

The

Winter 2019

POTOMAC FLYER



In this issue: Business Car • Achievement Program • Mark Me Up! — Review • The MER Convention: A Look Back • Nominations for Division Board of Directors • Get Ready for the 2019 Minicon! • MER needs a Convention Registrar • Liberty Bell Special — 2019 MER Convention • Building Your Layout – Procrastination versus Planning? • Getting Your Layout Ready For An Open House • Winter, The Season of Model Railroading • Layout Tour: Frank Benenati's, Maryland Junction • South Mountain Division Mini Con • Book Reviews: Diorama Design: Design Secrets that Will Give Your Diorama an Edge by Ivar Kangur and Steam & Locomotive Servicing Terminals by Tony Koester • Layout Tour Reports: Thomas Washburn's Miss Katy's Forreton Yard (circa 1974), Charlie Young's Chesapeake Crossing



The Potomac Division, Mid-Eastern Region, National Model Railroad Association includes the District of Columbia; Calvert, Charles, Montgomery, Prince George's and St Mary's Counties in Maryland; Arlington, Fairfax, Fauquier, Loudoun, Prince William, and Rappahannock Counties in Virginia, as well as all area independent cities.

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Bill of Lading

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Potomac Flyer

Potomac Division's Quarterly Newsletter

Submission Deadlines

Winter Issue December 1

Summer Issue June 1

Spring Issue March 1

Fall Issue September 1

Cover photo by Bill Sydow: Modular layout at MER Convention by Prince William County Model Railroad Club and North-East Corridor Historical Society.

From the Business Car

by Brian Sheron, MMR, Division Superintendent

Welcome Aboard

(County: Members)

Arlington: Mark Herman, Susan Stanford

DC: Kevin Kuchler, Jeffrey Rowe

Louden: Jim Mullison, William Mullison

Rappahannock: R. Dickey

St. Marys: John Porter

As I write this, the MER convention was a little over two months ago. By all accounts, it was a great success. Although we did not realize the attendance that we originally estimated, we still had slightly more than 200 attendees. Everything ran surprisingly smoothly, which I attribute to the hard work of all of the Division volunteers who stepped up and helped make the convention a success. There is an article in this issue of the *Flyer* about the convention, so if you were unable to attend, you can read it and get an idea of all of the events that took place.

Depending upon how many other Divisions step up and volunteer to host a regional convention, we will probably not have to consider hosting another regional convention for about 5-6 years. Next year, the MER convention will be hosted by the Philadelphia Division in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania, which is just northwest of Philadelphia. In 2020, it will be hosted by the Carolina Southern Division in the Charlotte, North Carolina area.

Even though we can breathe a sigh of relief that we successfully made it through the MER convention, we cannot completely relax. The Spring Minicon will be here before you know it, and even though it is only one day and not nearly the scale of a regional convention, it still requires a significant amount of planning in order for it to be a success. We will be holding it on Saturday, March 16th, with the Chesapeake Division, at the Emanuel United Methodist Church in Scaggsville, MD.

During the first week of November, I put out an e-mail to the membership asking for someone to step forward and volunteer to co-chair the joint Mincon with Dave Arday from the Chesapeake Division. As of this writing, no one has volunteered, so Marshall Abrams and I have agreed to split the co-chair responsibility with Dave Arday.

Recall that at the business meeting we had in March of 2018, we brought up the problem that very few members of the Division were volunteering to help provide the programs that many of you said you wanted. However, in response to our request for volunteers to help with the MER convention (and with a little coaxing), we had nearly 20 volunteers, which was great. Nevertheless, the fact is, the five Board members cannot be expected to organize and manage all of the Division events that everyone wants. If we do not get volunteers to help, we simply cannot offer the programs you like and want. So really, the choice is up to each of you. If you want to help, please contact me at superintendent@potomac-nmra.org. ☒



Brian is a long-time model railroader, and models the Port Jefferson and Atlantic Branches, and the City Terminal Zone of the Long Island Rail Road in HO scale. He earned Master Model Railroader (MMR) certificate number 469 in 2011 and is currently the Superintendent of the Potomac Division. His goal is to make NMRA membership, and model railroading in general, a rewarding and fun experience for Potomac Division members. In the spare time he has, when he's not working on his trains, he enjoys playing bluegrass banjo and plays in a local band.

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Achievement Program News

by Mat Thompson, MMR ocr@comcast.net

Start getting your models ready for the MiniCon—March 16, 2019!

If you have locomotives, cars, or structures you would like to have judged for the Achievement Program, we will be ready to do that for you.

But even if you don't need judging, bring a model you would like to show others, or bring your favorite train! After all, our hobby is all about models. Share what you are doing.

It's been a busy time for Award Program activities:

- John Paganoni received his Master Model Railroader Certificate at the MER banquet.
- Martin Brechbiel won both the best Traction Model and Best Display Off-line.



Martin's CG&W Freight Motor #19 is an O scale model.

- Ernie Little received the President's Award and earned a Merit Award for a scratch-built car.



Outgoing MER President P.J. Matson choose Ernie Little's Pennsylvania gondola with a pipe load for the President's Award.



Dolye's Ice, another O scale model, was Martin's second contest winner.



Ernie earned a Merit Award for this scratch-built tank car.

Four Potomac members earned the NMRA Golden Spike: Paul Hutchins, Nick Kalis, Charlie Young, and Pete LaGuardia.

The Golden Spike (<https://www.nmra.org/golden-spike-award>) is designed to demonstrate familiarity with different areas of the hobby, rather than expertise in a particular area. The requirements are:

- Display six pieces of rolling stock showing more effort than a "shake the box" kit.
- Construct five (5) structures (scratch-built, craftsman, or detailed and commercial kits).
- Construct 8 square feet of a model railroad layout.
- The layout should have three (3) types of trackage (turnout, crossing, etc.). All must be properly ballasted and installed on proper roadbed. Commercial track may be used.
- All installed trackage must be properly wired so that two trains can be operated simultaneously.
- Display one additional electrical feature, such as powered turnouts, signaling, turnout indication, lighted buildings, etc.

