The Potomac Flyer

December 2023-January 2024

The Newsletter of the Potomac Division, MER, NMRA

Inside This Issue:

And much more…

Decoder Pro Hobby Barn Clinic Dec. 9, 9AM In-Person
Motive Power Virtual Clinic Dec. 17th, 3PM via Zoom

Bill of Lading

Cover: Ma & Pa #42 Enters Baltimore Yard on Bob Sprague's Layout
(Sprague Photo)

The Potomac Flyer

Submission Deadlines – Issue

Nov. 1 for Dec.-Jan. Jan. 1 for Feb.-Mar.
March 1 for April-May May 1 for June-July
July 1 for Aug.-Sept. Sept. 1 for Oct.-Nov.

From the Business Car

by Ernie Little, MMR, Potomac Division Superintendent

As I reflect on recent events there are several items I want to bring to your attention.

Congratulations to Bob Rodriguez, MMR, on his 200th operations session that took place on September 30th. He has come a long way since his inaugural operating session held on November 30, 2002, including holding virtual sessions during the Covid period. This allowed many of our members to still get together and operate trains in a safe and healthy way. The Board of Directors greatly appreciates all our members that open their layouts to others to visit and operate trains.

Speaking of operating sessions, the Board of Directors has started planning to hold another "Operations Saturday" in the Spring of 2024. Watch the website for more information on this initiative. Members will be able to sign up and operate on the participating model train layouts in the Division.

I am pleased to say that the division has continued to be active. Many of our members attended the Mid-Eastern Region's "Round the Curve" convention in Altoona, Pennsylvania, on October 19th through 22nd. Several members presented clinics and Alex Belida, MMR, received the First Place Steam Engine award for his vertical boiler engine entry in the modeling contest. I attended meetings of the Region's Division Superintendents, newsletter editors and webmasters at the convention. NMRA President Gordy Robinson, MMR, attended the Superintendents' meeting and provided an update on what is occurring at the National NMRA level. First, any orphan members who do not live in a designated division's territory are being assigned to the most appropriate active division. As a part of this initiative, the Region Superintendents were tasked with placing current "orphan" counties into existing divisions. As a result, pending approval by the NMRA National Board, the Potomac Division will be increasing its area to include Warren, Page, and Shenandoah counties on the West side and Westmoreland, Northumberland, Richmond, and Middlesex counties on the East side. Second, National NMRA is changing the computer program for tracking membership since 1992 from FirePro to Access. This changeover will will allow Superintendents to directly access the membership database to secure information.

Welcome New Members

September 2023:

Ty Bateman - Great Falls, VA
Greg Tate - Woodbridge, VA
Chris Ruegger - Lansdowne, VA

With the boundary changes made concerning the orphan memberships at the MER Superintendent's meeting in October we have four additional new members:

William Hooks, Colonial Beach, VA
Michael Byle, Colonial Beach, VA
Jeffrey Jordan, Fort Valley, VA
Brendan Harrington, McClean, VA

In preparing for our joint meet with James River, the Board of Directors applied for a matching grant from the National Model Railroad Association to purchase new audio-visual equipment to use at our meets—two "clickers," two projector stands, and a portable 120" projection screen to replace one of the two screens we had that was in poor repair. The grant was approved, items purchased, and were used for the first time at the joint meet. A grant will be applied for next year to purchase another projection screen to replace the second existing one.

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.

The Division Crew:

Superintendent Ernie Little, MMR 571-383-7316 Super@potomac-nmra.org

Sr-Asst-Super Alex Belida, MMR 301-424-8164 Sr-Asst-Super@potomac-nmra.org

Assistant Superintendent Ken Wilson 571-238-8864 Asst-Super@potomac-nmra.org

Paymaster Jerry Stanley 540-364-1815 Paymaster@potomac-nmra.org

Clerk Lee Stoermer 928-580-3209 Clerk@potomac-nmra.org

Achievement Program Manager Martin Brechbiel, MMR 703-309-3082 Achievement-Program@potomac-nmra.org

Webmaster Ernie Little 571-383-7316 Webmaster@potomac-nmra.org

Potomac Flyer Editor & Publisher Alex Belida 301-424-8164 Potomac-Flyer@potomac-nmra.org

Flyer Proofreaders: Dan Ebert, Bob Sprague

Social Media Director: Bill Schultheiss media@potomac-nmra.org

Our virtual and in-person clinics continue in December after a short hiatus due to the other activities in October and November. A schedule, through the end of 2024, has been developed. It includes "technical" clinics on such topics as using DecoderPro to program decoders where a small number of participants will be able to use a computer to program a decoder as part of the clinic. We still have a few openings for which we need topics and clinicians for. If you are interested in presenting a clinic and are not scheduled to do so, please contact Jerry Stanley, or another member of the Board of Directors to get on the schedule. This is an excellent opportunity to share your knowledge and skills with other members and pick up points toward an Achievement Program certificate.

Layout tours are also coming back! Planning is in progress to create a schedule that will have a tour at least once a quarter starting in January 2024, alternating between Maryland and Virginia.

I want to provide our members with some information regarding how the Division gets membership information. This information is important as it contains contact information (email, addresses, and phone numbers) that is used by the Division leadership to communicate with our members. Accurate information is a must to allow effective and efficient communication between the Board of Directors and the Division's members.

Monthly, National NMRA provides a membership list for the Region, in our case the Mid-Eastern Region, which is then sent to each division containing the division membership. There have been on-going issues with the current tracking system at the

National level, including such deficiencies as incorrect expiration dates, members assigned to incorrect divisions, members disappearing from the division's list and reappearing the next month, and other similar issues. As noted above, National NMRA is upgrading its system to address the known deficiencies.

At the division level the membership list is reviewed and compared to our local database to determine what changes have taken place. This membership information is not shared with anyone outside of the Board of Directors.

So, with that said, how does our Division look in terms of membership, and where is our membership located, using the information as of October 3, 2023.

MARYLAND		
COUNTY	NUMBER OF MEMBERS	% OF DIVISION MEMBERSHIP
Calvert	6	2.58
Charles	8	3.43
Montgomery	50	21.46
Prince Georges	14	6.01
Total members	78	33.48
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA		
Total members	11	4.72
	VIRGINIA	
COUNTY	NUMBER OF MEMBERS	% OF DIVISION MEMBERSHIP
Alexandria City	10	4.29
Arlington	8	3.43
Fairfax	69	29.61
Fairfax City	1	0.43
Falls Church City	3	1.29
Fauquier	7	3
Loudoun	14	6.01
Manassas City	4	1.72
Prince William	27	11.59
Rappahannock	1	0.43
Total members	144	61.80

That's a total of 233 listed members. The Board would like to hear your ideas about how we can recruit more modelers to join our ranks. Thanks!

Candidates Wanted for the 2024 Division Elections

Two positions on the Potomac Division Board of Directors are up for election in April 2024. These positions are Assistant Superintendent and Paymaster.

Members interested in running for office in the 2024 elections are required by the Division bylaws to notify the Nominations Committee by email, no later than midnight, February 3, 2024, and supply them with a picture, a short biography not to exceed 200 words, and a statement about why they are running for a position. Candidates should send their information to all Committee members.

The following individuals are the Nominations Committee for the 2024 elections: Mark Gionet (Chair), Bill Demas, Paul Hutchins and Brian Sheron. These members are available to answer any questions concerning the duties and activities associated with service on the Board. The following are email addresses for the committee members: Mark Gionet mark.c.gionet@outlook.com; Paul Hutchins ff3hutch@aol.com; Bill Demas wsdemas@verizon.net; Brian Sheron bwsheron@me.com

The election process will take place in April of 2024. Ballots will be sent to Division members for whom the Division lacks email addresses; voting by everyone else will done electronically. This provides great convenience for all and a significant cost savings for your Division.

Important dates concerning the 2024 election process are as follows:

February 3, 2024 (Midnight) - Deadline for candidates to notify the Nominations Committee of their intent to run for office and provide a current picture, biography, and statement (not to exceed 200 words) as to why they are running for office.

