



# The Potomac Flyer

Formerly *The Dixie Flyer*

Winter Quarter

December 1994 to February 1995

The Quarterly Newsletter Of Division 2 ("Potomac"), Mid-Eastern Region, National Model Railroad Association, Inc.

## Winter along the Potomac

Our HO Module Team has busy December lined up, representing the division at two events. The first is the **Fairfax Station** benefit show, December 3rd and 4th. Fairfax Station is off Ox Road, just south of Fairfax, Virginia. See the map below for directions to this meet.

The Module Team's next event is the **National Capital Children's Museum** show the weekend before Christmas, December 17th and 18th. The NCCM is located at 2nd and H streets, NE, in DC, just east of Union Station. The HO Module Team has been doing this show for several years now and it has proven to be a rewarding time, introducing young and reintroducing the old alike to the joys of model railroading. The map to this event is also given on page 2.

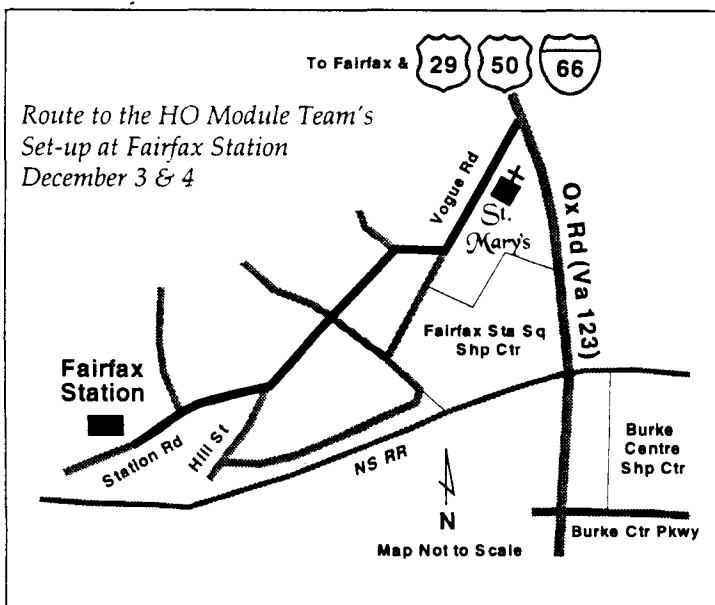
On Saturday, January 28th, 1995, we will visit **George Hughes** in Chantilly, Virginia. George models **Norfolk & Western** and **Virginian** in HO scale. His layout emphasizes run-through trains. A description of his layout and directions for reaching it are given on page 7. Please note that this open house is on a Saturday, rather than Sunday (the 29th is Super Bowl Sunday and even we won't compete with that event!).

On Sunday, February 12th, we will visit **Strad Bushby's** N-scale **Northeastern Corridor** layout. Strad's layout is on the cutting edge of train control using computer's to handle most of the routing and staging control so that a real-time schedule of trains can move across a model of the Washington-New York corridor. More details as well as a map to Strad's house are given on page 8.

## Past Quarters in the Potomac Division

The September Swap Meet, Alex Pope's Popenna Railroad, and the Rockville Lions Club Show kept us busy this past fall. Before describing these events, we have to backtrack to thank Ed

**Johnson** for hosting a layout tour last Mayday in Lanham, Maryland. In rushing to get the last *Flyer* out, I inadvertently forgot to thank him. Just to refresh your memory, Ed's J&D Railway is a single-track, first phase diesel branchline set in West Virginia. It operates between Junita Junction and Dazenville, serving the B&O and Western Maryland with coal from the Tremmell Mine, along with other commodities. At Junita Junction, the B&O and WM share trackage rights on a double main as they climb or descend the 3% grade at Turn Back Curve heading for Fitzburg or Donnellville. The J&D serves other industries along its route, but the second highest



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## Fall Recap, cont'd.

## Other Winter Events

revenue comes from the engine maintenance facility and Kevonski freight station at Dazenville. Ed is a marvelous host. Thanks again, Ed.

This Fall we repeated our **September Swap Meet**. Held at the Annandale campus of Northern Virginia Community College, it was quite well attended. Mailbag Hobbies, one of the Potomac Division's most loyal supporters, filled up half of one room, while Potomac Division members spread out over tables in the other half and throughout another room. Aside from some navigation problems experienced by several attendees (sorry about the signage—it could have been better), most everyone enjoyed the meet. Such meets are catch-as-catch-can, and most people I met came away with new treasures and the table renters seemed pleased as well. Special thanks to Rob Madson for having the presence of mind to bring a cooler full of Pepsi cans and selling them at less-than-vending-machine rates. Table rents and door receipts easily covered our obligation to NVCC. Special thanks, too, to Clint Smoke, professor of Fire Science at NVCC and member of the Potomac Board, for arranging the facilities.

October 16th, we met at **Alex Pope's Popenna Railroad**. This was brave scheduling on Alex's part, going up against both a Timonium show and a home Redskins game. The Popenna Railroad is based on the Pennsylvania, but with a notably local flavor. It is immense (36x40 feet!), having successfully expanded to take over more and more of his rec room. As if things weren't already big enough, there's even a G-scale layout running beneath it (thanks to Alex's wife, Sandy). The Popenna is based on the Pennsylvania Railroad from Harrisburg to Altoona and the New York Central and Central of New Jersey to the Poconos. The layout features Horseshoe curve (four tracks) complete with fenced-in Pennsy K-4 No. 1361, the 12-stall Northumberland roundhouse and a five track diesel service facility, the city of Harrisburg, the towns of Gallitzin, Lewistown, and Newport, East Altoona Yard, a ski mountain complete with ski lift, an electric power plant with coaling operations, a circus and amusement park, as well as rivers, docks, and mountains. What a layout! Thanks for your hospitality, Alex.

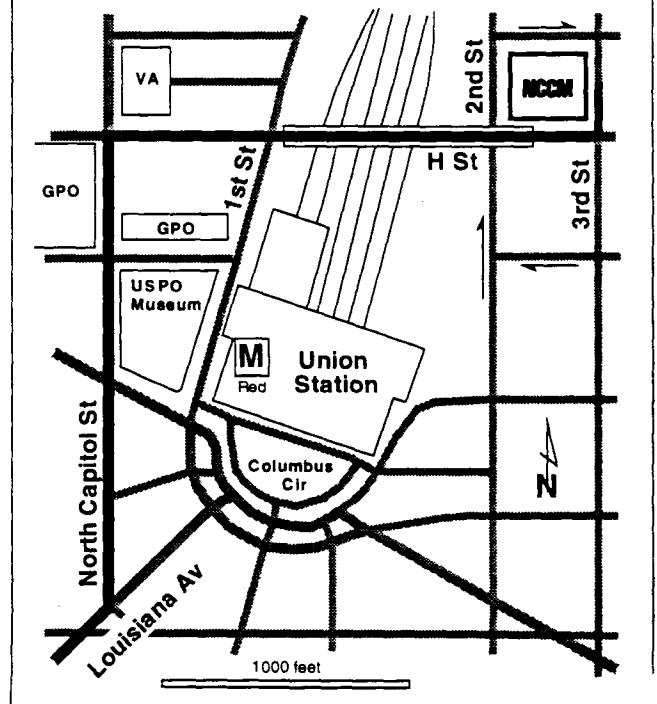
The November event is our now traditional involvement with the **Rockville Lions Club Benefit Train Show**. Potomac Division board member Ell Geib, president of the Rockville Lions, and his fellow Lions put on a great show. Operating layouts in Z, N, HO, tin-plate, O, and G provide the main interest, but the Lions also have railroad films, tape-slide clinics on model railroading, and other interesting events. The proceeds go to the Rockville Lions' main charity, blindness prevention and sight improvement. Ell will give us a complete report of the show in the next issue of the *Flyer*.