If you think you qualify for a Golden Spike or have questions, let me know, ocrr@comcast.net.



Get Ready for the 2019 Minicon!

by Brian W. Sheron, MMR

Mark your calendars for Saturday, March 16th, 2019. That is the date of the Potomac Division/Chesapeake Division Joint Miniconvention (Minicon).

The Minicon will be held at the Emanuel United Methodist Church in Scaggsville, Maryland, which is north of the Capital Beltway just off of Rt. 29 and I-95 (North Laurel).

We are planning a full day of activities. There will be two tracks of clinics, with a total of four in the morning and four in the afternoon. Of course, there will be a White Elephant Sale, so bring all that unwanted model railroading stuff you've been accumulating and sell it at the Convention, or find that special item you need for your layout!

A modular group is expected to be set up and running trains during the convention, and we will have a contest and model display room. If you have been building models for merit judging as part of the NMRA's Achievement Program, plan on bringing them to the Minicon to be judged. Or if you just built some great models and want to display them, the model room is the place to do that.

We plan on offering coffee and donuts in the morning, and a local Scout group will be selling food and drink at lunchtime. The Potomac Division will also hold its annual Business meeting during the lunch break, and elect three Board members. We will also be scheduling a lunchtime speaker.

The Minicon is a great way to spend a Saturday meeting other area model railroaders, and enjoying the great hobby of model railroading. I hope to see you there. If you have any questions, please contact me at superintendent@potomac-nmra.org.

Mark Me Up! — Review

by Mat Thompson, MMR

This is the twentieth "Mark Me Up" Column—five years' worth! It's time to look back and see if I said anything worth knowing. I am not quitting (unless the powers to be at the *Potomac Flyer* tell me I am), but once in a while a review just makes sense.

I will stick with my best advice to new operators: run slowly. Watch others who look like they know what they are doing, and match their speeds. As I said, "The best operating speed is virtually no speed at all. Slow down, think about what you are doing, use your engine's sounds, enjoy the ride, and look like a wise and experienced engineer."



Image you are the engineer running Extra 6014, a loaded rock train, down the mainline. It's the perfect time to run slowly and enjoy the action.

My other really good piece of advice was "...set turnouts back to normal." Nobody will say much if you do—but if you don't... well, just do it.

I also said you should attend Steve King's Time Table and Train Order clinic the first chance you get. That's still a smart idea. No one adapts prototype practices to model railroad operations better. His presentation is a concise, illuminating, and witty ride over the rails.

My nomination for the best operations book that tells you what to do with your train is still Lance Mindheim's *How to Operate a Modern Era Switching Layout*. Don't let "Modern Era" throw you. It is a well written, well illustrated, and appropriately brief how-to guide, regardless of the era.

My other recommendation for operations reading remains *How to Operate Your Model Railroad*, a special issue of *Model Railroader* that is still available from Kalmbach. The highlight is several of Andy Sperandio's "The Operators" columns. Month after month Andy gave us one page homilies on railroad operations in his precise and highly readable style.

Several times I have tried to make the point that the rules of operations are simple and common sense. Better yet, what you could consider the cardinal rules can be covered in a page or two. I did that with the Column "Some Handy Rules" (Potomac Flyer Summer 2016). Andy Sperandeo did the same thing in two columns, "Operate like an old head" in the April 2010 issue of Model Railroader and "Two useful rules" in the October 2013 issue.

If rules don't scare away potential new operators, the paperwork does. I made the point that paperwork—schedules, orders, car cards, waybills, switchlists, etc.—tell us what to do with our trains. Just like on the prototype, our trains don't have a purpose and aren't safe without the right documents. Think of it like the game of Monopoly. Without the instructions, deeds, and Community Chest cards, it isn't much of a game at all.

I spent some time on train handling. Besides slow, realistic speeds, I talked about how to switch cars. Sounds simple—but it gets complicated. While I hope what I wrote is helpful, switching is a bit like bike riding. You just have to do it to get it.

Ok, that's the end of the review. What's coming next? Well, I never know until an idea pops up, and I never know when that will happen, but I have some thoughts. "Mark Me Up" was started to encourage potential and new operators. Some future columns may be directed at more experienced operators and some will suggest what hosts can do to make the ops experience more satisfying and more fun.

If you have a suggestion, let me know, ocrr@comcast.net. ☒



In the Winter 2017 issue of the Potomac Flyer I said the best reason to operate is the friends you will make. Here my friends Pete LaGuardia and Bryan Kidd are switching the meat packing plant on my railroad and proving me right.



Engineers and Firemen say "Mark me up!" to get their name on the crew Call Board

for their next run. "Mark Me Up" is a quarterly column focused on how model railroaders can become operators and members of the operations community. Mat Thompson's Oregon Coast Railroad was featured in *Great Model Railroads 2014*. Building structures and scenery are his favorite modeling activities. He is also an avid model railroad operator and regularly attends operating sessions.

A graphic with a blue border and a large blue question mark. The text reads: "Did you know? Now online at www.nmra.org. The first three EduTRAIN® clinic presentations have been posted to the members' section on our website. To download these presentations, log in to the NMRA website as a member, click on "EDUCATION" at the top of the screen. Click on "EduTRAIN" on the drop-down menu, and then "EduTRAIN Clinics" in the blue box on the right side of the screen. The clinics include scenery strategy, modeling slate roofs, and signals. EduTRAIN® clinic presentations are now online! nmra.org logo."/>

Did you know?

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EduTRAIN® clinic presentations are now online!

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The MER Convention: A Look Back

by Alex Belida



This was my first-ever NMRA convention of any kind, and I was astonished by the depth of commitment, creativity, and sheer enjoyment shown throughout the gathering.

Two hundred thirty-one people attended MER 2018 in Rockville, with 197 formally registered. There were 36 first-timers like myself. As expected, the Potomac Division had the most folks participating, 66 in all. But visitors came from as far away as Washington State and Tennessee.

The attendees were fully engaged with model railroading and determined to share their experiences and their joy in the hobby. The entries in the contest room—locomotives, rolling stock and structures—displayed the highest level of art and craftsmanship. Everyone appeared pleased with the offerings on the schedule, whether attending workshops, visiting local layouts, or enjoying excursions and the banquet.