April 1, 2024 - *The Potomac Flyer* and emails from the Division will provide a list of candidates for office for the membership to consider. Ballots will be mailed out to those members without email addresses on record.

April 13, 2024 – eVoting will commence.

April 20, 2024 – eVoting will conclude; deadline for receipt of mailed ballots by the Nominations Committee.

April 27, 2024 – Candidates will be notified of election results.

May 21, 2024 – The new Board of Directors will meet.

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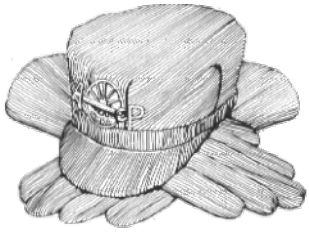
Achievement Program Report



by Martin Brechbiel, MMR, Potomac Division AP Manager

I was expecting something of a quiet month or two, but I was pleasantly surprised for things to be otherwise. I had two certificates to present in November. First, Paul Hutchins (photo right by Martin Brechbiel) earned his AP Volunteer certificate. I drove over to Waldorf, Maryland on what must have been the windiest day of the month to hand the certificate to him. Paul has been working hard supporting the Division, Region, and National as a volunteer. He has done a lot behind the scenes, providing the heavy lifting securing venues, providing support at shows and meets, and just helping out wherever he was able. It is members like Paul that that make your Division function.

The other certificate I presented had been aging on top of my file cabinet, waiting for a golden opportunity for its delivery and presentation. This certificate was for the Golden Spike and was awarded to Mike Byle (photo left by Lee Stoermer). It was actually from last year, but Mike relocated from the Philadelphia Division to Northumberland County, Virginia, which until very recently was a county unaffiliated with any Division. Serendipitously, this all converged with Northumberland becoming part of the Potomac Division (see Business Car P3) with Mike attending the November 4th Joint Meet with James River, where I presented the Golden Spike certificate to our new Division member.

Noting the November 4th Joint Meet, there were four models there to be evaluated (apparently "judging" is being removed from the NMRA vocabulary.) Alex Belida, MMR and I evaluated these models and found three of the four to be of Merit Award quality (see photo in Joint Meet Report P11). The fourth, a bridge, was there to be seen and registered by the modeler in pursuit of his AP Master Builder–Structures certificate. This certificate requires 12 models, six of which need to receive Merit Awards. One of the 12 must be a bridge, but that bridge need not get a Merit Award. Keep that detail in mind when you are in pursuit of the Structures certificate!

And, if you have models or layouts to be evaluated, contact me and we'll get something set up.

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Nominations Wanted for the Abrams Award

The Board of Directors is seeking nominations for the Marshall Abrams award to recognize a Potomac Division member who has demonstrated outstanding service to the Division.

The following guidelines will be used in determining the recipient:
1. The recipient must be a member in good standing of the Division.
2. The recipient must have shown a level of service above and beyond that expected by other members of the Division.
3. In addition to service to the Division, service to the Mid-Eastern Region and national model train efforts may also be considered.

Nominations should be sent by January 1, 2024 to Ernie Little by email at super@potomac-nmra.org. The email should cite reasons why the nominee should be considered.

The Abrams Award was created by the Potomac Division Board of Directors in the Spring of 2021 in honor of the late Marshall Abrams who served the Division in several positions including Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, *Potomac Flyer* Publisher and Division webmaster.

The selection process will take place in January. A committee appointed by the Division Superintendent will review the nominations and select the individual(s) to receive the award. The committee is authorized to select two individuals if it sees fit. Although the committee will determine the recipient(s) of the award by February 1st, 2024, the announcement of the individual(s) will not be made until the Division's Annual Meeting.

If you'd like to serve on the selection committee, please email Ernie.

Previous recipients of the award: 2021-2022 Mat Thompson, MMR and 2022-2023 Jerry Stanley.

Joint Meet with James River Division

The Potomac Division held a joint meet with the James River Division on Nov. 4th at Battlefield Baptist Church in Warrenton, Virginia. There were clinics, layout open houses, popular model contests, White Elephant sales and AP evaluations. Some 50 members attended from the two divisions along with one visitor from Chesapeake. Superintendents Ernie Little, MMR, and Phil Taylor (photo left) opened the morning session. The church provided its facilities for the meet free-of-charge. Meet participants in turn contributed over $1000 to support Battlefield's Haiti relief project.

Here are several photos (by Alex Belida & Ernie Little) from the event, starting with the clinicians.

Ken Montero (photo right) discussed modeling tools.

John Sethian (photo left) talked about converting 3 rail O gauge to 2 rail.

Pete LaGuardia, MMR, (photo right) covered visual aids and wiring techniques.

In the second set of clinics (after a pause for donuts and coffee,) Mark Gionet (photo left) discussed his recent project modeling the Salmon River Falls bridge. (See article P 49)

Martin Brechbiel, MMR, (photo below right) reprised his popular resin casting clinic.

Chris Chapin (photo below) gave his clinic on upgrading locomotive speakers.

And throughout the morning, George Meyrick (photo below right) led a hands-on clinic on using Decoder Pro.

The White Elephant sales tables (and freebies table) were quiet (photo left) during the clinics.

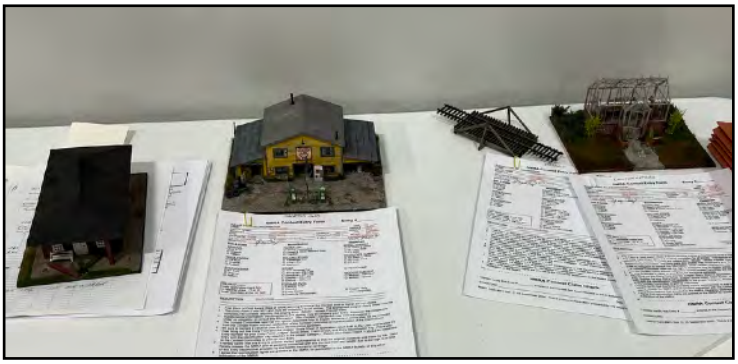
The popular display models (16 in all) drew attention and many votes for both the on-track and off-track categories.

Roger Buchholz (photo right) received the certificate for his on-track display of a St. Petersburg tram (photo below).

Martin Brechbiel, MMR, took the off-track certificate for his highly-detailed model of Hostetter's Store (photo below).

The interior (photo below right) was fully detailed.

Four models (photo right) were evaluated for the Achievement Program, three from Greg Cassidy (right) and one from Lee Stoermer (left). Two of Greg's models received Merit Awards as did Lee's station model.



After the morning session concluded and members helped clean up and stow away chairs and tables, members were able to depart to visit three layouts: John Swanson's PRR Cresson Branch, Sean Hoyden's Dominion Southern, and Ernie Little's Norfolk Southern Connector. The following photos were taken by Ken Wilson.

Swanson layout photos:

Hoyden layout photos:

Sean Hoyden's purpose-built layout building (photo left). Sean (left) discusses plans with Lee Stoermer (center) and Phil Taylor (right) (photo below).

Ernie Little poses in front of his layout.

Ernie with Ken Montero (left) and Roger Buchholz in background.
(Bob Rodriguez photo)

Round the Curve to Altoona!

The 2023 MER Altoona Convention Oct. 19-22 offered a variety of rail tours, clinics and other activities. Here are a few photos by Alex Belida, MMR and his wife, Patricia Reber.

Western Maryland Scenic Railroad 2-6-6-2 en route from Cumberland to Frostburg as it rounds a curve. The shot was taken from the MER convention group's coach, one of the last on the long train.

And the mighty engine up close shown below.

Gordy Robinson, NMRA President, was on this outing.

The second excursion was to the East Broad Top narrow gauge railroad. It also included a trolley ride courtesy of the Rockhill Trolley Museum and a visit to the Bricktown Model Railroad Club's HO/HOn3 layout.

There were the usual convention activities of meetings, clinics and awards. Here we see NMRA President Gordy Robinson, MMR, (who took the photo left) with Potomac Superintendent Ernie Little, MMR, and other Division Superintendents.