## Other Railroading Events

This is the season that several model railroad clubs have open houses. I urge you to check directories of events of your favorite model railroad magazines. Many of these clubs depend on donations collected at their open houses to support activities through the following year. Three local groups have sent the *Potomac Flyer* their open houses schedules.

First up is the **Baltimore Society of Model Engineers**, found on the third floor of 225 West Saratoga Street in Baltimore, Maryland. BSME will be open every Sunday from November 27th through January 29th, except

*Route to the HO Module Team's Set-up at the National Capital Children's Museum (see page 1), Dec 17 & 18*



## The Potomac Flyer

Is the Quarterly Newsletter of Division 2 ("Potomac")  
of the Mid-Eastern Region

of the National Model Railroad Association, Inc.

Editor: Peter K. Matthews

Publisher: Bruce Strickland

The Potomac Division territory includes: the District of Columbia; Montgomery and Prince Georges Counties, Maryland; Prince William, Arlington, Fairfax, Fauquier, Loudoun, and Clarke Counties, Virginia, as well as the independent cities of the area.

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#### Upcoming Board meetings and locations:

Sept 14, Stewart; Oct and Nov, TBA.

**Advertising in the Potomac Flyer** is available. Per-Issue rates are \$5 for a Business Card (eighth-page) block; Quarter page, \$10; Half page, \$20; Full page, \$40. The back page space above the mailer goes for \$25 and is reserved on a first-come-first-served basis. Special rates are available for multi-issue purchases. Make checks payable to "Potomac Division."

**Submission Deadlines** for all materials in each issue of the *Potomac Flyer* are: Spring issue, Jan 15; Summer issue, April 15 (with some allowance given for taxes); Fall issue, July 15; Winter issue, Oct 15. Mail all submissions to Pete Matthews, Editor, Potomac Flyer, at the above address. Unless special arrangements are made, no materials will be returned.

**Change of Address (COA):** Complete the enclosed Application/COA form and send it to Clerk, Potomac Division, P.O. Box 3204, Manassas, VA 22110.



## Potomac Division Calendar

### Nov 27

BSME Open House  
Baltimore, MD (2)

### Dec 3-4

Potomac HO Module Team  
Fairfax Station, Fairfax, VA (1, 6)

### Dec 4 & 11

BSME Open House  
Baltimore, MD (1)

### Dec 10

NVMR Open House, Vienna, VA (4)

### Dec 11 & 18

Winchester Club Open House (4)  
Winchester, VA (2)

### Dec 17 & 18

Potomac HO Module Team  
National Capital Children's Museum (1,  
Map on 2, 6)

### 1995

#### Jan 1-29, Sundays only

BSME Open House  
Baltimore, MD (2)

#### Jan 15

NVMR Open House, Vienna, VA (4)

#### Jan 28

Potomac Home Layout Tour  
Chantilly, VA (7)

#### Feb 12

Potomac Home Layout Tour  
White Oak, MD (8)  
NVMR Open House (4)

(nn) — Details on page nn of this *Flyer*.

Potomac Events in **boldface**.

‡—Details in an upcoming *Potomac Flyer*.

Local model railroad clubs may have their events listed here if space permits. Please send a schedule of your activities to Pete Matthews, editor of the *Potomac Flyer* at the address given in the Division Staff Roster.

Calendar

Staff Roster

### Have You Paid Your Dues Yet?

If not, please pay  
them now. They're  
still only \$2<sup>00</sup>—  
So *what's* your  
excuse?

## Other Winter Events, cont'd

## Achievement Notes

December 18th and 25th, from 1 to 5 P.M. For more information, call Bob Jackson at (410) 837-BSME (-2763).

The Northern Virginia Model Railroaders, Inc. continue their season of open houses on December 10th, January 14th, and February 11th, from 1 to 5 P.M. each day. NVMR is located in the Washington & Old Dominion Station, Dominion and Ayr Hill roads, Vienna, Virginia. For information, call (703) 938-5157.

Finally, the Winchester Model Railroad Club open house is scheduled for two successive Sundays in December, the 11th and 18th. Hours are (you guessed it) 1 to 5 P.M. each day. Admission is free. For more information, call Craig Alderman at (703) 665-9898. 🚂

## Model Railroading and Baseball Cards

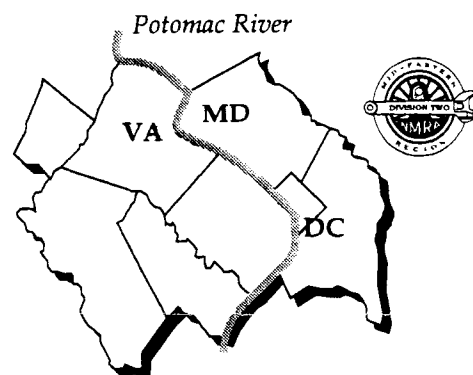
—Nick Kalis

Yes, there is a connection. Baseball card shops stock a couple items of use to us model railroaders. Recently, Model Railroader mentioned that baseball card shops carry inexpensive yet strong, white cardboard boxes that are ideal for storing HO-scale rolling stock.

Remember, most longer (50-foot or more) Athearn cars often do not fit back into the Athearn box once the couplers are installed. I visited Jolly Roger's Comics and its baseball card department to check out MR's advice. I found individual boxes of various lengths perfect for holding freight and passenger cars.

There is also a tray available which will hold several cars. Note, there is an advertiser in MR who offers something similar, and while his includes padding, it is more expensive.

What MR failed to mention, though, is baseball card shops also carry small clear boxes ideally suited to HO-scale vehicles—you know, the kind that cost about 69¢ but come in a throw-away bag. These smaller baseball card boxes I found are ideally suited to a great line of vehicles from Spain's EKO. EKO's cars cost only \$1.49 each, but are quite delicate and need a box for storage. These smaller boxes fit the storage need perfectly (pardon the pun). Visit Jolly Roger's at Williamsburg Shopping Center, 6503 North 29th Street, Arlington, Virginia. You might want to call Jolly Roger's proprietor, Tom Mulvey, at (703) 241-5930, to make sure he has enough boxes in stock to meet your needs. 🚂



Geographic extent of the Potomac Division, Mid-Eastern Region, NMRA

## Achievement Notes

—Bruce Strickland

### Congratulations Monroe!

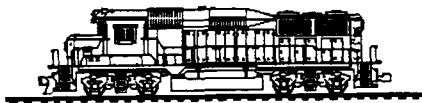
Now that I have said it, I guess that I should explain to you Potomac Flyer readers just what I mean. Monroe Stewart, our past Division Superintendent and present Tour Guide, has just earned the status of Master Model Railroader. He did this by completing the requirements for seven of the eleven certificates available in the NMRA Achievement Program.