As Bob Halsey of the Southern Carolina Division wrote to the Flyer, the “Mid East Region Convention was definitely top-notch!” He added, “I think I learned more from this convention than from any previous one.” That assessment was a tribute to the Local Coordinating Committee, led by Potomac Division Superintendent Brian Sheron and Convention Co-Chairman Marshall Abrams.

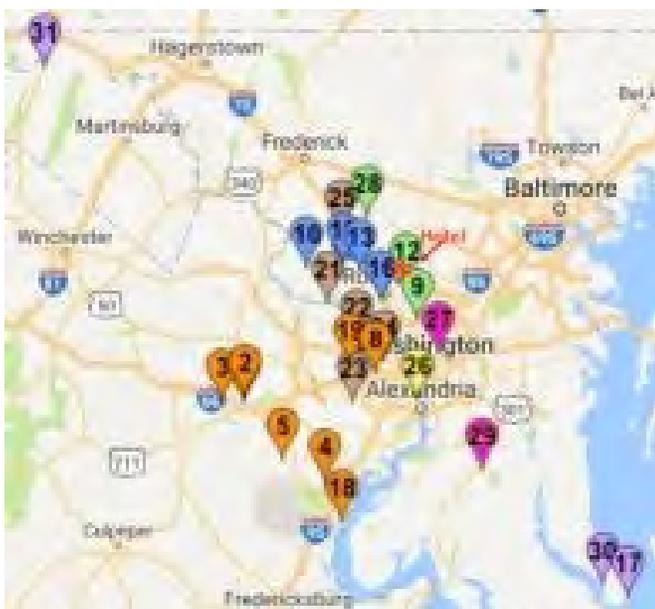
Under Marty McGuirk's leadership, the convention featured 45 clinics. These ranged from how-to sessions on "backdrops" to "speed ballasting," from "downsizing to a shelf layout" to expanding "the Long Island Rail Road," Brian's own layout.

There were 33 layout tours on the schedule, featuring layouts large and small. Bill Demas was the layout tour coordinator: "Past experience has shown that because of Washington metro area traffic, 4-hour



time windows were preferable to 3-hour windows. This, along with the geographic clustering we have been practicing, allows for more time spent at each layout... The (already high, I'm sure) appreciation level of the visitors for the work the hosts put into their individual layouts would only be enhanced; so, to this end, we avoided overloading any one time slot with too many layouts. With so many new apps available, paper tour manuals were eliminated, and we received much positive feedback for the electronic directions program Marshall Abrams developed.

"We strove to include at least two photos with every layout description, and the text descriptions were, for the most part, from the hosts themselves. We also made a conscious effort to encourage new hosts to participate, and were reasonably successful; but we also made sure to



try to include many of the famous layouts folks never seem to tire of visiting. Once again, to all those individuals and groups who hosted either a tour open house or a Call Board operating session, my thanks and appreciation. Your participation sets the standard for the level of success on the Convention." The web site includes an extensive collection of layout pictures contributed by the visitors at <https://sites.google.com/view/mer-convention-2018/layout-tours>.

Nick Kalis was among those who opened up his Oahu Sugar Company 1944 Fn3 layout for visitors. He reported his trains ran and “the visitors seem to enjoy what they saw.” His visitors came from Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland, North Carolina, and two different towns in Pennsylvania. Nick says he “considered the evening a success” and he looks forward to more such open houses.

Another highlight of the convention was an excursion to the Walkersville Southern Scenic Railroad, about an hour outside of Rockville. Jerome Skeim shared this summary:

“We started the day by having 12 of the 13 folks who registered for the excursion show up for the museum and shop tour promptly at 10 am. The tour lasted about an hour. The folks who narrated both the museum portion and the shop tour were well versed on their operations and history, and answered all the questions that the group had.



“We had stated in the information about the excursion that there was a possibility of having two of the registrants get a chance to ride in the locomotive for the trip. As it turned out, the good folks at the railroad thought that perhaps they could do two on the outbound portion and another two could ride in the cab on the return portion of the trip. There were four very happy folks at trip’s end. We ended up with 12 folks who took the tour and excursion, and all said they had a good time.”

One of the other highlights of MER 2018 was the banquet. MMR Brian Sheron shared this memory:

“As the convention started to draw to a close Saturday evening, many of the attendees availed themselves of the opportunity to meet and socialize with fellow model railroaders in a more relaxed setting. At 6 pm on Saturday, about 94 convention attendees relaxed with good conversation and refreshments during the cocktail hour preceding the banquet. At 7 pm, a delicious buffet was set up outside the banquet room, and attendees could partake of a choice of entrees, side dishes, and tasty desserts.

“As folks finished up their dinners and desserts, Our Regional President, P.J. Mattson, convened the Regional business meeting, then promptly proposed it be adjourned until 10 am Sunday morning! Of course there was unanimous consent. At that time, Kurt Thompson, the MER Vice-President, came to the podium and thanked P.J. for his service as MER President. “Chip Stevens from the Philadelphia Division then gave everyone a preview of what the Philly Division is planning when they host the MER convention next October.

“Martin Brechbiel then took over and announced the winners for the contest room. [The contest room winners were featured on the web at

<https://sites.google.com/view/mer-convention-2018/at-hotel/contest-room> and in the November-December 2018 issue of “The Local.” at http://mer-nmra.com/MEReLocal_Files/2018/elocal-v73i06-2018NovDec.pdf].

“After Martin finished, I had the pleasure of introducing Lou Sassi, our featured speaker. Lou is a well-known author in the model railroad community. He is currently a contributing editor to *Model Railroader Magazine*. The subject of Lou’s talk was *The Evolution of My Model Railroad Photography*. Lou explained how he got started in model railroad photography, and how he was able to keep pace with ever-evolving photographic technology, and how that affected his photographic skills.”