Lance Mindheim (photo right) was among the Potomac Division's clinicians. Brian Sheron, MMR, and Ernie also presented clinics.

And Flyer Editor Alex Belida won an award for his scratchbuilt vertical boiler engine.

Next year's MER convention will be hosted by the Carolina Piedmont Division in Durham NC Sept. 26-29.

Meet the Ma & Pa

Article and Photos by Bob Sprague

Ma & Pa #25 northbound approaches Woodbrook

Through most of my lifelong model railroading career, I did what most model railroaders do. That is, I modeled the railroads that were around during my formative years—in my case, the Chessie System of the 70s and 80s. But in 2016 I underwent a bit of a life change, and in addition to relocating from Alexandria to Baltimore, I decided it was time to change my modeling subject as well. I had three primary motivations.

First, as I had gotten more into operations, I noticed that most operators gravitated to labor-intensive jobs such as local switching, way freights, and yard operations. Running through trains is fine, but the real fun is in untangling a switch list. But those kinds of operations are not typical of modern-era railroads with their limited cargoes and emphasis on efficiency.

Second, I became aware of just how big things are in real life. Trains, roads, and structures take up a lot of room, and their modern counterparts are huge. To model a modern railroad convincingly takes a lot more room than most of us have.

Third, I found that I really enjoyed the challenge of scratchbuilding and reproducing signature scenes on a prototype railroad. I didn't want a railroad full of the same generic kits.

I had never been particularly interested in steam or early railroads, but as I thought about it, I realized that modeling a vintage short line had the potential to satisfy all three of my new criteria. Furthermore, it so happened that my new home was within a short walking distance of what once was the route of such a short line: the Maryland & Pennsylvania RR, or Ma & Pa.

And so it came to pass that I disposed of a large collection of Chessie-era rolling stock and structures and started to study my new prototype. Within a year, my basement was remodeled, and construction was underway.

Ma &Pa #6 pulls passenger train through Sheppard cut

The Prototype

The Ma & Pa was the result of the merger of three narrow-gauge railroads. By the turn of the twentieth century, it had become a single standard-gauge route traversing the scenic Maryland and Pennsylvania countryside. As the crow flies there are only about 40 miles from the southern Baltimore terminal to York, Pennsylvania; but it took the Ma & Pa 78 track miles to get there. The sharp curves, hills, and many bridges along the way were a headache for the prototype, but a recipe for an interesting and distinctive modeling subject.

As a fan of operations, I was not looking to evoke a decrepit, one-train-a-week backwoods shortline. As of 1924, however, the year I chose to model, the Ma & Pa was a relatively busy and prosperous operation. Trucks, cars, and modern roadways were just beginning to make a dent in railroad operations, and so the Ma & Pa carried a wide variety of local and through freight as well as frequent end-to-end and commuter passenger traffic.

Caboose #2002 traverses Jail Trestle

Still, the equipment was compact. The Ma & Pa had a roster of small steamers, the largest of which were "modern" 2-8-0 consolidations. Freight cars were 34' to 40' and passenger consists were of 60-foot coaches and baggage cars. This means that a lot of operation can fit in a limited layout area, and that trains look realistic on foreshortened model-railroad-radius curves. It also meant that I would have to be resourceful in building a roster, since availability of "pre-depression" era rolling stock is much more limited than that of the transition or modern era.

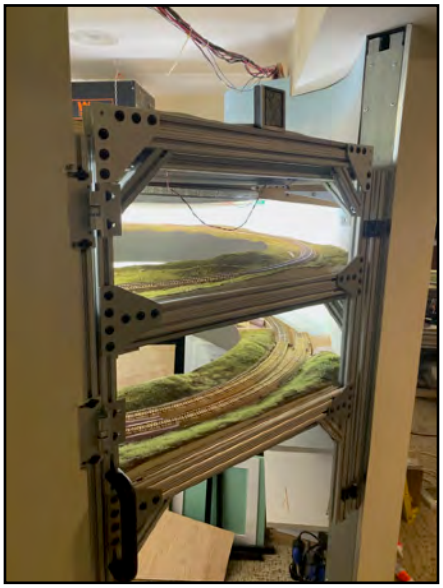
I know that some modelers would not want to limit themselves to strict prototype modeling as I do. But for me, understanding, researching, and staying as true to historical accuracy as possible is a motivator. It makes decisions easy (Didn't exist on the prototype? Don't need it!) and adds to my satisfaction from creating authentic and believable scenes.

The Model

My Ma & Pa is in HO scale and fills a finished basement space of about 14' x 30'. It represents the entire line from Baltimore to York, with the intermediate towns of Evergreen, Woodbrook, Towsontown, Baldwin, Fallston, Bel Air, Sharon, Cardiff, Delta, High Rock, Felton, Dallastown, and Red Lion included in prototype order and orientation. Many classic Ma & Pa scenes, including the main part of the Baltimore

terminal, the York yard, the famous Gross Trestle, and segments of Bel Air and Delta are included at full size, with no compression.

Doing all this in an adequate but not ample space persuaded me to go to a three-deck design (photo left). I felt that as someone who has enjoyed designing more than 100 plans for other modelers, I had to put my money where my mouth was by including some ambitious and innovative features. Key to the design are a three-level swing gate (photo below) for entrance and a helix assembly that connects the three decks. The width of the decks varies continuously, from 30" at the Baltimore yard to as little as 8"—just enough to contain a single track with backdrop and a few trees, but perfectly adequate to connect more interesting scenes on either side.



Baltimore and the southern interchanges with the PRR and B&O are on the lowest deck so that yard operations are practical. From there, the main line proceeds north to Towsontown (now Towson) and enters the helix for the first time. It emerges on the second deck—always going right to left from the operator's POV as it progresses northbound—and travels through Baldwin, Fallston, Bel Air, and the Gross Trestle before entering the helix again. On the top deck the tracks go through Cardiff, over the state line to Delta, through High Rock, Felton, and Red Lion. The branch to Dallastown is also represented on the top level. Finally, the tracks enter a separate "inner" helix that returns to the lowest deck and emerges at York. This profile mimics the overall vertical profile of the prototype, because Red Lion, at 872 feet above sea level, was the highest point while York is almost 500 feet lower.

Construction

Most of the three-level benchwork for my Ma & Pa sits on metal shelf brackets screwed to the wall studs, providing a "floating" look. The helix and Baltimore Yard sit on L-girders, while York and the levels above it are supported by extruded aluminum channel. All lumber is ripped from ¾" birch plywood, and I have been very pleased by its resistance to warping. The sub-roadbed is also ¾" birch. On top of that is a strip of camper tape for sound deadening, topped with Central & Western HomaRoad.

All visible track is handlaid by soldering code 70 and 55 rail to PC Board ties. I use supplies and many tools from FastTracks, but I have evolved my own approaches to supplement them in some respects. I've always been a stubborn fan of handlaid track. To me it looks better and works better, allows a lot more flexibility in design, and even saves money compared to today's costs for track and turnouts. I also maintain that to have good track one must spend so much time on the preparation—roadbed structure, careful attention to curves and grades, etc.—that hand laying the track is only incrementally more time-consuming. But I understand it's not everyone's cup of tea.

To light three decks well also requires some thought. I have settled on parallel LED strip lights, one row of warm white next to one row of daylight. The result is a bright, even daytime look that runs cool and doesn't consume a lot of energy. I have some work to do to "aim" the light with baffles and reflectors, but overall I'm very pleased with the museum lightbox effect I get.

Electronics include Digitrax DCC, Tortoise turnout motors controlled by Digital Specialties' Hare and Rabbit stationary decoders, and TCS WOWSteam units in the locomotives. I've managed to fit sound decoders and Keep-Alives in all the steamers, even 0-6-0 switchers, and I enjoy the ever-improving sound and performance I am getting so far.