Now that winter is approaching, and the March Mini-Convention is only a short time away, you should be competing those models that you wish to enter in the Merit Judging portion of the model contest. Keep in mind that the spring MER convention is quickly approaching, and will also be in nearby York, Pennsylvania.

The Achievement Program is currently soliciting ideas for improving the AP. If you have any ideas please send them to me so that I can pass them along. If you wish, you may send them directly to Rick Shoup. Rick's address is:

Rick Shoup  
AP Chairman  
1810 Bunker Hill Dr.  
Sun City Center, FL 33573

A copy of the AP Rules and Regulations can be found in the January 1993 NMRA Bulletin. If you have any questions or need any of the forms necessary to work towards an AP certificate, please feel free to contact me any time by phone or mail. My phone number and address are listed in the Staff Roster on page 3 of this Flyer.



## The Head End

—Pete Matthews  
Potomac Flyer Editor

### Thanks to Contributors

It takes a fair amount of text to fill out this newsletter. If I had it all to do myself, the *Potomac Flyer* would be much shorter and quite boring. This issue marks (pardon the pun, Mike) the completion of Mike Jones' second submission. We also have a delightful remembrance appropriate to the season from board member Clint Smoke. Also, Nick Kalis has noted a cross-over between model railroading and baseball card collecting. If any of you readers have tips to share, or a story to tell, please send them to me and after review and editing I'll run them in a future *Flyer*.


### NMRA Dues Rise

If you haven't heard, NMRA annual dues have risen to \$30. This is reflected in our Application Form found later in this issue of the *Potomac Flyer*. Potomac Division dues remain \$2 a year for the foreseeable future.

### Looking Towards Atlanta

If you are planning to attend the Atlanta NMRA meetings and are also presenting a clinic there, we want to hear from you. Our Mini-Convention is coming up in March and we need new clinics. Making your presentation at the March Mini-Convention benefits us both. You get a chance to try out your talk on a small, critically aware, but friendly crowd, and we get fresh information and demonstrations. We have a savvy group of modelers who will readily and happily comment on your presentation, both its content and style. Such response is invaluable for preparing a talk or demonstration for a large audience. It's great for both of us. Please call any staff member listed on the Division Staff Roster on page 3 if you are interested.


### Season's Greetings

Let me close by wishing you and your families the best of the season and a happy new year. Your fellowship is what makes this hobby so wonderful. The giving and sharing that distinguish the Potomac Division are the reasons that I continue to enjoy serving you all so much. Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah, and Happy New Year to you all! 

## The Business Car

—Jeff Martello  
Division Superintendent

Happy Holidays, Everyone!

I just have a quick note. At this time I would like to thank the board of directors, Ell Geib, Clint Smoke, Bill O'Neill, and Bob Minnis, and the Potomac membership for all your support this past year I have been superintendent. I am looking forward to another successful year. However, I have served for over three years and it is time for some new blood. Anyone who is interested is invited to run for the board at our March Mini-Convention and Annual Meeting. Let us know, and we will be happy to place your name in nomination. I am fully confident that someone will rise to the occasion. Thanks. 

## The Head End

## The Business Car

# N-Scale KATO SD40s

All roads and undecorateds available

**\$75<sup>00</sup> and Up**  
Discounts on large orders

Please call Marlin  
at (608) 781-9610 evenings  
or (608) 388-4311 days.  
Thanks.

**Dixie Module  
Team News**

**Northern  
Virginia NTrak  
News**

**HO Module Team Notes**

—Bob Minnis

These past three months have been relatively quiet for the Module Team—the lull before the storm of public shows that mark our packed holiday schedule. Only a few of the eight weeks I mentioned in the last issue remain in which to build, scenic, or otherwise complete a module. But it can be done.

As this Flyer goes to press, the Team is making final preparations for the Rockville Lions Club Show. Now is the time to check over your modules. Make repairs to the scenery damaged by those little (and not-so-little) fingers that were “just looking.” Touch up the paint nicked and chipped in transporting the modules. Check over the motive power and rolling stock for dirty wheels, droopy couplers, out-of-gauge wheels, and under-weight conditions. Verify that all track and switch components are “in gauge.” File smooth any uneven or rough joints. Also check all wiring—tighten loose connections or resolder poor ones. These few minutes of bench maintenance can save valuable set-up time and the frustration or embarrassment of finding bugs once you go “public.”

I would like to welcome Colin Weiner to the Module Team. Colin “bought-in” to the organization during the September Swap Meet. We look forward to his debut in Rockville.

If anyone is interested in building a four-foot corner, please give me a ring. I have been toying with the idea of “kit-bashing” an inside corner out of an existing three-foot outside corner. In order to use it, though, we need a fifth outside corner. With it, we can set up an L-shaped layout.

The approaching winter months are an excellent time to build a module or two. Start planning for the Mini-Convention. We will have plenty of space for anyone wishing to display a module (or more). Keep in mind, too, that it only takes 32-square feet (four modules) to qualify for the AP Scenery certificate. 🚂



**Northern Virginia NTrak News**

— Pete Matthews for Matt Schaefer

Due to an oversight on your editor's part, Matt Schaefer wasn't given adequate lead time to write something for this issue of the *Potomac Flyer*. But reading through our Northern Virginia N-Trak newsletter, I can see that we have a busy late fall planned. We are scheduled, as of this writing (October 16th), to set up at four shows in six weeks. Starting in late October, we will be at the Greenberg Show in Upper Marlboro, Maryland, on the 29th and 30th. Then at the Rockville Lions Club Benefit, November 12th and 13th. A week later, November 19th and 20th, we will be at Landmark Mall with the National Capital Tinplate Trackers Model Railroad. Finally, on December 3rd and 4th, we are setting up at the Silver Spring railroad show. Beyond that there are no specific plans at this time (beyond that we won't have any energy left!).

At the October 9th meeting, the club voted to make a bid to host the 1996 NTrak East Convention. At this preliminary stage, they are still looking for a site to hold the meet. The convention is slated for July or August 1996.

Northern Virginia NTrak welcomes anyone interested in building and operating a module (or more). The club publishes a newsletter that will keep you up to date on all the club's activities and the latest in modular layout design, operations, and other NTrak data. For information about joining please write to Northern Virginia NTrak, P.O. Box 1951, Herndon, VA 22070. 🚂

**Module Team Events**

Nov 12-13	Rockville Lions Club
Dec 3-4	Fairfax Station
Dec 17-18	National Capital Children's Museum
Mar 18	Mini-Convention, Fairfax, VA

## George Hughes' HO Scale "Norfolk & Western and Virginian"

Saturday, January 28, 1995, 1-5 p.m.