One of the most anticipated events at the gathering was the awarding of the Door Prize. Bill Lyders provided this report:

“The Door Prize Committee stayed in communications from the day of the first LCC (Local Convention Committee) meeting via email, and covered each of the LCC meetings to get input and report status. We contacted donors via telephone and email over a four-month span and had all donations sent to the Committee Chairman. The Committee chairman wrote a Door Prize Process document, including updates from the convention, and provided it to the LCC. The Co-Chairman took pictures of the Door Prize table and provided that to the LCC to complement the process document. We also sent out personalized Thank You notes to each of the 18 donors after the convention.

“During the convention, the Door Prize table was in the same room as the White Elephant sale, which enhanced the flow-thru of convention visitors. Because we were a committee of only two, we alternated manning the table for both full days of the convention. This did allow us to go to some clinics. The announcing of the winners went smoothly. The list of winners was posted within 30 minutes of shutting down the room and winners then claimed their prizes on Saturday before and after the banquet. It was a positive experience as convention staff but no less so as a convention attendee.”

Co-Chairman of the Convention, Marshall Abrams, paid tribute to the engagement of all those who served on the Local Coordinating Committee: “The teamwork in the LCC was especially gratifying. Sharing responsibilities made it possible for LCC members to also participate in aspects of the convention beyond their responsibilities. With Brian (Sheron) and I sharing the responsibility of being on site to handle whatever came up, we could both also host operating sessions and layout tours.”

A retrospective look at the convention is available on line at <https://sites.google.com/view/mer-convention-2018/>. Enjoy!



All I can add in conclusion is that I’m looking forward to the next MER convention! 

Alex Belida is a retired foreign correspondent and news executive who worked for the Voice of America. Besides living in Europe and Africa, he traveled extensively in the U.S. and abroad while covering the White House and the Pentagon. He and his wife live in Rockville. His Eureka and South Pass RR is in a second floor 10x12 bedroom. It will be on the layout tour list for 2020.

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Nominations for Division Board of Directors

One order of business at the upcoming Minicon is the election of three members to the Board of Directors for Potomac Division. The bylaws (Article XIII) call for three directors to be elected in odd-numbered years. Another two directors are elected in even-numbered years. Upon election, Division Officers will be selected by and from the five duly elected Board members to fill the positions of Superintendent, Senior Assistant Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, Clerk, and Paymaster. Preference, experience, and expertise all factor in who fills which particular job. Your current Board members all reflect these characteristics in the jobs they fill.

In accordance with the bylaws, Superintendent Brian Sheron has appointed a nominating committee consisting of John Paganoni and Ernie Little.

The bylaws state that any three members of the Division in good standing may nominate someone—with his or her permission—via written notice to the Nominating Committee at least thirty days ahead of the election. Please include a one-page biography that explains the candidate's model railroad background and objectives in seeking office. The election will be held Saturday, March 16, 2019, so all nominations must be received by February 15, 2019. All nominations will be communicated to the membership no less than fifteen days ahead of the election, or March 1, 2019 in this case. The list of nominees will be published on the Division webpage and communicated by email (or postal mail for members for whom we don't have email addresses). All nominees must be NMRA members in good standing who live in the Potomac Division. Nominations should be sent to John Paganoni <john.paganoni@comcast.net> and Ernie Little <prwmfm4@aol.com>, or by postal service to John Paganoni, 13418 Gordon Dr., Manassas, VA 20112-4741.

Now is your opportunity to influence the direction you wish the Division to go. Members get AP points towards the Volunteer Certificate, but more than that, they get the satisfaction of giving back to the hobby we all enjoy. So give serious consideration to whether you wish to serve, or talk it over with someone you think may; it doesn't take an inordinate amount of time and effort, and the intangible rewards are great.

See you at the Minicon. ☒

Liberty Bell Special—October 10-13, 20192019 MER Convention

Come celebrate trains in the cradle of liberty!

The Philadelphia Division, NMRA welcomes you and yours to Liberty Bell Special 2019! The convention will take place October 10 through October 13, 2019 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in King of Prussia, PA. After much deliberation, our committee chose the name Liberty Bell over such other favorites as Cheese Steak Special and some lesser titles. For those of you not familiar with King of Prussia, it is located 20 miles northwest of downtown Philadelphia adjacent to the Pennsylvania Turnpike and many nearby highways. In southeast Pennsylvania, all highways lead to Valley Forge.

Since Monday, October 14 is a Federal Holiday, the hotel has agreed to extend the room rates for the convention for an additional 3 days before and into the week following the convention. The hotel is in walking distance to the second largest shopping mall in the United States with shops and dining to meet any tastes. Also, in driving distance are the Valley Forge National Park whose accommodations during the winters of the American Revolution were not as luxurious as our hotel; Longwood Gardens, the gardens of the Dupont family; and many more places of interest. More

about the area can be found on the hotel's website, www.cpvalleyforge.com. For those of you who collect hotel stay points, Crowne Plaza is a part of the IHG hotel group (Holiday Inn, Intercontinental, etc.). [Registration forms for the Convention are available](#) and hotel reservation information will be published soon.

At this time, we have one prototype tour: the Colebrookdale Railroad. The Colebrookdale is part of the former Reading Barto branch in nearby Boyertown, PA, a 50-minute drive from the hotel. In addition to the autumn foliage that occurs in early October, there will be the train ride, lunch, and a tour of the railroad's shops. The committee is working hard on additional tours, and will announce them through the Region and Division newsletters as well as on the websites www.libertybellspecial.org or www.mer2019.org.

Currently we have the first four layout tours scheduled, three HO layouts and a traction layout. Efforts are under way to add to the list both with individual and club layouts. We are attempting to keep all tours and open houses within drives of 30 minutes or less. We would also like to hear from owners and superintendents who are willing to open their layouts to those making the trip to Valley Forge, keeping in mind that Monday, October 14th is a holiday. Those willing should notify Bill Fagan (bfagan777@hotmail.com) of their ability to host. Remember, those Open Houses count toward AP Volunteer points.

Liberty Bell Special will begin on Thursday night with clinics which will continue through Sunday morning. We have one, tentative, hands-on clinic planned with a noted presenter, as well as many more sessions tentatively planned. Check the website for additional or new clinics. If you want to present a clinic, please email John Seibert (johnhseibert@comcast.net) with your topic.

