

Lights, Camera, Lionel Trains! A Photo History of an American Icon

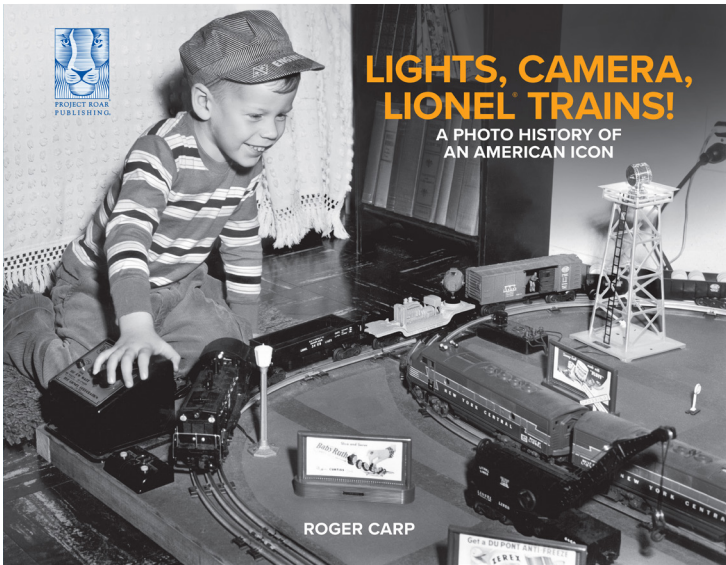
by Roger Carp

2024: Project Roar Publishing; Winfield, Illinois 60190. \$49.95 (hardcover)

A numbered, autographed limited edition hardcover is available for \$99.95.

Reviewed by Dr. Joseph Lechner TCA #01-52673 Winter 2025 e*Train

A casual internet search might suggest that every word about postwar Lionel trains has already been written. At least six authors have produced comprehensive collector's guides documenting Lionel's locomotives, cars, accessories, and outfits; their known variations; their rarity; and their monetary value in the secondary market. Greenberg's postwar series spans six volumes, with its flagship title on motive power and rolling stock now in its tenth edition.



Regular Edition Front Cover

This book, however, is different. *Classic Toy Trains'* senior editor, Roger Carp, offers a fresh perspective. Instead of focusing on Lionel's engines and cars, as many of his previous books and *CTT* columns have done, *Lights, Camera, Lionel Trains!* celebrates the people who built, promoted, sold, and—most importantly—enjoyed Lionel trains. **Through 100 photo essays, Carp explores the toys' impact on American culture, touching on everything from motion pictures and television to dining and even law enforcement.**



A Father-Son Bond

This quintessential 1954 image epitomizes the father-son bond that Joshua Lionel Cowen promised his toys would strengthen.

Lionel trains delivered meals in restaurants, collected donations for charity, and even served as a defense exhibit in a celebrated legal case. They educated the public about electricity, and police in Rochester, NY, used Lionel layouts to encourage youths to stay in school and out of trouble.



To order from Project Roar Publishing
Call 630-653-ROAR (7627) or visit www.projectroar.com
Books are also available from Amazon.com, Trains.com and your local hobby retailer

A Holiday Tradition

Scenes like this one at New York's R.H. Macy & Company were replicated in department stores nationwide. The gleaming Blue Comet brought holiday cheer even to Depression-era families who couldn't afford one.

Lionel trains also became rolling advertisements for products ranging from breakfast cereal to gasoline and roller bearings—and even for railroads themselves.

After World War II, Lionel trains symbolized a return to normalcy, whether to schoolchildren in war-torn Guam or kids pressing their noses against department store windows in American cities. They brought Christmas cheer to wounded GIs recuperating in a Staten Island hospital.



A Hollywood Connection

Toy trains made memorable props in Hollywood movies like *Four's a Crowd* (1938), *Everybody's Baby* (1939), and *Slightly Tempted* (1940). Celebrities such as James Cagney, Betty Grable, and Rita Hayworth seemed more relatable when posing with a train set.

Thurgood Marshall, Ezio Pinza, Nat King Cole, and Roy Campanella all played with Lionel trains alongside their children.



To order from Project Roar Publishing
Call 630-653-ROAR (7627) or visit www.projectroar.com
Books are also available from Amazon.com, Trains.com and your local hobby retailer

Behind the Scenes

Every Lionel fan knows about Madison Hardware. In these pages, you'll meet the Shur/Shaw brothers, who ran this iconic dealership, as well as Buffalo's Chester "The Train Man" Spoonley and the Johnston family of St. Louis' Electric Train Shop. You'll also learn about the artisans from Diorama Studios, who created the stunning advertising scenes Lionel used, and Jack Kindler, who designed the fabulous Super "O" showroom display and the L-shaped layout featured on the back cover of Lionel's 1957 catalog.

While the cover photo showcases Lionel outfits from the early 1950s, the book's coverage is broader. Of its 224 photographs, 9% depict Standard gauge trains, and 13% feature prewar O gauge. Postwar O gauge does predominate; but Lionel produced more trains during that era (especially during the decade from 1946–1955), and thus that genre has impacted more people.

The book concludes with tributes to Lenny Dean, Lionel's longest-serving employee, and Richard Kughn, who led Lionel Trains, Inc. from 1986 to 1995.

For those of us who grew up playing with prewar and postwar trains, the essays' clear black text on white backgrounds is an appreciated nod to readability.

Richly illustrated and deeply engaging, this book belongs on every coffee table. Both train enthusiasts and non-hobbyists will enjoy discovering Lionel's profound impact on American society.

Lights, Camera, Lionel Trains! A Photo History of an American Icon by Roger Carp. Available from Project Roar Publishing, P.O. Box 95, Winfield, IL 60190. To order, visit www.projectroar.com or call 630-653-ROAR (7627). 224 pages, 220+ full-color and black-and-white photos, Hardcover \$49.95 (ISBN 978-1-933600-07-9), Limited Edition Hardcover \$99.95 (ISBN 978-1-933600-08-6). It is also available Amazon.com, Trains.com and your local hobby retailer.