Set Dressing

Although I'm concentrating on the heavy construction and trackwork necessary to achieve operating status, I have done quite a bit of scenery and structure work. Landforms are carved foam, often built up with multiple vertical profile cuts laminated together. I cover the foam with Lou Sassi's "ground goop," which provides an immediate and very stable ground surface for later detailing. Rock faces are hand-carved from hydrocal, and vegetation is a mix of Woodland Scenics and Silflor material. I build my background trees—all that I have done so far—from Sedum flowers covered with leaf flock. The process is very fast, very cheap, and to my eye very convincing in the large numbers required for forested Eastern hillsides. Perhaps over time I will be able to build more detailed foreground trees to draw attention, but for now my Sedum trees are a good stand-in.

Faithful prototype modeling requires a lot of scratchbuilding of structures—and that's OK. I find that many commercial and craftsman kits are overdesigned, and too distinctive to blend into a realistic scene. Most of the structures on the real Ma & Pa were ordinary workaday buildings that—even in 1924—were exhibiting hard use. Fortunately, I enjoy scratchbuilding and have used a variety of techniques to create a reasonable sampling of the many I will eventually need.

Some of the structures are wood, and many are styrene. Most recently I took the plunge and acquired a 3D printer, and have been printing the buildings in resin. I love the precision and the detail of 3D-printed structures, but they hardly represent time savings—whatever advantage one gains by printing out complicated rooflines and scrollwork is eaten up by design and experimentation. In fact, most of my structures are hybrids now: 3D printed shells, windows, doors, and details; laser-cut shingle strips and wood for authentic textures for platforms and floors. Whatever the underlying structure, painting and weathering make the difference in the final effect.

Adventures in 3D

3D printed MAPRR boxcars

I am among those who believe 3D printing is going to bring a further revolution to our hobby. Already it is essential to my efforts to model the Ma & Pa.

There are simply few products that fit a 1924-era railroad commercially available. Locomotives, yes, between plastic and brass. Resin kits for pre-depression cars along

with some recent releases by Tangent and ExactRail (thank you!) among others for authentic rolling stock. But automobiles, figures, structures, and details are among those items that are in very short supply, and the more puritanical one wants to be (guilty) the less that is out there.

3D printing means that I can have anything I am capable of designing, with little delay, in any quantity, and (once the printer itself is amortized) at very low cost. I have already used my printer to create structure details, switch stands, bridges, replacement trucks, multiple variations of Model Ts, and unique-to-the-Ma & Pa cars and cabooses.

All that said, 3D printing is not a mature technology. All you have read about the learning curve and the mess is true. However, I am having lots of fun and creating items that I can be quite sure no one else anywhere has on their model railroad.

Operations and Future Plans

One consideration not always brought to the fore about a multi-deck plan is that the decks must (or at least should) be built simultaneously. It would not be wise to finish a lower deck, for example, then go back and try to build a second deck above it. Gravity, after all, pulls things downward. Ask me how I know.

At this point, therefore, I have finished benchwork, track, and rudimentary scenery for about 2/3 of the Ma & Pa—but this has resulted in three disconnected railroads, one above another. Nevertheless, during the dark days of the pandemic I was able to bring all three segments to operating condition and conduct solo operations in the Baltimore Yard, Bel Air, and High Rock to Red Lion. Then came the disruption and dust of helix and swing gate construction, and only recently did I restore operability to the still-disconnected lines.

By summer 2023 I thought it might be time for a “sea trial,” so I invited Mat Thompson to come by before he relocated. After all, Mat has hosted me numerous times for operating sessions on his railroad. “Sure,” said Mat, “and I’ll bring Bernie (Kempinski) and Paul (Dolkos) too!” As a result, the first real operating session on the Ma & Pa involved three of the finest modelers to ever walk the planet. Fortunately, the gremlins took the day off and the layout behaved reasonably well.

After originally experimenting with a car card system, I became aware of the JMRI Operations Pro module. This is a traffic-generating system that tracks car movements and generates manifests and switch lists. Having used it for some months I think I will stick with the JMRI application; although it has a few quirks I appreciate the realism of working with unique documents instead of piles of easy-to-drop car cards.

Construction has now commenced on the final third of all three decks, with the nominal deadline for a golden spike being MARPM24 (the Mid Atlantic Railroad Prototype Modelers meet in September of next year, for which planning is underway

at marpm.org and our Facebook page). Having a complete mainline will do much to facilitate operating sessions, when through freights and passenger trains can leave Baltimore and York with somewhere to go. I am further planning to have the whole thing presentable enough to be ready for an open house.

In addition to bench- and trackwork, current projects underway include a 3D printed version of the original station at Red Lion (the one that still exists was built after a fire in 1925!), models of the Ma & Pa's air dump cars #301 and #302, and most impressively, a full-scale version of the largest trestle on the Ma & Pa, the well-documented 491' curved Gross Trestle near Sharon, Maryland.

Officially, of course, Baltimore is outside of the Potomac Division. But as a former northern Virginia resident I have many ties to and friendships within the PD. I hope that in the not-too-distant future many of you will be able to come and see what I've been doing, and I hope that this account will make you eager to do so.

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Bob Sprague is co-founder of the Mid-Atlantic Prototype Modelers Meet (MARPM), author of numerous model railroad articles, and a creator of track plans (https://www.bobstrackplans.com/). He is also an assistant editor of *The Flyer.*

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Would You Like to See Your Layout Featured in the *Flyer*? Just answer these questions (as appropriate) and send a selection of photos to: Potomac-Flyer@potomac-nmra.org

1. What is the name of your layout?
2. What scale is your layout?
3. Does your layout have a specific era and/or location?
4. What are the overall dimensions of your layout?
5. How do you control your layout?
6. When did you start making your layout?
7. Do you host operating sessions or would you consider doing so?
8. What type of track (sectional, flex track or hand laid) and switches are on your layout and what is its code?
9. If you were to brag about your layout what would you describe as its outstanding feature(s)

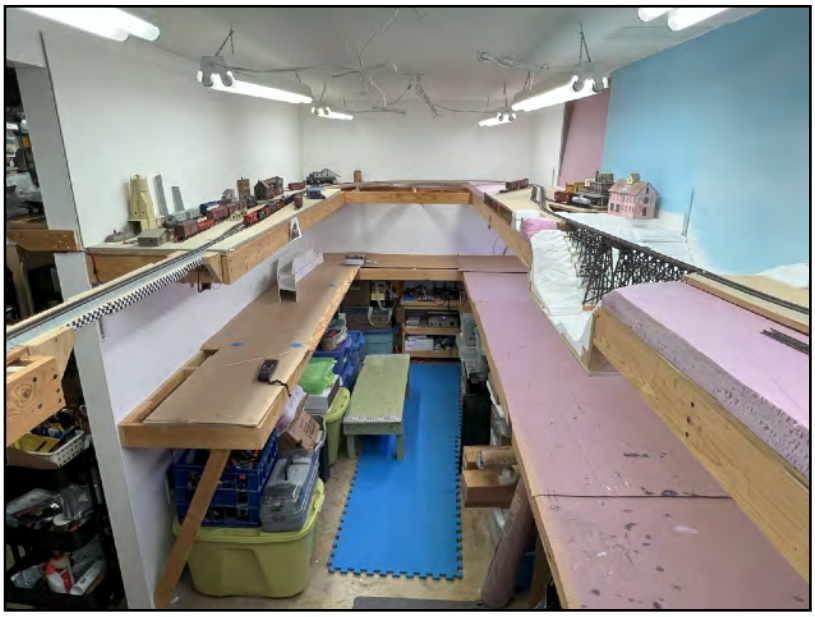
Ben Sullivan's B&O Georgetown Branch

1. What is the name of your layout?
Georgetown Branch of the B&O RR

2. What scale is your layout?
HO

3. Does your layout have a specific era and/or location?
Yes. 1945-1955, the Georgetown Branch of the B&O that ran from Georgetown Junction just west of Silver Spring, MD through Chevy Chase and Bethesda, MD, along the Potomac River & C&O Canal on into Georgetown where it terminated.