13416 Springhaven Dr., Chantilly, VA • (703) 742-0177

George Hughes' 37x14 foot layout models the Norfolk & Western and Virginian railroads in HO scale. This is a West Virginia coal country setting where 30-car trains are typical. Operationally a run-through layout, trains run from staging yard to staging yard with very little on-layout switching. The feeling is one of traffic moving through the valleys and hollows on their way to points beyond the layout. The N&W has a double-track main, while the Virginian is a single-track electrified line with sidings. Electrification of the Virginian is about three-quarters complete, with catenary poles in place, but wire yet to be run.

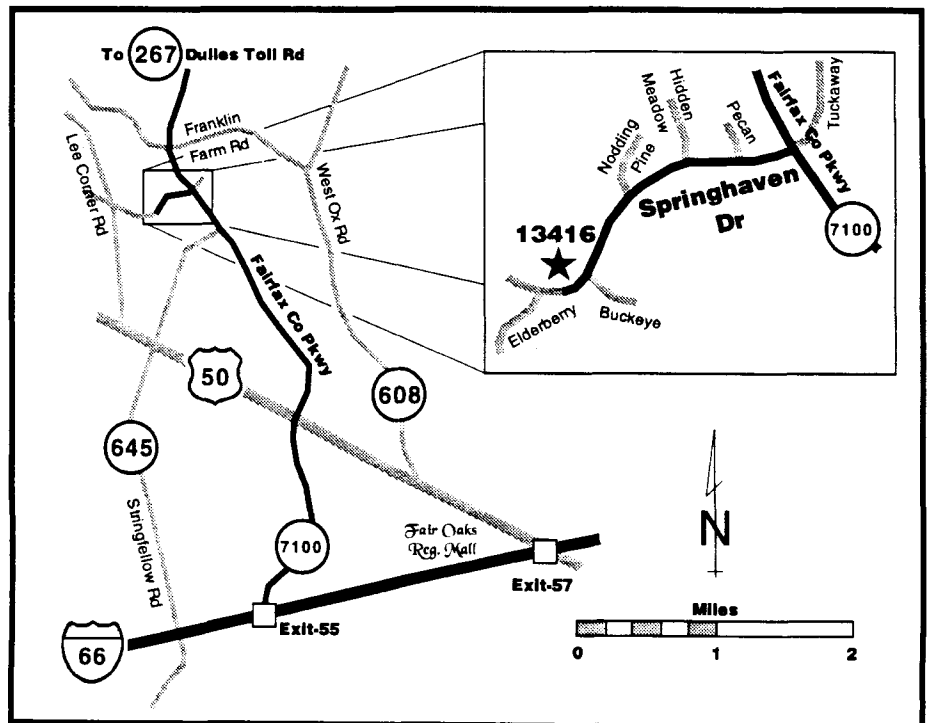
George describes the time period as mid-50s to Norfolk-Southern times. He admits that his favorite aspect of the hobby is detailing diesel locomotives and the relaxed definition of the era lets him run his favorite models from the early diesel era right up to the present.

George's N&W is an along-the-wall basement layout with one peninsula. **Entry to the room is via a duck-under.** Benchwork is L-girder. Turnouts are manual where they can be reached, but powered by Tortoise or Switchmaster machines elsewhere. Scenery is described as basic (and building). Walls are painted sky-blue and the room corners have been fitted with rounded backdrops. As the layout is conceived, train control is command control (originally Mann-Made, but now Digitrax). Until all his locomotives have receivers installed, though, he uses Innovator throttles to fill his "receiver gap."

### Getting There

George recommends reaching his house via the Fairfax County Parkway, County Route 7100. Fairfax County Parkway connects the Dulles Toll Road and I-66 west of the Beltway.

- From the Dulles Toll Road, take the Fairfax County Parkway exit. After paying the toll, turn left (south) onto the Parkway and follow it for about 4 miles. The light before the one at Springhaven is Franklin Farm Road (Giant Foodstore etc.). At the next light, turn right onto Springhaven Drive (note: Tuckaway Dr. is to the left).
- From I-66, take the Fairfax County Parkway (Route 7100), exit-55. Proceed north along the Parkway past US- 50, Lee-Jackson Memorial Highway. Springhaven Drive is about 2.1 miles ahead on the left. You will pass Stringfellow Road on your left just before Springhaven. Turn left onto Springhaven (note: Tuckaway Dr. is to the right).
- Once on Springhaven Drive, you will pass three roads to the right and one on the left. The latter is Buckeye. George's house, 13416, is on the right between Buckeye and Elderberry. If you get to Elderberry, you've gone too far. The house is a two-story colonial with a two-car garage, painted blue with red shutters. The number is above the door.



### Winter Events

#### • January's Home Layout Tour

## Strad Bushby's N-Scale Northeastern Corridor

Sunday, February 12, 1995, 1-5 P.M.

515 Hexton Hill Rd., White Oak, MD • (301) 384-2339

### Winter Events, cont'd

### • February's Home Layout Tour

Strad Bushby's layout models modern, East Coast railroading from Washington to New York. This 24x17-foot N-scale layout features Amtrak, Conrail, and CSX trains running on realistic, computer-controlled timetables. Strad is a computer hardware systems consultant and he has applied his expertise to his layout. In keeping with his background, he emphasizes operations, so you won't see much scenery. But you won't miss it. On this layout, the operations are the scenery.

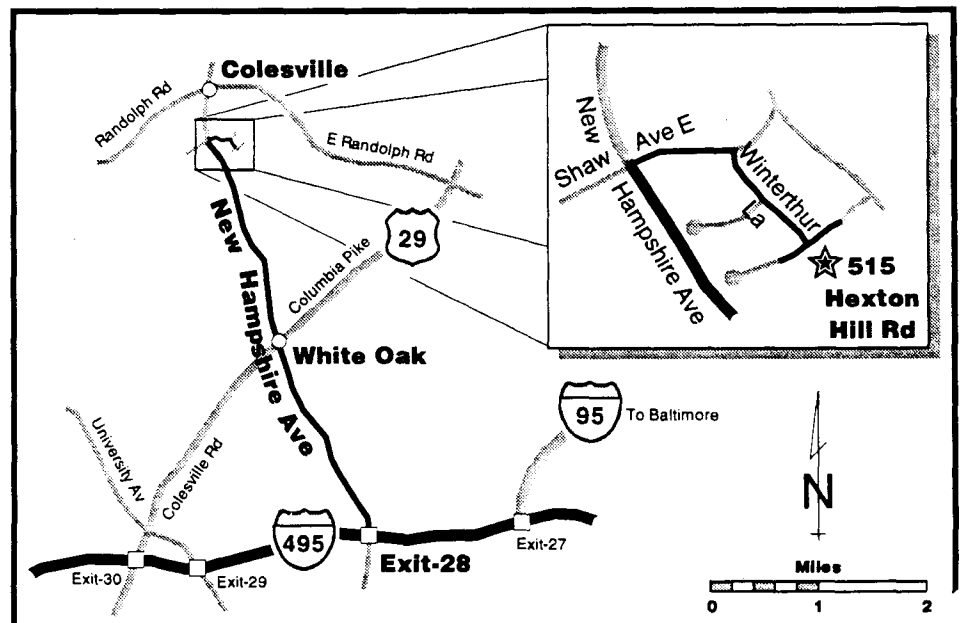
Making extensive use of computer control, Strad's trains run on actual schedules in real-time so that, for instance, when a Metroliner leaves Washington, it disappears into staging where the computer holds it two hours before sending it out to arrive on schedule in New York. Strad has designed the computer system to assist with the behind-the-scenes activity, to route trains, and to schedule arrivals and departures in the staging tracks (in theatrical terms, the computers are the stage crew). What this means is that even when Strad runs the layout alone, there is a constant background of train movement.

