



## WARD KIMBALL'S LEGACY TO TCA

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National Toy Train Museum and Library

Ward Kimball, renowned Disney animator, Dixieland jazz musician, and toy train aficionado, was TCA president from 1974-1975, and applied his prodigious creative talents to various types of artwork to benefit the organization. Among his contributions were ideas for the architectural



design of the National Headquarters building in Strasburg, PA which houses the National Toy Train Museum and Library. He designed the weathervane atop the Headquarters building and the TCA logo mounted on steel beams in the Museum atrium. Ward Kimball also produced 22 *Train Collectors Quarterly* magazine covers and artwork for the 17<sup>th</sup> Anniversary convention car.

### Biography

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Attired in a pair of round, black spectacles, an engineman's cap, and dungarees, Ward Kimball's personal appearance belied an unconventional attitude about how a professional animator should dress and act. Close friends referred to his comic genius and flair for caricature. Newspaper articles referenced his satirical sensibilities and irreverent sense of humor. A key characteristic of Ward Kimball's personality was that he found it irresistible to satirize anyone who was self-important or too earnest.

Born in 1914 in Minneapolis, MN, Ward Kimball's passion for trains extended as far back as his boyhood when his first drawing is said to have been of a train. As a young man Kimball attended art school and in 1934 was hired by Disney studios where he pursued a highly successful

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career until the time of his retirement in 1973. Kimball shared a love of trains with employer, Walt Disney, and several times the two visited Disney's boyhood farm in Marceline, MO, where Ward thrilled at the sights and sounds of the trains of the Santa Fe Railroad as they rolled through town.

A fascination with trains is reflected both in Kimball's professional and personal life. As an animator he developed the character of the train, "Casey Jr." which appeared in several Disney movies including *Dumbo*, the elephant. "Casey Jr." is depicted as a small train with great vitality, capable of performing acrobatic stunts; stretching, bending and jumping in all directions. The energy and humor with which he imbues "Casey Jr." resembled Kimball's own vibrant personality.

Kimball's professional success allowed him to fulfill his passion for both full-size and toy trains. At his home in San Gabriel, CA on a 3-acre property he built the 3-foot gauge Grizzly Flats Railroad which included two Baldwin narrow gauge steam locomotives, a passenger coach, cattle car and caboose. Kimball also constructed two extraordinary toy train layouts at his home; one American and the other European, where he delighted in giving tours of his world-class collection.

At the time of his death in July 2002 at age 88 Ward Kimball's reputation as a connoisseur of antique trains and toys was well-established. Represented in Noel Barrett's auction of his collection in 2004 were pristine examples of trains produced by European manufacturers such as Märklin, Bing and Carette, as well as the trains and toys of American companies such as George Brown, James Fallows and Bliss. Ward Kimball's collection reflected a vast array of the highest quality toy trains assembled by a single collector.

### **Ward Kimball and the TCA National Headquarters Building**

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As TCA President from 1974-75, Ward played an instrumental role in plans for constructing a new National Headquarters building in Strasburg, PA. He worked closely with Museum & Education Committee Chair, Bob Robinson, to determine an architectural plan which would best represent the dreams and aspirations of train collectors.

As a patron of the Orange Empire Trolley Museum in Perris, CA Ward Kimball observed a historic railroad station built in 1886 by the Santa Fe Railroad which was located on its grounds. On visits to the museum, he admired the architectural features of the old Victorian station; overhanging eaves with wooden supports, refined brickwork, mansard roof and gingerbread detailing on its centrally-located cupola. From this station Kimball took his inspiration and in April 1975 persuaded members of the Education & Museum Committee to use it as the basis for the new building's architectural design. Today TCA members appreciate the attractive building in Strasburg, PA which testifies to Ward Kimball's sense of history and of beautiful, proportional design.

In May 1975 the Board of Directors issued a report in the form of a brochure to update the membership about the proposed Museum and National Headquarters building. Its cover featured an architect's rendition of the building developed from Ward Kimball's concept of the Perris, CA, station. A follow-up article in the *Quarterly* by Bob Robinson describes the Museum's interior which, "allows space for displays of trains and toy train artifacts, an operating layout, a reference library for members and the public, a business office and storage."