4. What are the overall dimensions of your layout?
19.25' x 6.5' with an external helix and staging yard.



5. How do you control your layout?
DCC. (TCS CS-105 command station, TCS UWT-100 & IASE ProtoThrottle throttles, RaspberryPI running JMRI/WiThrottle server for wifi throttle connectivity, and a wireless router for network. Turnouts are a mixture of Blue Point manual throw, and IASE MRServo & DCC Concepts Cobalt IPDigital machines.

6. When did you start making your layout?
2011

7. Do you host operating sessions or would you consider doing so?
Once the layout is complete, yes. Operations are a key part of my model RR. At this time I'm planning on using JMRI Operations Pro for my ops scheme but that may change down the line.

8. What type of track (sectional, flex track or hand laid) and switches are on your layout and what is its code?
Upper deck is Shinohara/Walthers code 83 flex track and turnouts, with some custom built hand laid turnouts, Micro Engineering Code 83 turnouts and some Code 70 sidings. Lower level will be all Micro Engineering Code 70 flex track and turnouts with several custom hand laid turnouts. Staging and helix track is Atlas code 100.

9. If you were to brag about your layout what would you describe as its outstanding feature(s)?
I am quite proud of the track plan as it pertains to fitting certain key elements of the prototype into such a small space. I believe I have designed a layout that will provide many hours of interesting switching operations representing the prototype in a faithful manner given the limited size. I'm also proud of the prototype structures and features such as the Bethesda freight station, Rock Creek trestle, Talbot Ave bridge, Linden Ln bridge and coal trestles. All of which were meticulously researched, plans drawn up and in some instances 3D printed by my friend Kelly. Some of the models are under construction. The big kahuna is the series of bridges that spanned the C&O Canal which he is working on.

—

Ben Sullivan is a graphic designer who provides support services at the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) in Arlington, Virginia. He provided the photos for this layout profile.

Rise of the Phoenix, Chapter 2

Article and Photos by Mat Thompson, MMR

This is the second part of my story about moving and remaining an active model railroader at age 75. In the first part *[Oct.-Nov. 2023 Flyer],* I talked about perhaps satisfying my modeling aspirations with a shelf layout. Ultimately, I decided that this option would not keep me as involved as I wanted, so we bought a house with room for a larger layout.

The theme of my shelf layout was a small Oregon farming town. While I didn't get to finish it, I enjoyed building the grain elevators and other structures.

Before I made this decision, though, I built a shelf layout thinking the lessons learned could be useful regardless of layout size. I didn't finish the layout, but it was fun and did give me ideas for the next version of my HO scale Oregon Coast Railroad.

My available space was 11' 6" long and up to 30" wide over my work bench. I used two interior blank doors for the layout's flat surface. Doors cost a bit more than quality plywood, but for a small layout the difference is minor. Small layouts also don't need as much trimming as plywood, an important advantage if workspace is limited. I supported it with 1"x3" runners, 56" above the floor, so I would have head room at the work bench.

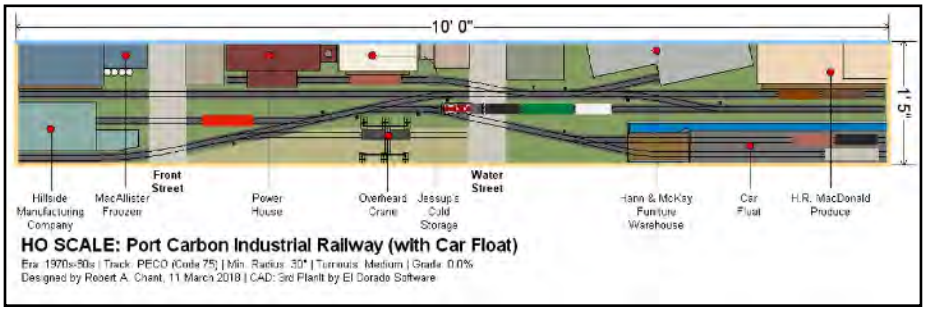
The layout is composed of two hollow core doors over my work bench. I trimmed the excess door length off on the white door and added it to the side so the layout is L-shaped. I mounted two LED lights on the bottom of the door over my work bench to illuminate the area. I used homemade templates for track planning.

Most important for this project, the doors are light. I wanted to eliminate crawling under the layout by laying the track and completing the wiring while the doors were on sawhorses and still be able to pick them up and put them in place. My only challenge was staying oriented when I was working with the doors upside down. After a few miscues I labeled the fascia side and the wall side.

The doors were 80” long, but my space was only 138”, so I sawed off the extra 22” of one door and added it to the door’s side, giving the layout an L shape. I inserted a 1” x1” piece of wood in the cut end of the door to keep it flat. One door was 30” wide and the other was 28” wide. I put the narrower one over my work bench. After adding the fascia, the gentle curves connecting the two doors and the L shape were visually more pleasing than a straight edge.

I decided to control turnouts electrically because at 56” above the floor the long reach in to throw turnouts manually was not practical. Interior doors are too thin to hold screws so mounting switch motors requires a little extra work. Using a keyhole drill bit, I cut a two-inch hole in the bottom side of the door. Then I glued a 2” by 2” piece of ¼” wood to the exposed underside of the top skin, providing a solid base for the Tortoise machines.

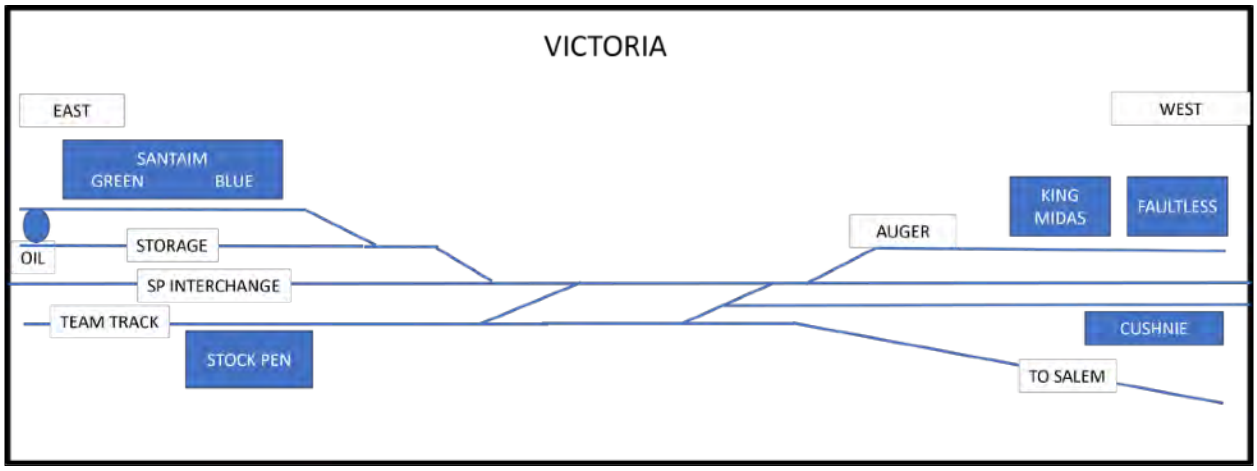
This worked well, but if the layout had been lower, I would have chosen to throw turnouts by hand. Peco, Micro-Engineering and the newest Walthers code 83 turnouts have springs, so it is very easy to move them with a finger or an uncoupling pick. Other turnouts can be made finger throws by placing thin styrene under the throw bar.



My goal was a switching layout with enough track and industries to keep an operator busy for an hour or

more. I picked Rob Chant's plan for the Port Carbon Industrial Railway as a guide. His plan is 10' long and I had 11½' to work with. My experience using track plans is that they never seem to quite fit the designed space, so the extra length was good news.

I also had more width available than Rob's plan—28" to 30"—compared to the plan's 17". Even so, I did not place any track more than 18" from the fascia, because the height of my layout made it hard to reach much farther for uncoupling cars. The space at the back of the layout was perfect for modeling the small farm town scene I had in mind.



My track arrangement is slightly different than Rob Chant's but has the same number of turnouts and enough industrial car spots to keep operators busy for more than an hour.