Strad's operations span the breadth of activity seen in the Northeast. Local switching of on-line industries, movement of passenger trains and operations at passenger terminals, and through freights and freight switching at two immense freight yards are all part of the scene. Staging, controlled largely by computer, plays a vital role. Up to 38 trains may be held in staging awaiting their turn on the layout. Digitrax command control runs trains, but given that Strad has over 250 locomotives, many still require conventional control. (To keep those locomotives busy, there are well over 1500 cars, too!)

### Getting There

Strad recommends New Hampshire Avenue as the most direct approach to his house.

- Take Exit-28 from I-495 onto New Hampshire Avenue (MD 650).
- Go north under US-29 and continue on for about 2.2 miles to Shaw Avenue East.
- Turn right onto Shaw.
- Take the next right onto Winterthur Lane. Winterthur Lane ends at a T-intersection with Hexton Hill Road. Strad's house, 515 Hexton Hill Road, is opposite the intersection.





As related in Part 1, Marx's HO line got off to a strong start in 1957. Less than a decade later, it was just poking along. One does not have to look far for explanations. Marx had many other toy lines to develop and maintain. A road racing line launched in the early 1960's must have had startup costs on the order of the HO line's. Marx was in a highly competitive business in which new products had to come out frequently. Thus, it had to make its capital outlays carefully. The Marx company itself was reported troubled by the high costs of new machinery, a late move into television advertising, labor problems, and, perhaps, aging and tired management. Once an innovator, Marx became known as something of a copycat. Finally, growth in both scale and toy trains was sluggish in the 1960's.

In fact, the US RTR HO market was going through a shake-up and a shake-out. Athearn dropped sets and RTR items in order to produce a greater variety of kits — and never looked back. Lionel and Revell dropped their HO lines. Gilbert drop its HO line in 1963 and went out of business in 1966. The Varney and Penn Line names disappeared for one reason or another. All of these firms had once been major players in the HO market. Many had been burned by ventures in the road racer business.

This left Tyco, AHM, and (later on) Bachmann and Life-Like to slug it out with Marx in the low-cost RTR HO arena. Their trains were reputed to be more realistic than Marx's. With little or no difference in price, this would have given them a sales advantage. (Personally, this author does not see that much of a difference in detailing between Marx's HO cars and those of contemporary rivals.)

Perhaps the biggest problem was that Marx's HO line was a "me too" line — almost everything in it was offered by nearly everybody else. Also, it was not keeping pace with the times. While the competition came out with miniatures of late model Metroliners and GE U-Boats, Marx just plodded along with the same old stuff. The wonder isn't that Marx deemphasized its HO line, but that it didn't drop it altogether.

But starting in 1968, Marx HO enjoyed a revival. Various locomotives, cars, and accessories were reissued over the next few years. Some were in old schemes, some in new ones. A plethora of new track and accessories came out in 1971. For the first time in years, things were looking up for Marx HO.

Marx was still in the O27 business and a comparison between the two lines is enlightening. Marx made its plastic O27 trains in three grades of detailing and features: lightweight, medium, and de luxe. Of those, Marx HO most resembled de luxe. Indeed, it was often superior to the larger line in detailing. Almost everything in one line had a counterpart in the other, but they were not necessarily identical in appearance. The boxcar, flatcars, bay window caboose, work caboose, open hopper, crane, and tanker were the spitting images of their O27 counterparts. The cupola caboose, however, did not much resemble its O27 equivalent. Aside from the Hudson, there was little resemblance between the two lines' motive power. (However, the O27 line's big diesels were E-units that resembled the HO F-units.) The HO line lacked the O27's triple-dome tanker and four-axle Alco S-2 switcher, while the larger gauge had no covered hopper or tank steamer. All would have been useful and appreciated additions.

In March 1972, the Quaker Oats Co. purchased the U.S. branch of Louis Marx & Co. One result was a reinvigorated effort in trains. Consumer catalogs and parts lists were routinely issued for the first time. Items were sold by mail. But while a number of revived or revised O27 items were produced, there was little new activity in the HO line, and that was confined to new liveries and numbers on existing products. The liveries tended to be older style ones. The HO line did not have anything like O27's Penn Central diesels or Exxon tanker. The Santa Fe 0-4-0T switcher of 1974 might well have been Marx's last "new" HO item.

Unfortunately, this new effort was not rewarded with better sales. After nearly 50 years, Marx train production at Girard, PA, ended in November 1975, although sales from stock continued into 1976. Indeed, Marx sales in general were disappointing. The old guard had left with Mr. Marx and the Quaker Oats crew just didn't get the hang of running the company. In April 1976, Quaker Oats practically gave the firm away to Dunbee-Combex-Marx, Ltd. (DCM), of London, England. DCM, whose empire included the UK's Hornby Tri-Ang trains, had a reputation for turning around ailing companies. With big plans for the US market, DCM bought the Aurora Products Corp. from Nabisco in 1978. Best known for its AFX model road racers, Aurora also sold Roco N scale trains under the "Postage Stamp Trains" banner. Despite these rail connections, DCM did not revive Marx trains.

## Feature Article

# The Life and Times of Marx HO Part II

by Mike Jones

**Marx HO,  
cont'd.**

DCM incurred a heavy debt load with these acquisitions — at a time of rising interest rates. A sagging US economy and poor product choices hurt sales. (One sales clerk later told the author that Aurora made too much of what didn't sell and too little of what did.) Just as things were improving, AFX production was disrupted by the shift of Aurora production to Marx's plants at Girard and Glendale, WV. Marx and Aurora suffered huge losses and DCM's credit dried up.

Marx/Aurora fell apart almost in a matter of days. Operations ceased in January 1980. Leisure Dynamics, the makers of Cox model airplanes and automobiles, signed a letter of intent to buy the Aurora racer and train lines. (Cox had sold HO trains and G-scale racers some years earlier.) In early February 1980, a group of Marx's creditors filed a bankruptcy petition in Federal court. It was not contested. Leisure Dynamics called off its deal, noting that it could not be completed before the vital New York Toy Show. DCM wrote off its US venture and called in a receiver for itself before the end of the month.