As usual, Saturday will include the Contest Room. Plan now to bring your latest modeling efforts for sharing with other MER members. More AP credits may be available for your efforts.

Sprinkled among all these activities will be opportunities to operate on some truly spectacular individual and club layouts. We're keeping those AP Dispatcher points in mind.

To whet your appetite, we suggest you visit the following website for local information: www.valleyforge.org. This is the website for the area's tourism and vacation planning guide. You may also be interested in visiting historic Philadelphia, home of Independence Hall, the world-class Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Franklin Institute, America's oldest Zoo, and much more: www.discoverphl.com. If you have school-age children studying the history of the United States, you won't want to miss the Constitution Center, home of the Liberty Bell, Betsy Ross House, and the new Museum of the American Revolution. Karen Confer, one of our volunteers and a local, has offered to clarify information or answer questions which you may have during your trip planning. Please feel free to contact her for that personal touch: rcths.kconfer@aol.com.

October will be here before you know it. We hope you will take advantage of our offers, bring your family, and make the convention weekend a family affair. We are looking forward to seeing you!

All roads lead to King of Prussia, PA. We hope you and yours will take advantage of this opportunity to visit the convention for a truly memorable experience. ☒



MER Needs a Convention Registrar

Kurt Thompson, MMR, President of the Mid-Eastern Region, has asked our help in finding a new Convention Registrar. This position can be filled by an individual or a team. Contact president@mer-nmra.com; cell phone 410-507-3671.

The MER Convention Registrar performs the normal registration duties associated with mounting an MER Convention as an integral member of the MER Convention Action Team (CAT) and works closely with the Local Convention Committee, MER Convention Treasurer, and the Executive Convention Chairman. The principal responsibilities are:

- Set up and maintain suitable registration records for each convention; design and maintain a convention registration form, both print and web, with input from the Local Convention Committee, and have it approved by the Executive Convention Chairman.
- Create forms and handle individual registrations, both prior to the convention and at the door; deposit all funds received in the registration process in the bank account for that convention; account to the Convention Treasurer for these funds.
- Coordinate with the Local Convention Committee and the ECC for registration inserts.
- After the conclusion of a convention, transfer all financial records to the Convention Treasurer.
- Act as a back-up for the MER Convention Treasurer.
- Track the registration statistics of the convention, working with the MER Convention Treasurer.
- Provide the Executive Convention Chairman, the MER Treasurer, and the MER Vice-President a final registration statistical report. ☒

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South Mountain Division Mini Con

by Don Florwick

On April 13, 2019, from 9 AM to 4 PM, MER South Mountain Division and Mainline Hobby Supply will host their 7th annual MiniCon at the Blue Ridge Fire Hall, 13063 Monterey Ln., Blue Ridge Summit, PA. Come enjoy this one-day free event, located one block north of Main Line Hobby Supply, consisting of prototype and modeling presentations, formal and informal clinics, modular displays, and interaction with your fellow hobbyists and beginners. This year we explore Modern Modeling when we look at 3 D Printing and Laser Cutting Technology. This no-admission-charge, educational event is for the promotion of the hobby of Model Railroading, open to the public and wheelchair accessible . <http://www.smdnmra.org/> ☒

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Thoughts on Building Your Layout

by Nicholas “Nick” Kalis

How do I know whether I am procrastinating (to be avoiding) or just simply putting my time to good use in planning my model railroad? Here are a few guidelines to give you some direction between these two easily confused activities:

Planning

1. A clear idea of at least some of your goals has emerged from this process.
2. You have established some deadline for this phase of your layout project.
3. Good useful ideas/plans are accumulating in this process.
4. Tools, books, materials are being collected.

Procrastination

1. Very little useful planning is taking place.
2. No ending date for the process has been established.
3. While you may have established a goal, you may have failed to identify the next action step(s) to move your project along.
4. You have failed to accumulate the tools or materials to move forward.

Great, so now we have some “tools” that let us know whether we are procrastinating versus planning. Now don’t get me wrong, there can be some overlap between the two. However, as we see when reading further, procrastination can envelop healthy planning.

There is perhaps a third condition that model railroaders—in fact all doers—should be aware of: incubation¹. In this state, one is neither planning nor procrastinating. You are considering an action (say, buying a piece of rolling stock for your layout) but you are waiting to, variously, accumulate funds for the purchase; find it on sale; or hear back from a trusted friend as to whether that piece of rolling stock makes sense for your layout. So incubation can be just fine; but for myself, when I am incubating an idea, I like to break through and just ask myself, for example: “will I eventually buy that locomotive?; if the answer is yes, there is no need to incubate—or some may call it “agonizing”—and just place the order for the desired locomotive.

So, let’s say you are no longer procrastinating, and planning is in earnest but still no progress? Well, ask yourself—have I been stopped in my tracks by lacking confidence in my plans? If your answer is yes, then all you can do is start construction of this element of your layout and see what happens. This is better than either procrastinating or endless planning. By just jumping in, two good things happen. First, you get to try out your plan, and it just might work. Second, if your plan fails than you have made progress, because now you can try something else. As Lance Mindheim wrote in his blog on January 14, 2018, “Fear of Mistakes”, there are few mistakes in layout building that cannot be corrected somehow. See www.shelflayouts.com.

Keeping in mind the differences between planning and procrastination will make your layout construction project go faster, smoother, and provide you greater satisfaction. And if you are wondering why I think I know so much about this topic, it is because I, too, daily struggle with discerning the differences between these two activities in my model railroading life, my business, and my personal life.

Getting My Layout Ready

Getting my layout ready for an O Scale Convention open house, I was reminded...

- Working with strings of LEDs is not as easy as advertised; cutting the LED string and then reconnecting it sometimes does not work, depending on the manufacturer.
- I had been working daily on my layout for about 15 days—every muscle in my body ached; building a layout can be physically exhausting, with hours of standing up and reaching and climbing stairs and making runs to Home Depot.
- Be careful about keeping tools and supplies on more than one level of your home (not as silly as it seems, there can be good reasons why your modeling and benchwork supplies and tools are on different house levels).

¹ David Allen, *Getting Things Done*, Penguin Books.