The most important track feature is the "run-around." This track arrangement allows the engine to move from the front of the train to the rear by uncoupling, switching over a track, running back, and then switching back over to get behind the train. Without a "run-around," the engine can only work trailing point turnouts. That's efficient on the prototype but not much fun on a model railroad switching layout.

Even though Rob's plan is for the industrial area of a port, it is very flexible. I chose to model a farming town in Oregon's Willamette Valley in the late 50s. In fact, another reason I built the shelf layout was to build such structures as grain elevators that didn't fit my big layout. Engines were GP7s working a mix of 40' and 50' freight cars.

I mounted a photo backdrop on 16" tall styrene. The printed backdrop was 24" tall. I cut off 8" of sky. I think that made the horizon line too high. I would have gotten a better look if I had cut a few inches off the bottom and then trimmed the sky as needed.

The photo backdrop was 24” tall. I trimmed off the sky to match the 16” height of my styrene support instead of trimming some from bottom so the horizon would be lower. Santiam Foods is a cannery kit-bashed from AMB and Bar Mill offerings.

I bought two 10’ sections, but the sky and ground colors did not match as the seller’s ad said they would. I solved this problem by painting clouds where the backdrops met and hiding the ground seam behind a building and some trees. At $50 for each 10’ section, I was not pleased. Next time I will paint the backdrop myself.

I spent several happy hours running the layout to learn how much traffic it could handle. The scheme was that a train would come in from Salem, Oregon, pull the outbound cars and set out the inbound cars. The train would then go back to Salem. I found that up to nine inbound cars was a logical workload. I could place up to 12 cars around the industries if no more than nine made up the outbound train. The other cars would be re-spotted on the layout or designated as holds, not to be taken by the outbound train.

With that, I was ready for others to try running the layout. It kept a single operator busy for an hour or more as I had planned. The work didn’t go any faster with a two-

person crew of a conductor and an engineer. Crews used a switch list showing both the inbound and outbound cars to determine their car moves.

The only things left were buildings and scenery. I created my Oregon farm town scene with a combination of kits, kit bashes, and scratchbuilt structures. My intent was to scratchbuild several more structures, but before I finished, we did decide to move.

The new house has a generously sized train room, so the new Oregon Coast Railroad will be much bigger than a shelf layout. However, the theme will be industrial switching—which is really a series of operating locations—so the lessons learned building the shelf layout will still be valid.

There was one bonus to building the shelf layout I had not anticipated. For mostly health-related issues, some of the people invited to ops sessions on the Oregon Coast Railroad were not comfortable with a full three-hour event. For them, the slower pace of operating the shelf layout let them enjoy the event at a relaxed pace while being with others.

"The Rise of the Phoenix, Part 3" will cover the planning and initial construction for my new Oregon Coast Railroad. The focus will be on construction, operations, and layout maintenance decisions that I made to enjoy model railroading for many years into the future.

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Mat Thompson, MMR, is the former Achievement Program Manager of the Potomac Division who recently relocated to Williamsburg, Virginia.

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Need Modeling Help? Want to Share a Ride to a Meet? Contact Your Team Leader!

Potomac Division Teams

Virginia:

Arlington County: VACANT (Please volunteer, contact Jerry Stanley)

Fauquier: Jerry Stanley, 703-595-8081, paymaster@potomac-nmra.org

Loudoun: Lee Stoermer, 928-580-3209, leetrains@yahoo.com

Prince William: John Paganoni, 703-791-5055, john.paganoni@comcast.net

Fairfax: Bill Mosteller, 703-272-8190, wsm@greatdecals.com

Maryland:

Charles County: Dale Latham, 301-645-3055, dale.latham@verizon.net

Montgomery: VACANT (Please volunteer, contact Alex Belida, Sr-Asst-Super@potomac- nmra.org

The Great Motive Power Challenge

Belida Photo from Allegheny Portage Railroad Historic Site

Back in the February-March 2022 *Flyer*, we did our first Motive Power Challenge. It drew 22 submissions, one of the largest responses since the Challenge series began in the summer of 2021. Since all model railroaders seem to cherish their engines, we decided it was time to see more steam, diesel, traction and other types again.

If you see one you think deserves special mention, send us an email at POTOMAC-FLYER@potomac-nmra.org identifying the one you like best.

That's the same email address you should use to send in your submissions for our February-March 2024 issue. For that *Flyer* we'll be looking for your favorite railroad station, passenger or freight. I'm counting on another big turnout of member submissions! Please send them no later than January 10th.

In our last issue we showcased bridges. And the recipient of the *Flyer's "Most Favored"* Star is Stan Knotts' narrow gauge trestle. Congratulations!

Alex Belida, MMR
Flyer Editor and Publisher

(The following items appear in the order in which they were received. The texts and photos are by the modelers who submitted them unless otherwise noted. Some texts may have been edited for length and/or clarity.)

1. Mat Thompson's F Units

The white flags on Northern Pacific F7 6013A, coupled with its sister units, 6014A and 6014C, mark the ballast train sitting in the Hoyt Street Yard as an Extra. It's 1957 so the units in the NP's freight scheme paint are starting to show wear although they will last into the 1970s.

The first NP F units numbered 6013 and 6014 were F3s added to the railroads roster in 1947. In the early 50's the engines were renumbered and the new F7s were known as 2nd 6013 and 2nd 6014. The quick spotting difference between F3s and F7s is the ventilator grills. Instead of the full body length grills on F7s, F3s had three shorter grills separated by metal body panels.

The HO scale models are early offerings from Athearn's Genesis line. I installed Soundtraxx decoders, added extra flags, and weathered the engines. My Oregon Coast Railroad was focused on industrial switching so diesel lash-ups and long freights were an uncommon and interesting sight. *Mat Thompson, MMR*

2. Alex Belida's Lincoln Lumber Company Shay

I bought this beautiful brass Shay at The Caboose in Wolcott, Connecticut en route to a college reunion in Hartford back in the 1980s. I had read their ads for brass engines for years and, since I was nearby, I decided to drop in. Having always wanted a Shay, I didn't drive off empty-handed. It's a United PFM product but the box it came in was for an HOn3 Cowichan Railroad model. But mine is HO and lettered for the Lincoln Lumber Company #6. In researching all the other brass United PFM Shays out there, I have since determined it was actually the version marketed as the Hillcrest Railroad 25-ton Shay. I haven't modified it in anyway nor have I added any details. It operates on simple DC and doesn't have working lights. But I've always liked it and it runs… slowly as befits a workhorse engine hauling logs to my sawmill. *Alex Belida, MMR*

3. Martin Brechbiel's Interurban Coach

This is a LaBelle kit for a Sacramento Northern coach that I completed this year. It has an interior and the roof (askew) is secured by a few neodymium magnets top & bottom (bit of an experiment there). It was an exercise in traversing many errors in the instructions and too many missing or mis-color coded bits of wood. The primary "like" about this model is that it's no longer occupying too much of my work bench space! I do like though that the drive truck does not intrude up into the body. Sadly, I have a second one to build and the matching combine.
Martin Brechbiel, MMR

4. Ken Nesper's OR&W 2-6-0

Locomotive 16 is one of three 2-6-0s running on my version of the Ohio River & Western (OR&W). They are not perfect matches for similarly numbered OR&W locomotives, but close enough for my purposes. Locomotives 7 and 12 handle freight service; 16 is assigned to passenger service. The On30 locos are manufactured by Bachmann. Since the OR&W did not use steam generators, I removed the generators on these models and replaced the electric headlights with replicas of oil-burning headlamps. Bachmann offers operating front couplers as replacements for the standard dummy couplers. I installed Soundtraxx Econami sound decoders and speakers in the tenders. A light thread runs from the cab to the bell.
Ken Nesper

5. Ernie Little's "Spirit of Roanoke"

My favorite motive power would be the Norfolk and Western number 611, J class, 4-8-4 locomotive, which is also known as the "Spirit of Roanoke" and the "Queen of Steam." It was built in May of 1950 at the Norfolk and Western East End shops in Roanoke, Virginia and went into revenue service as a passenger locomotive on May 29, 1950. On January 23, 1956, the locomotive derailed near Cedar West, West Virginia, running as the westbound *Pocahontas*.The engineer was killed and 60 passengers and crew were injured. The accident was the country's last major steam-powered revenue passenger train wreck. The 611 was extensively repaired and returned to service the following month and retired from service in January, 1959. It has gone through two rebuilds, the first in 1981 by Norfolk Southern, and the second in 2014 at the North Carolina Transportation Museum.. It is the sole survivor of fourteen J class locomotives built by Norfolk and Western and still pulls excursions such as the Shenandoah Valley Limited I had the pleasure of riding behind it on Friday, October 27th from Goshen, Virginia to Staunton, Virginia.