Some parts of DCM, including Hornby, survived intact. Marx did not. To satisfy the creditors, the Marx firm's assets were sold piecemeal over the next three years. Louis Marx himself outlived his company, passing away at age 85 in 1982.

But this is not the end of the Marx HO story. Both Marx and HO are gaining popularity with collectors and there seems to be increased collector's interest in Marx HO. Although not the most common stuff, Marx HO can often be found at train shows, even though it seems that the only items on sale are either individual boxcars or complete sets in original boxes! One advantage of Marx HO trains is that they take up about half of the space of most of their O27 counterparts. However, another advantage, modest prices, seems to be disappearing as interest increases. Passenger cars and some intact flatcars can command premium prices of up to \$40 each. (Relatively few of the former were made and the latter tend to lose their loads over the years.)

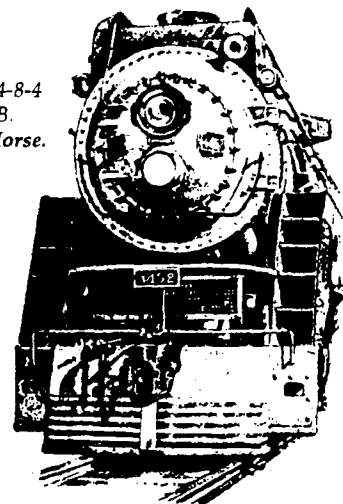
As for the Marx HO tooling, at least some of it found its way to China. Today, several of the former Marx HO freight cars are imported by Model Power as its "Heavyweight" line. Each comes in a number of road names, more than Marx used. The liveries are quite attractive and some are pleasantly offbeat, e.g., Baker's Chocolate and Kodak

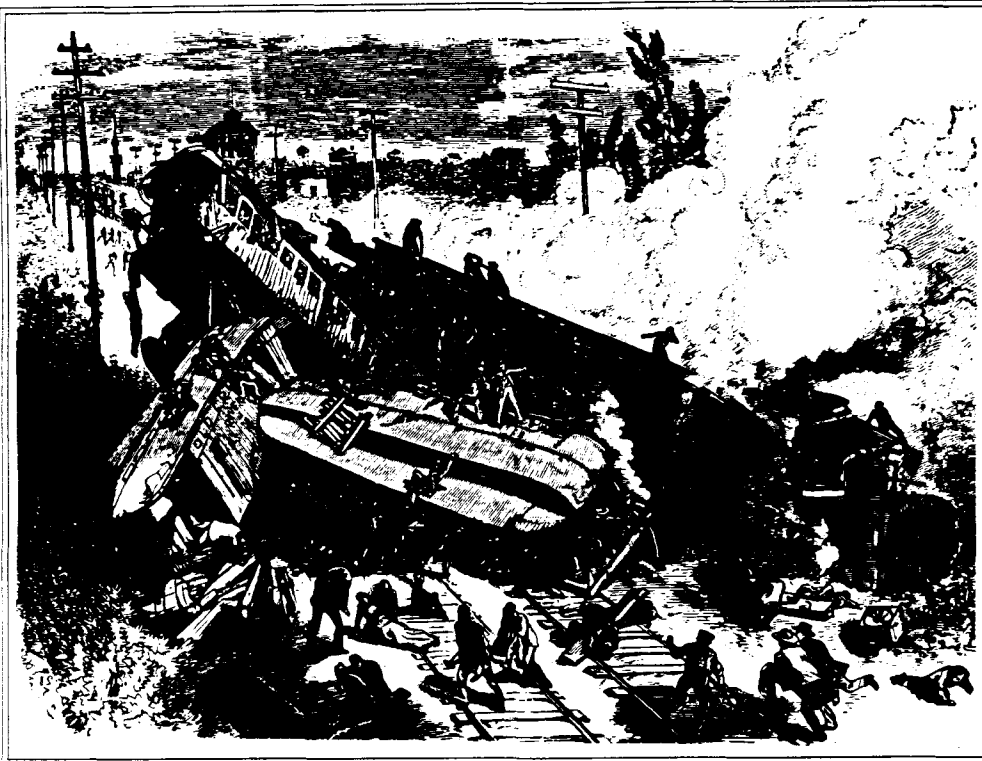
tank cars, Jack Frost Sugar covered hopper, and B&O Sentinel and Timken Rolling Bearing boxcars. Decoration is by the traditional combination of colored plastic and printing, but the printing is much finer now. Perhaps other Marx HO items are still being made under new names as well. So nearly 40 years after their inception, Marx HO trains live on! 🚂

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*Southern Pacific GS-4 4-8-4  
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Feature Article

# The Great Train Wreck of 1945

by Clinton Smoke  
(Copyright © 1994 by Clinton Smoke)

Many young people dream of growing up to become the hero often represented by fire fighters and police officers. Others find fascination with people in transportation, those who operate planes, ships and trains. We may know of an individual who was able to find a rewarding career in the profession that was once a just a childhood fantasy. We may also know others, who for one reason or another found their vocation in other pursuits and, who seem to have otherwise matured but never quite outgrow those fascinations from childhood. Maybe that explains why some of us are interested in model railroading.

I guess that I fall into that category. Like many of you, I like trains. I always have. My father was interested in trains and helped me get interested too. And he helped me get interested in model trains. But first, there was a toy train set. This story is about that first train.

The scene for this story took place nearly fifty years ago. Like most of you, many of the details of those first few years in my life are mostly lost in memory somewhere, but the details of one morning can still be recalled. It was Christmas morning and on that special and memorable occasion, I received my first train set. World War II had recently ended and the world was finally at peace. Across the world families were grateful for the

tranquillity that existed and for having their family together again. But because of this nation's recent commitment to war-time production, things like toys must have been hard to find.

Somehow that year, my parents found a toy train and lots of other things needed to have a train layout. And somehow, they built and moved an entire 4-foot by 8-foot scenicked layout from the basement to the living room of our home in the dead of night, just to set the stage for that special Christmas morning. The board was mounted in legs that must have raised it up about two feet from the floor, about right for me at the time. While flat, the top was painted to represent the streets of a town and a vast countryside. Features included an interesting layout of track, buildings appropriate for a small town, and several farm houses. There were street lights and lots of other "trimmings." It was quite magnificent.

For those who are interested in the details, the train was Marx freight train set, with a steam engine, a half dozen freight cars, and a spiffy red caboose. And there was lots of 027 track and four remotely controlled switches. All of that was waiting for me on Christmas morning.

Even though the lights in the room were low that Christmas morning it would have been impossible to miss the layout. Lights were shining out of the windows of many of the little buildings

## Great Train Wreck, cont'd

and from the street lights in town. I was later to learn more about these things and appreciate the work my father had put into this project as much of it was scratch built.

That Christmas morning the train was ready to make its first trip. I may have seen toy trains before that morning but I am not sure. I am sure that I had never operated one. My parents must have explained the basics of the controls to me. I recall to this date the results of moving the handle on the transformer from "off" to "full"! Maybe there is a little of Casey Jones' blood in our family.