- Keep a Tub O' Towels heavy duty cleaning wipes in your layout room.
- Keep a paper towel dispenser in the layout room and always keep it full.
- You might need more than one trash receptacle in a large layout room; one at the layout itself and one near your workbench; and don't forget to keep a whole roll of kitchen trash bags inside at least one of your trash receptacles.
- I discovered a new take on Pareto's rule (also known as the 80/20 rule)—if you are ever going to build a layout or have one built for you, you just might want to keep locos/rolling stock to 20 percent of your total budget because the benchwork, lighting, scenery, some room prep, valances, facias may just well take up 80 percent of your budget.
- Making a layout presentable can be costly—not in big ticket items, just small expenditures of less than twenty dollars that soon add up. So, don't be the guy who fills up a closet with locos and then finds he lacks the funds to paint/re-motor/install sound/install DCC any of them, let alone find the funds to build a layout.

Winter, The Season of Model Railroading?

In our Division, winter is commonly thought of as the season for model railroading. It is when daylight is shorter, and yardwork and sports take a backseat to being in the basement.

What folks may forget is that winter poses challenges for some stages of model railroad building. With snow on the ground, taking a pair of sawhorses outside of your garage to cut some wood (to let the sawdust fly with the wind) becomes problematical. Of course, if you have a super shop with a dust collection system, you can ignore the above warning. But few of us have such an extensive shop.

Even working in a cold garage, though invigorating, can put a crimp our work. Taking breaks into the warmth of our heated homes does admittedly ameliorate this problem to an extent—though it does require a patient spouse, should you be dragging dirt into the home with every foray in search of warmth. Painting outdoors also poses challenges—humidity makes it more difficult for paint to dry and cold makes it harder on the painter.

Should you not build your layout during winter months? Absolutely not; use the winter to make all the progress you can on your layout. Should you take some of winter's challenges into account when planning your work? Absolutely yes. Don't let all your model railroading projects pile up for winter. Budget your time; schedule for fairer weather months painting and dirty jobs that if left for winter would require forays into a cold garage or an even colder out-of-doors.

See you at our next open house.... Better yet, see you at your open house! ☒



Nick Kalis writes: "My love of model trains came from seeing them on television. That led to the proverbial Lionel set under the Christmas Tree at about the age of eight or nine. My adult layout experience has been a never-completed HO Sunnyside Yard, then on to the Lower Montauk Branch LIRR featured on the cover of RMC. This summer, my current Oahu Sugar Company in Fn3 graced the cover of *Narrow Gauge Downunder* and was the feature story of that issue."

Dress Up Your Layout: Put Ads And Posters on Your Buildings

by Alex Belida

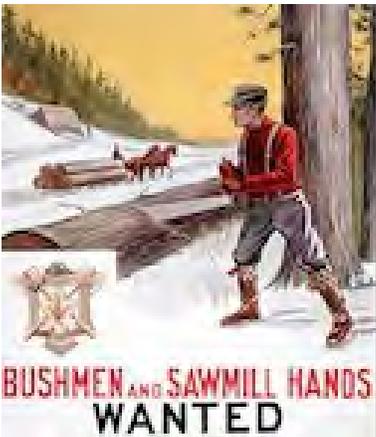
I'm someone who has struggled with dry transfers and decals. Most of the time they just never seem to come out right when I apply them. They're crooked, or they fall apart or they simply detach—all despite my following directions. I'm jinxed.

But my modeling life improved greatly when I recently purchased a color printer (an HP Deskjet 3637). I discovered I could easily find ads and other posters and signs on my laptop, download them, resize them to fit my HO scale buildings and then print and attach them.

My Eureka and South Pass Railroad is a fictional operation located in Nevada in the late 1890s. Was it difficult to find era-appropriate signage?

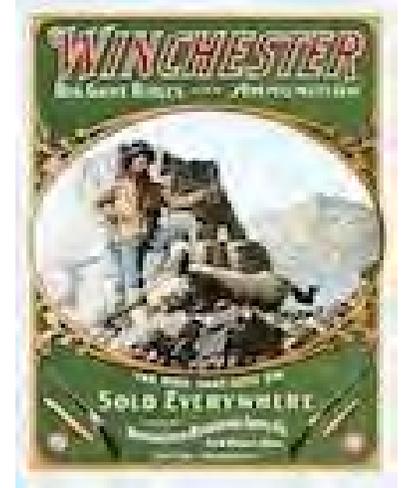
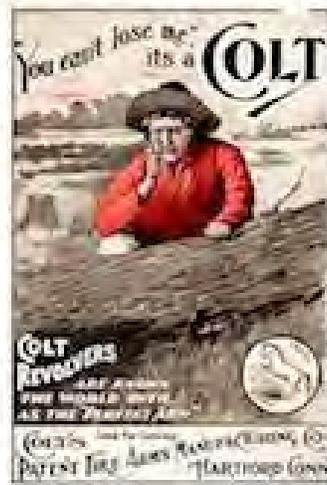
Not at all. In fact, it's easy if you set your search parameters for "vintage ads,"

or, to use a more specific example, "vintage gun ads" was one search I ran to find posters for a new gun shop I added to my layout. I quickly found old Colt revolver and Winchester rifle ads.



On another occasion I looked for a vintage "help wanted" type poster for my sawmill. This one involved a lot more searching, but I eventually found one issued in 1916 by the 224th Canadian Forestry Battalion for "bushmen and sawmill hands." I just had to snip away the bottom portion of the original placard where it said it was a Canadian organization looking for help.

But for general ads, for things like Coca-Cola and other venerable companies, the search is a lot easier. Coke ads, for example, can be found for virtually every era the company promoted its beverage - even the late 1890s.



The search process can yield some wonderful and amusing finds. Some favorites, which now grace the sides of my buildings, include “Cocaine Tooth Ache Drops” and “Fresh Cool Lager Beer.” And how about this wild one: “Asthma Cigarettes”? (The ad states “Not Recommended For Children Under The Age of 6.”)