A few facts about 611:
-Painted black with a Tuscan Red stripe with golden yellow linings and letterings.
-Equipped with a Hancock long-bell 3 chime whistle
-Weighed 494,000 pounds, 109' 2" long, 11' 2" wide, and 16' tall.
-Driver wheels were 70 inches in diameter.
-Maximum speed was 80-100 miles per hour.
-The power output was 5,100 horsepower at the tender drawbar.
Ernie Little, MMR

6. Paul Hutchins' Heavy Haulers

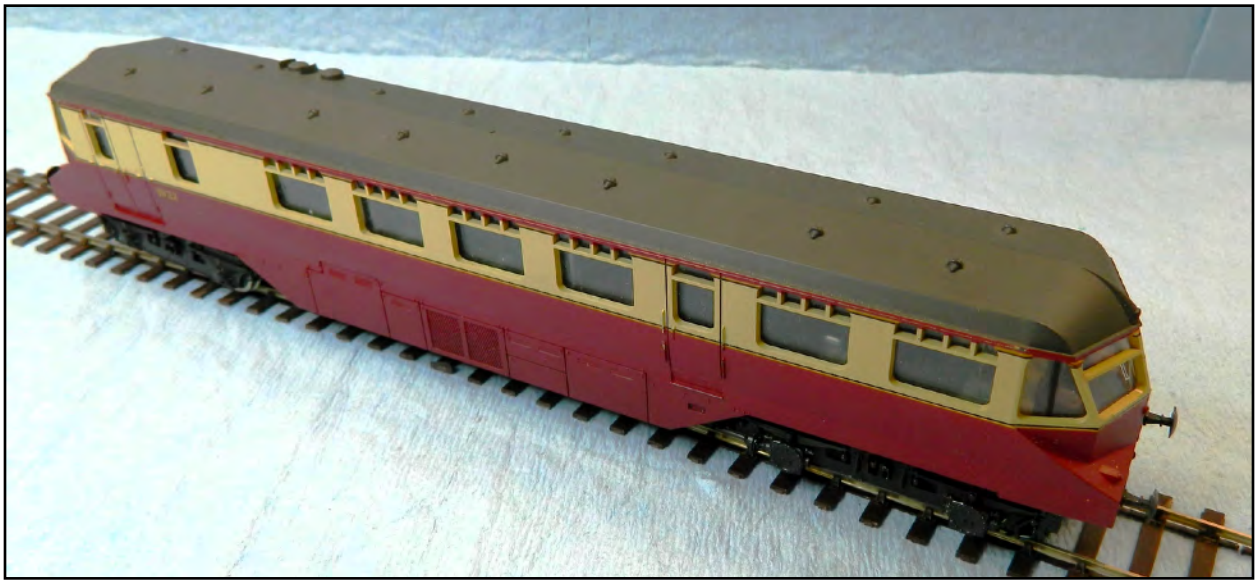
This is one of my heavy haulers for my freight train on the P&D railroad, a CSX SD50.

This Conrail diesel is another heavy hauler engine for the P&D layout. I usually run it in a consist to pull long freight trains. This is also an SD50. *Paul Hutchins*

7. Dale Latham's 2-6-0

Here is a photo of my Piedmont Southern #6. It started life as an inexpensive IHC 2-6-0 Mogul. I added some extra details, shortened the drawbar between the engine and tender to a prototypical length and greatly shortened the tender coal bunker. I added a sound decoder and painted and decaled the engine to complete what has become a very smooth runner. *Dale Latham*

8. Nigel Phillips' "Chippy Flyer"



One of my first memories is of my mother with me in the pram going to see her mother in north Oxfordshire in the UK in 1951 on a diesel railcar. Only a distance of six miles, but I distinctly remember watching the trees flash by at what must have been a giddy 25 mph. The line was the old Banbury and Cheltenham District Railway, built in the 1870s. The diesel railcar was originally a Great Western Railway (GWR) car and in 1951 would have been in British Rail colors following the nationalization of the railways in 1947. The line closed to passenger traffic in 1951.

Built by the GWR at Swindon, Wiltshire, in 1939-1940, they were equipped with 2 diagonally opposed, 4-stroke 6-cylinder high-speed diesel engines with direct fuel injection, Ricardo-designed heads, and water-cooled dry sumps. The engines were made by The Associated Equipment Company (AEC) in Ealing, Middlesex. AEC had considerable experience in building these engines for road trucks, military, and bus use in the 1930s. Hydraulic clutches and preselector 5-speed transmissions were used, and each engine powered one truck via Cardan shafts connecting the clutch to the gearbox and then to the truck. SKF roller bearings from Sweden on the axles decreased rolling resistance. A rigid second drive shaft from the inboard axle powered the outboard axle. GWR built the chassis, wooden body, and interior, and AEC supplied the diesel engines and transmission components. Originally a B-B design, by the end of WW2 they were reduced to one engine and driven truck due to a shortage of SKF axle roller bearings, which were made in Sweden and during the war exported only to Germany. Similar problems were had with the Bosch-supplied compressor for the pneumatic controls. They ran like this until British Rail retired them in the early 1960s. One is running on a heritage railway (The Great Western Society, Didcot, Oxfordshire).

British Rail painted its passenger car stock in Crimson Lake and Cream ("Blood and Custard") between 1949 and 1957. The Lima Crimson Lake and Cream model I'm working on dates to the 1970s and has a ring field motor and a gauge of 16.5mm but a 4mm scale body. An anachronism that is unfortunately firmly entrenched today in UK model railways. I have regauged it from 16.5mm to 18.2mm (EM gauge, close to the correct gauge of 18.83mm for 4mm scale). I added electrical pick-up on all wheels, and it's been converted to DCC sound with an ESU decoder and a custom sound suite. The model has driving cabs at either end, a passenger compartment (smoker and non-smoker sections,) and a luggage/freight/heating boiler compartment (in which the motor and gears are located). I have a set of flush-fitting windows and that is the next job to do.

Lima, Hornby (who now own Lima), and Dapol have produced RTR models in 4mm scale/OO gauge, and brass etches are available from Worsley Works (worsleyworks.com) for those who like a challenge. The Lima model I have is a third-generation GWR diesel railcar, the first two generations had more streamlined bodies. The book "Great Western Diesel Railcars" by J.H. Russell (Wild Swan Publications, ISBN 0-906867 30 4, 1985) gives details of the development of the GWR diesel railcars.
Nigel Phillips

9. John Paganoni's Favorite Engines

Here are a few shots of my favorite engines--the M-2a (photo above) and Shifter are the first engines I bought in the mid-1950's so they have a warm spot in my heart. No. 507 was the yard switcher (photo below right) at the East New London Connecticut Central Vermont yards into my high school years before steam was phased out on the CV in April 1957.

The Central Vermont No. 400 M-2a is a Varney "Old Lady" that has a lot of great brass super detail parts to bring it close to the prototype configuration. These detail parts are incredible and can really bring "realism" to our older models -- and some of the newer ones! The one thing I did not finish on this model was accurate valve gear. The prototype has Southern Valve Gear, but that would have been an extensive project—doable, yes, but for an engine that sits idle at the "Cape Nancy Junction," I

decided to put the time and effort in other places that I needed to.

The Mantua "Shifter" (photo below) also has a lot of brass detail parts added that really made the difference from a good commercial engine to a super good scale model.