While you can anticipate the results of my action, I did not. The engine did what it was supposed to do: the headlight came on and beamed brightly, its light reflecting off the new three-rail track, and the two little green jewels that represented the classification markers were like little green stars in a dark sky. (There were even lights in the caboose.) And it all was moving. What a sight! While I was admiring this scene, the train rapidly accelerated out of the station and moved smartly down the long straight section of track that ran almost the length of the board. I was excited beyond words. It may have been just a toy train, but for me it was a real adventure—this train and I were going places together.

By the time the engine got to that first curve it was going just about full speed. It never made the turn, but rather, continued straight ahead. There was nothing there to stop it, so the engine, followed by most of the rest of the train, dived from the board in a great arc, traveling what seemed like half the length of the living room before landing on the carpeted floor. What wasn't still on the board was on the floor in a great heap. Just seconds before this marvelous new toy had come to life as the result of my touch. Now, in just moments, I had killed it.

In reality the damage was minor. Examination revealed that the damage was limited to a small dent and some missing paint on the front of the engine. My father put the engine and cars on the track and coupled them together once again. I'm sure that some coaching was provided regarding the proper control of speed. Before long the train on its way again. While I don't recall the rest of

the day, my mother later told me that I played with that train until bed time.

In recalling this story I also recall an important lesson learned on that occasion. The expense and the work that went into the gift were significant. My parents must have worked many hours late into many nights to get everything ready. The first trip lasted seconds. The crash and my reaction were devastating.

Following the great train wreck, damage assessment and repairs to the train were rapidly accomplished. What seemed so dreadful really wasn't so bad. With some minor repairs and with some support and encouragement from my parents, I was ready to try again. Repairs to me might have taken a little longer, for the comfort they provided on that occasion is also remembered. In a way, they put me back on the track and got me going again too. While these events occurred a long time ago, I recall them well.

Reflecting later on the experience, I can understand that it wasn't really such a big deal, but at the time, I needed help to understand and overcome the situation. So many of life's experiences are like that—they seem important at the time, but as we look back on them, we realize that they were really of minor consequence. When we are young, little things seem important, but as we mature, we are better able to sort out these concerns, and separate the significant from the insignificant. In this case, as in many others, I was comforted by my parents. As usual, their judgment was correct. Big problems need attention and need to be fixed. Smaller problems can sometimes be overlooked and often don't really matter much anyhow. The hard part is knowing which are which.

During our early years, parents and others in our lives help us grow and mature. In later life, spouses and even our own children help us see things in a better perspective. We often fail to realize and show appreciation for the advice of those who are interested in us and willing to help us recover from this little crashes.

I still have that toy train. It still runs. There is still a little dent in the front where it fell to the floor many years ago. I could repair it and repaint the area but dare not. I want to keep the reminder of that great train wreck, and of the good things my parents helped me understand. 🚂

If you are looking for gift ideas for those friends of yours interested in trains, but not necessarily in building a layout, you might consider one of Mayfair Games' many Empire Builder series games.

Empire Builder is a rather different game. It is not a monopoly type of game. While some players will do better than others (and win games, of course) no player can be driven out of the game by the play of others. Ultimate success or failure depends largely on each player's decisions.

In Empire Builder, the goal is to build a network of rails across the US so that you can pick up goods where they are produced and deliver them where they are consumed. That is, do what a real railroad does. The system is abstracted so the day-to-day railroading that we modelers think of is missing. Players start with a large sum of money with which to build their initial lines. In addition, they are each given a train, initially a slow, light capacity freight. Each player also receives three demand cards, on each of which are listed three possible payoffs for delivering specific goods to specific cities. Only one demand on a card can payoff, but with three cards, you have nine potential plays. The demand cards and how the players exploit them are the crux of the game.

You begin by building routes that connect a producing city with the consuming city. You literally draw them with erasable crayons right on the game map. Building track costs money depending on terrain built through or across. After a couple of building turns, the players place their markers on the map, collect a load, and move towards their first payoff city to collect more money, draw another demand card, and build more rails with the moneys earned.

This goes on and on, players moving, collecting payoffs, building track, upgrading to heavier and faster trains, and ultimately accumulating wealth. Along the way, they will have to deal with weather, floods, strikes, and even corporate taxes.

Empire Builder's winner is the player who most quickly capitalizes on circumstances (the luck of the demand card draw) to build a profitable network. The options presented by the demand cards force a certain amount of decision making, especially early on, but most of it is left to the player to decide. Ultimately the game reaches a point where further track building is unnecessary, and serious wealth

accumulation begins. Victory is measured in total dollars accumulated, not track built, with the proviso that a play must connect five of the six major cities (Los Angeles, Seattle, Kansas City, Chicago, New York, and Atlanta) to his or her railroad.

The neatest thing about Empire Builder is the way in which the resulting network of rails mimics the actual web of tracks across the continent, especially with several players involved. The game can also serve to teach geography, although in a somewhat stereotypical manner (fruit from Tampa, sheep from Cheyenne, iron ore for Duluth, etc.).

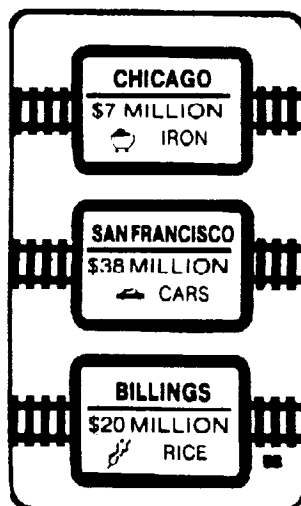
The only drawback is game length. This is a weekend rather than an evening game. When more than three players are involved, the decision-making and track building take a fair amount of time. For instance, a recent five-player game at my house lasted over six hours, and even then we used the sudden-death finish rather than the dollar-figure criterion (although we had just entered the final and rapid wealth-building phase).

Empire Builder now comes in several flavors. The original game is restricted to the lower 48 states and southern Canada. North American Rails adds Mexico (as well as textile and coffee loads and Mexico City as a major city). British Rails is set in England, Wales, and Scotland. Eurorails is an EEC version. Nippon Rails is set in Japan, and the latest version is Australian Rails. There is a simplified version for children, as well as a fantasy version that may appeal to teens. All in all, this is an entertaining series of games, being both visually and intellectually appealing. 🚂

## Feature Article

# Mayfair's Empire Builder — A Holiday Gift Idea

by Pete Matthews



**A Typical Demand Card.**  
*Three potential demands are available although only one per card may be collected. Payoff is proportional to the number of mileposts to the nearest city producing the commodity.*

# The Call Board

Notes about fellow Potomac Division Members — Hosted by Carl Barna

## The Call Board (formerly Member Notes)

## Bulletin Board

Thanks for the biographical sketches that continue to accumulate. Last time we ran five of them and this time we received two. One is Bill Parks' note presented below. The other, unfortunately, came to me without a name attached. Our Unknown Model Railroader credits Jim Strong with his inspiration and has modeled in N, HO, and G scales. If this sounds like you, just remember what your teachers always told you: if you don't put your name on it, you can't get credit for it.

