuck Seddon took over he did well as it took Chuck a year or two to really get things straightened out and get rolling by the time we had our third Convention in Huntsville, Alabama. Chuck Seddon saved the Club.

Oh, I overlooked one important thing, at the first Annual Convention even though we were small, Lionel did send a representative and I wrote them a letter and I always thought that was pretty good because we were so small. Lionel also gave me a box of, I think, 100 catalogs to pass out. That was pretty nice, that was helpful. At the second Convention, we wrote them, or the new President did because I told him how I did things. The Lionel company from that day on always sent somebody and some of the guys don't work for them anymore, but we did have support from the Lionel company from the very start and then I also had a lot of other support from a lot of other people. For example, at the first Annual Convention there was a guy named Ted Dart