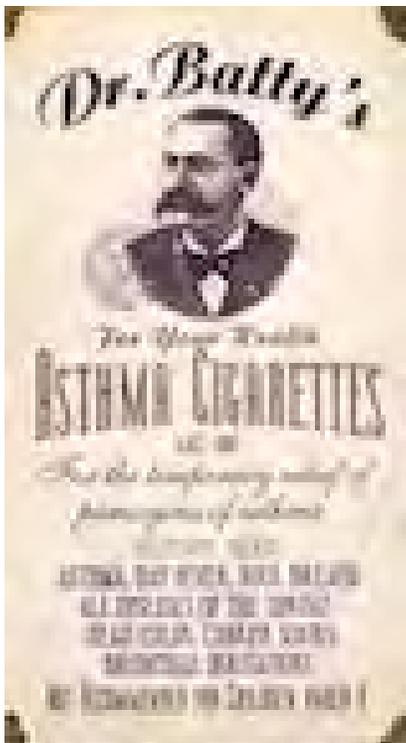


One of the easier searches was for “Wanted Posters” that I needed to paper the new Sheriff’s Office and Jail that I scratchbuilt. I found a huge variety, including “Billy The Kid” and “Jesse James” and a warning notice that cattle and horse thieves would be hung.

But my all-time best find involved a poster for “Coombs Aerated Pastry Flour.” Why do I single this one out? Well, right in the center of the image is the word “Eureka” - the name I gave my main town and my Railroad.

I have no idea why “Eureka” is in the ad and can find no credible explanation anywhere. I

suspect it originated with Archimedes who reportedly shouted “Eureka” when making a discovery about the displacement of water when he stepped into a bath. The firm that made the flour was actually British. The product purportedly helped conquer indigestion.



But there is a bakery building in my Eureka so I named it the Coombs Bakery. And in one of the “news” stories I write and post on my website for the fictional “Eureka Gazette”, I gave the family that



owns it a fictional “Best of the West” award for their pastry flour in the cooking and baking category at an annual competition at nearby Carson City. See

<https://esprblog.wordpress.com/2018/09/26/coombs-bakery-wins-best-of-the-west-honors/>

If you are online often I suggest you give it a try. Regardless of the era or setting you may be modeling for your railroad, I’m confident you’ll find something worth printing and using on your layout. For another example of this approach, take a look at MMR Brian Sheron’s article “Easy Storefront Signs” in the Fall 2016 issue of the Flyer.

And if you’re concerned about copyright issues, don’t worry. As long as you are just using the material for your own layout, you’re OK. 

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Diorama Design: Design Secrets that Will Give Your Diorama an Edge by Ivar Kangur

Book review by Nicholas Kalis

Why would a model railroader want to read a book about dioramas? Well, most of the principles drawn out in Kangur’s book apply directly to every scenicked model railroad. And of course, dioramas and model railroads share many techniques and goals.

In his second chapter Kangur describes “The Design Process”—beginning with “Pick the Story You Want to Tell,” This is directly applicable to each scene in a model railroad.

The author's third chapter, "Design Basics," teaches us much, under the headings of "Geometry", "Topography", "Space", and "Colour." Read these topics thoroughly. It might take a few readings to hone in on exactly what you want in your particular model railroad scene.

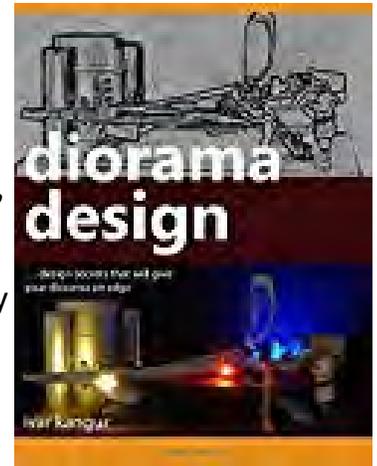
You can learn much from his chapter "The Seven Principles of Design." Those seven principles are Balance, Unity, Contrast, Emphasis, Movement, Repetition, and Rhythm. Here is just one of many examples of how these principles apply to a model railroad: "Visual linking of dissimilar elements can also create Unity. Picture a diorama of a house and shed connected by a pathway. Without the pathway, the house and shed might appear awkward and disconnected... The pathway gives the eye a conduit to link the house to the shed."

As Ivar states "A visually effective diorama can be created by incorporating the design principles discussed in this chapter. You don't need to use all of them at once. A good diorama might use two or three." Substitute "model railroad scene" for "diorama" and you will be on to some great guidance.

Kangur concludes with six case studies in which he applies the principles laid out in his early chapters.

Read this book and you will find countless ways to make the scenes on your model railroad talk to your visitors and operators.

Kangur is a filmmaker with a life-long passion in dioramas. His diorama projects can be seen at www.creativedioramas.com. A visit to Ivar's web site will be sure to get your creative juices flowing. ☒



by Ivar Kangur
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Steam & Locomotive Servicing Terminals by Tony Koester

Book review by Mat Thompson

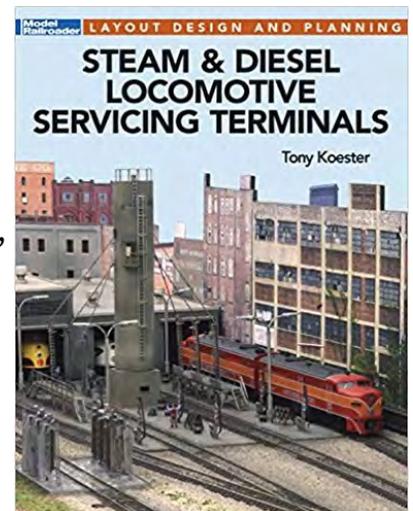
Kalmbach released Marty McGuirk's book *The Model Railroader's Guide to Servicing Terminals*, in November 2001. I snatched it up and still have it. Marty knows railroads and model railroading and writes well. Typical of Kalmbach books, the many photographs and drawings are clear and support Marty's narrative well.

So this fall (2018), when Tony Koester's new book, *Steam & Diesel Locomotive Servicing Terminals* (Kalmbach Publishing, \$21.99) came out, I wondered, why a new book? What could be different?