### Ward Kimball and the *Train Collectors Quarterly* Magazine

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From 1965 to 1992, Ward Kimball published 19 articles in TCA's educational publication, *Train Collectors Quarterly*. In addition to his written contributions to the *Train Collectors Quarterly*, Kimball offered his artistic talents to the magazine in other ways.

From 1970 to 1992 Ward Kimball designed 22 covers for the *Train Collectors Quarterly*, some of which wrap around to the back cover of the magazine. These covers tell a multi-layered story, usually humorous and irreverent, which nudge the viewer to think of toy trains with a sense of fun and an active imagination. On some of these covers miniature scenes exist within the larger picture, allowing us a deeper enjoyment of Ward's whimsical humor.

The most amusing and only “controversial” cover created by Kimball appears on the Volume 37 #1, January 1991 issue of the *Quarterly*. It is a wraparound cover depicting the image of an artist painting a semi-nude young model who holds in her hands a Lionel Blue Comet locomotive. Ward thus explains his painting,

“I tried to think of a composition which would show the emotional love and dedication a man seems to have for his trains...and then it hit me! Why not *paint* a picture that would express this deep affection some of us shower, for example, on Lionel’s “Blue Comet,” that voluptuous tinplate femme fatale of the late 1930s?”

Kimball goes on to say in this issue that he dedicates this graphic endeavor to the thousands of patient wives of collectors out there who no doubt has questioned many times their resigned plight with silent musing. “WHICH COMES FIRST, ME OR THOSE DARN TRAINS!”

## **Weathervane**

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On April 22, 1976, groundbreaking ceremonies took place at the site of the TCA National Headquarters building in Strasburg, PA. As evidenced in a series of original sketches housed in the library, it was Ward Kimball who first suggested, “Why not a toy train weathervane?” For the Museum’s Grand Opening in 1977 he designed a handsome weathervane modeled after the Ives cast iron steam locomotive, a floor train of the 1890s. The weathervane was constructed of several flat, heavy metal cut-outs, measuring 4 foot long and 20 inches high. Today it remains an impressive sight to visitors to the National Toy Train Museum and Library.

## **TCA Logo**

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Ward Kimball also influenced the appearance of the TCA logo. The original logo consisted of a circle with “TCA” appearing in bright blue letters at its center and “Train Collectors Association” in red around its circumference. In a scroll at the bottom of the logo appeared the words, “Organized 1954”, and below, “Inc. 1957”. Superimposed on the “TCA” lettering was a generic-style trolley in white.

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**Observing that the trolley was not the most appropriate symbol for a train collector's group, in 1976 Ward Kimball replaced it. From original pencil sketches housed in the library, he drew an image of a circa 1917 Lionel #33 electric outline locomotive which was permanently added to the new logo. The patriotic colors were dropped and the logo has appeared in a wide variety of colors over the years. Today it hangs from the steel beams in the atrium of the National Toy Train Museum in striking colors of red and gold.**

### **Sketch of the Board of Directors**

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**Nowhere is Ward Kimball's satirical sense of humor more evident than on the back cover of the Summer 1974, volume 20 # 3 issue of the *Train Collectors Quarterly*. Appearing on this cover are a series of caricatures drawn by Ward during the 20<sup>th</sup> Convention Board of Directors meeting in Seattle, WA. In "a few quick sketches," as Kimball describes them, he draws numerous officers among whom are: Lou Redman, Bob Davenport, Jim Wiley, Charles Feyh, Ray Le Cates and others, each with serious facial expressions, studying reports and scrutinizing rules and regulations. In the lower right corner of the sketch Ward Kimball can be seen, hand on forehead, an exasperated expression on his face.**

**It was Ward Kimball's natural inclination to caricature those who were too self-important, self-absorbed or serious. As we view the drawings of these gentlemen concentrating on the business of the BOD, Ward Kimball's underlying message is very apparent and as applicable today as it was forty-eight years ago:**

**Do not take your hobby too seriously! Enjoy the fun and camaraderie of collecting toy trains with the Train Collectors Association.**