### Bill Parks

Bill is 33 years old, married, but currently has no children. His love of trains goes back to his grandfather, who spent about 30 years from the 1930s to '50s as a freight agent with the Seaboard Airlines. He always had had trains in the house, mainly at Christmas, starting with his father's O scale Marx train from his childhood, an HO scale Märklin purchased in England in the mid-1960s, and his own collection of various HO scale equipment. Having grown up in a military family, along with spending seven years in the Air Force himself, Bill had never been in one house long enough to build a layout. Currently, he is in the design phase of a '30s era HO scale layout highlighting southeastern swamp logging. At present he and his wife are remodeling their basement, so Bill hopes to begin building his layout after the first of the year.

## Bulletin Board

### Want Ads, Help Wanted, etc.

**New York Connecting Railroad Society.** The New York Connecting Railroad Society has been formed. For further information, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to SIG-member Nick Kalis, P.O. Box 1412, Falls Church, VA 22041.

**Operating Group Forming:** Pete Matthews is looking for a additional operators to meet once or twice monthly and run his N-scale Great Northern Cascade Railway. Here's your chance to start earning points towards your AP Dispatcher Certificate. Call (703) 360-2313, days and most evenings  
**Rail-Marine Special Interest Group (SIG)** is being formed and is seeking new members. Contact John Teichmoeller at (410) 461-3196.

**Wanted:** Used Copies of Allen Keller's Latest Tapes Sought. Call Nick Kalis, (703) 671-1477.

**HO Layout for Sale.** Oregon Pass Lines in Atlas King-Size Track Plan Book. No scenery. 12x8-foot L-shape. Can be broken down into two 4x8-foot sections for transport. \$300. Contact Bruce Strickland by mail at 10766 Tullamore Ct., Manassas, VA 22111, or by phone at (703) 361-5620 (home) or (703) 313-2050 (work/pager).

### MER 50th Anniversary Convention Committee Forming

The Mid-Eastern Region of the National Model Railroad Association will be celebrating its 50 Anniversary in the Fall of 1995. Fred Voelcker chairs the committee planning our biggest and best Convention to help commemorate this occasion.

Fred requests volunteers to serve as members of the Convention Committee as well as other functions and assist in the planning and success of this Fall Convention Special! He needs people who are willing to work hard so we may make this Convention the Best MER has ever sponsored.

Fred has enjoyed many MER Conventions in years past, and feels it is time to pay the piper, and plan for others to enjoy! Please write or call him if you or others are willing to help. He firmly believes in the MER motto, "Most Enthusiastic Region," and feels sure we will be willing to contribute to the success of this historic event!

Fred Voelcker's address is 4F Deepwater Court, Cockeysville, MD 21030-4712, and his phone number is (410) 667-6024.

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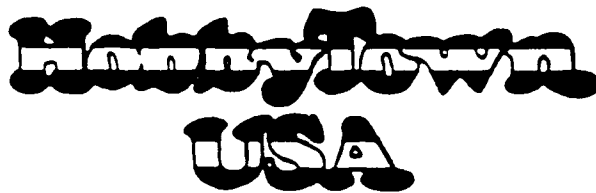
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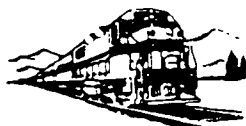
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# Potomac Division

Mid-Eastern Region, National Model Railroad Association, Inc.

## Membership Application

The Potomac Division is for the National Capital area and the Mid-Eastern Region of the NMRA, providing various activities for all model railroaders, such as home layout tours, prototype tours, and an annual Mini-Convention in March. A quarterly newsletter, the Potomac Flyer, is published, with model railroad news and the Division schedule of activities.

You do not have to be a member of the Mid-Eastern Region or of the NMRA to be a Division member, though most Potomac members are also NMRA/MER members. The Potomac Division has one of the largest concentrations of model railroading talent in the country, with no less than 100 Club A Master Model Railroaders in our area, and many more outstanding modelers as well.

The Division's territory is Northern Virginia, from Prince William to Loudoun Counties, including Arlington, Fairfax, Fauquier, and Clark counties, as well as the independent cities of the region. Also included are the District of Columbia, and Montgomery and Prince Georges counties in Maryland. Anyone interested in furthering the hobby may join the Potomac Division, regardless of their place of residence.

Please indicate status: ☐ New membership ☐ Renewal or Change of Address (COA)

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☐ Enclosed are Potomac Division Annual Dues of \$2.00 (includes the quarterly Potomac Flyer)

Primary Scale/Gauge Interest (circle one): Z N TT HO OO S O G Other \_\_\_\_\_

Secondary Scale/Gauge Interest (circle one): Z N TT HO OO S O G Other \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have a Layout? (circle one) Yes No Yes No

Narrow Gauge (circle one)? Yes No Yes No

Module Interest (circle one)? Yes No Yes No

Traction Interest (circle one)? Yes No Yes No

New and renewing members: Please include a short, one paragraph description of yourself and your railroading interests for possible inclusion in a future Potomac Flyer Call Board column. Thanks.

**NOTE:**  
The NMRA requires that its members also be NMRA members. If you are not already an NMRA member and wish to join NMRA, please check the Both levels. The Potomac Division requires an other level of membership.

☐ My check includes MER Annual Dues of \$2.00 (includes the bimonthly MER Local)

\* Are you a Mid-Eastern Region Member (circle one)? Yes or No

If Yes, please give MER Member Number \_\_\_\_\_

☐ My check includes NMRA Annual dues of \$30.00 (includes the monthly NMRA Bulletin)

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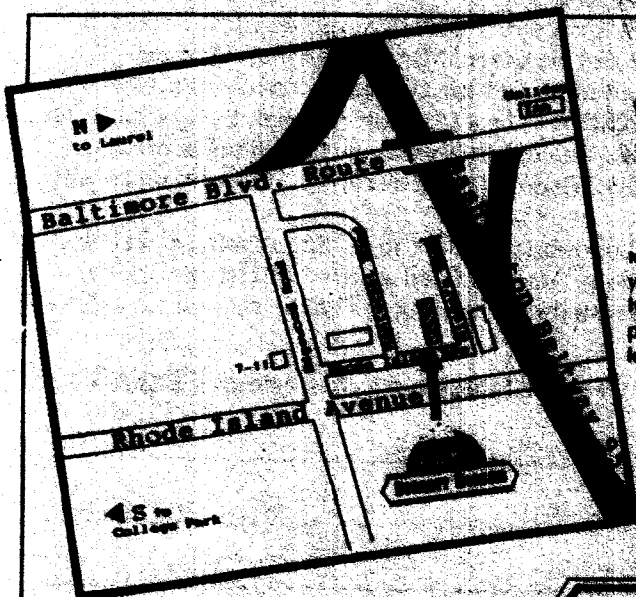
\* Are you an NMRA Special Interest Group (SIG) or railroad historical society member?

If so, please list your SIG or historical society memberships: \_\_\_\_\_

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Please return the completed application, with a check payable to Potomac Division, to:  
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