It didn't take much looking to find the answer. I am lucky enough to know both Marty and Tony, and realized immediately that their approach to the subject matches their approach to our hobby. Marty is a skilled operator, but, given his choice, would be at the workbench building a model. Tony is a good modeler, but for him the goal is to operate a realistic model railroad.

Their interests show. Marty included four pages in his book on selecting and installing a turntable. Tony uses about the same space to explain the work of a hostler during an ops session. Marty included a clever write up on detailing the Atlas Water Tank. Tony includes a description of servicing engines on Rick De Candido's engine-facility-only layout.

The bottom line is the two books generally cover different aspects of the same subject—and they both do it well. Tony has not written an update; he has given us an expansion of the subject. Any



serious model railroader probably already has Marty's book and will be pleased to add Tony's to their library.

In fact, I would give Tony's book an "A" for Armchair Modeler Appeal. He has included several large photographs of prominent layouts built over the last decade. Engine facilities pictures range from Bernie Kempinski's Civil War-era Aquia Harbor Railroad to Dave Abeles' rendition of Conrail in the 1970's. Along the timeline are Andrew Dodge's 1890 Colorado Midland, Perry Squires' 1920's Shawmut and Tony's own transition-era Nickel Plate among others. The photos alone make the book a pleasure.

If you are looking for modeling information, operations tips, or just a fun read, I recommend *Steam & Diesel Locomotive Servicing Terminals*. ☒

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Layout Tour Report: Thomas Washburn's Miss Katy's Forreston Yard (circa 1974)

by Nick Kalis, Photo Nigel Phillips

Thanks to host Tom Washburn and his lovely wife for hosting us for a first-time layout open house (Saturday October 20th) at their beautiful home in Burke, Virginia. Our visitors enjoyed the Washburns' gracious hospitality and their very nice spread of cookies, snacks, and beverages. Visitors were treated to, among other features, a look at very well built benchwork consisting of old school construction, solid open framework, cabinet grade plywood and homasote for the track. This was a great opportunity to see the "bones" of a layout before the scenic cover was installed. Tom had installed DCC control for this iteration of his layout. The track work on Washburn's layout was superb; Tom mentioned that his open house deadline prompted him to tear down his HO scale layout and re-build it for his greater enjoyment. Tom also mentioned he would be game to host another open house in 1 - 2 years. He appreciates the progress that a deadline imposes).



We learned that Tom is a retired military officer with the Provost Marshall. Tom proudly displayed his Potomac Division *Certificate of Appreciation* he had received by mail prior to his open house date.

Thanks to Reston's Nigel Phillips for serving as greeter. ☒

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Layout Tour Report: Charlie Young's Chesapeake Crossing

Article and photos by Nigel Phillips

Charlie was been building his basement model railroad ever since 2011-2012. The highly detailed plans were drawn up during down time on many of his out-of town engagements as a professional musician and orchestra conductor. Clearly the work put in at the planning stage is being translated into some excellent modeling. The model railroad is based on his observations of the railroads around Hampton and Norfolk, VA, as a teenager, when his Dad worked for the railroad.

Essentially a series of vignettes modeling what he is interested in and feels appropriate, rather than following a prototype, it will eventually cover the mountain coal mines all the way to a harbor transfer section. Charlie told me he models what he wants to do and when he feels like it. No set timetable and when it fits in with his professional activities.



Being a work in progress, visitors got an opportunity to see some excellent, earthquake-proof open frame, multilevel construction in dimensional lumber and ½" ply, along with 130+ Tortoise switch motors and some really neat wiring. Charlie is modeling in N-scale, and the scope for multilevel main lines, sweeping curves and storage/switching yards under the main lines is being fully exploited. The layout is DCC, and visitors were treated to some custom sound installs (ESU Loksound) in the diesel-headed trains that were being run by Charlie and his operator team, all of whom were more than happy to slow the trains down and have a chat about what was going on.

This is a big layout divided into four main sections: the coal mining areas in the mountain gorges, complete with company towns perched on steep hill sides; line side industries and urban areas, including an impressive cityscape; the locomotive depot complete with roundhouse, turntable, freight car staging, along with some impressive servicing tracks for the diesels; and eventually the transfer dock in the harbor—plus some bridges along the way. Charlie had the opportunity to start with a blank canvas in this case, a basement that needed extensive reconstruction, which he did himself.

This was a great layout tour during National Model Railroad Month. If you couldn't make it, you missed a real treat. I personally want to thank Charlie and his team of enthusiasts for making this a memorable open house. I learned a lot. ☒

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Layout Tour: Frank Benenati's, Maryland Junction

When: Saturday, February 16, 2019, 1:00 to 4:00 PM

Where:

Handicap access: Being a basement layout, there is no handicap access. The carport/kitchen door faces the stairs to the basement and is the most direct access.



My 20x12 foot HO railroad was started while I was living in Germany and is "modular" by design. The railroad remains "room-sized"; however, the added scenery (weight) will make it more challenging to move a second time. It currently uses Digitrax DCC, and most turnouts operate manually using Fast Tracks "bullfrogs". Steam is not in service, and first generation diesels provide the motive power. Trains run point to point, and the layout includes working interchanges with N&W, PRR, B&O, and WM. Car cards, a time table, and a fast clock are used to simulate operations. A variety of Campbell, Bar Mills, Fos, etc., and scratchbuilt structures provide texture and interest to this Western Maryland themed railroad.

There have been several modifications made to Maryland Junction since I last hosted a Potomac Division Open House; all were needed to enhance operations. Most importantly, the eastern end of the railroad now has a yard, turntable and engine service facilities. I also added a passing siding along Security Branch to improve Brunswick operations.

For those who are interested, I will explain/demonstrate how I use Decoder-Pro and a Sprogg to re-program DCC engines and adjust sound levels, speed curves, and other CVs. I've had good results (with the exception of first generation WOW sound steam).

To read about Frank's last open house, [click here](#).

Caution: Just about every road into and out of Damascus has a speed camera cleverly located to generate revenue for Montgomery County. Remember to keep an eye out for "safety corridor" and other warning signs. Occasionally there are "doubles" placed to catch those who speed up after passing the first camera. ☒

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