The No. 507 started life as a Proto 2000 product and served as a good starting point to replicate (as best as possible) the Central Vermont prototype configuration. I did not replace the drivers as I initially intended for a more accurate version, but after disassembling the Proto 2000 engine, I found that the driver axels were split for current pickup and converting that whole part of the engine would have taken many more hours to get the desired results. I just modified the driver appearance as best I could to get close to the prototype. Lots of brass detail parts here and it is great that Cal-Scale and others had all of the parts I needed to get a good model. It runs great.
John Paganoni, MMR

10. Lee Stoermer's Locomotive

This locomotive is Spectrum by Bachmann HO on my layout pulling a passenger consist on the Northern Central. *Lee Stoermer*

11. Todd Hermann's Ironton RR #750

The Ironton Railroad was an eastern Pennsylvania short line jointly owned by the Lehigh Valley and Reading railroads. Despite its name, by the mid-1950s the line originated mostly bulk cement, handing a good portion of that traffic off to Reading in West Catasauqua, PA. I model just a short portion of the Ironton's interchange that connects to the Reading on my HO scale Catasauqua Branch layout. To serve that interchange, I needed some Ironton power. In 1955, the line rostered just two locomotives, numbered 750 and 751, both Baldwin DS-4-4-1000 switchers. The family connection to the Reading was quite apparent from the color scheme and other details on these units. These units were built by Baldwin in 1948-49 as add-ons to larger RDG orders. Clearly, the Ironton had no interest is designing its own unique paint scheme.

My version of #750 started out as an undecorated Stewart Hobbies DS-4-4-1000. It's a twenty-year old model, but with some upgrades it holds up well. I detailed it using a set of etched stainless-steel parts from KV Models designed to fit the Stewart/Bowser Baldwins switchers. Adding the KV parts requires some surgery to remove the cast-on grills from the original body shell, but the result is worth it in my view. I added the typical Reading-style rain gutters on the cab roof and a two-chime horn, both from Cal-Scale. The flip-top cap on the exhaust stack was another unique feature on these units. I scratch built it using styrene.

I painted the unit with Scalecoat II Pullman Green and decaled with it mix of sets from CMR Products and Microscale. Internally, the loco features Stewart's original Canon can motor and drivetrain paired with an ESU Micro decoder, one of their "keep alive" capacitors, and a Scale Sound Systems speaker. The Ironton was known for keeping its locomotives in good shape, so the weathering is relatively minimal. I used a wash of light gray gouache, along with Pan Pastels to achieve the look I wanted for this Pennsylvania Cement Belt workhorse. *Todd Hermann*

The Salmon River Falls Bridge

Article and Photos by Mark Gionet

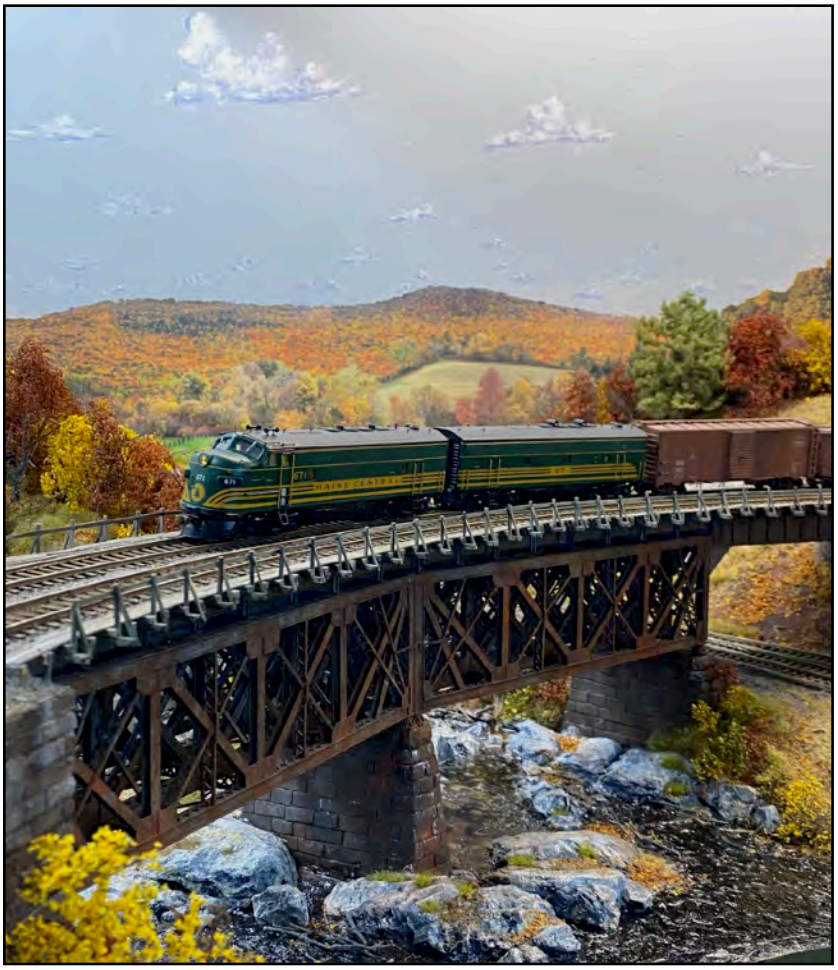
The bridge goes on forever and the party never ends . . .

intentionally misquoted from Robert Earl Keen

Years ago, I saw an image of a Boston & Maine freight crossing the Salmon Falls River Bridge connecting southern New Hampshire and Maine. It was in one of those many photo-heavy railroad books that provide pages of inspirational images while occupying the time one would otherwise spend modeling what's illustrated. The scene was a layer cake of everything I like to model—wood on steel on stone over dammed up water, all topped by trains. I even convinced my wife to make a smallish detour on a drive from the Maine coast to friends in Massachusetts so that I could see and photograph the bridge in real life.

I saved a spot for it on the latest iteration of my layout. Initially it was represented by bare plywood and flex track with bridge ties. I tacked up two photoshopped images of the real spans glued to pieces of foam core to signify "bridge goes here." But layout progress eventually reached that bridge, and it was time to cross it.

Bridges are made up of a lot of the same things repeated over a long distance —piers, girders, trusses, rivets, and ties. Redundancy creates structural integrity. A multiplicity of small parts means easier construction. Repetition means efficiency and economy. In real life that is. In modeling, this means piecing together four separate



bridge trusses for each of two spans; sitting at the kitchen table every rainy spring day placing hundreds of rivet decals on added gusset plates; ripping thousands of scale board feet of eight-by-eights from stock lumber to fill out the deck and walkways; and laying up a styrene stone masonry pier master styrene by block-by-block before casting multiples in plaster. On a project like this, you can test two or three ways to build something before settling on a preferred approach—and still find a place for the discards. With so many of any one thing, who's to notice?

I can't say it hasn't been fun. It's certainly the most complicated structure I've attempted, and easily has taken the most time. I've picked up some new skills and tried out some new products. And hopefully, it's finally close to opening for use. The real party will be seeing it installed and supporting the weight of trainloads of paper, potatoes and people traveling from Portland to parts south.

—-

Mark Gionet gave a clinic on the building of his Salmon River Falls Bridge at our November Joint Meet with James River. His Boston and Maine Western Route layout contains numerous examples of his fine modeling.

Meet the Member: Stan Knotts

Editor's Note: This feature is designed to promote greater knowledge about members of the Potomac Division and their model railroading interests. If you are willing to participate, please send an email to potomac-flyer@potomac-nmra.org. The text and photos are from the member.

I got started in the hobby about 70 years ago when my father said I needed a hobby to keep me out of trouble. He bought me an HO wood caboose kit to start with. He started modeling at the same time. His model railroad was called the Troll & Elfin. I have been an NMRA member for at least 50 years. I joined the Dixie Division many years ago which later became the Potomac division due to political concerns.

I used to do all division activities including being an officer of the Dixie Division. Now I rarely do any division activities.

I have an HO scale layout with an HOn3

section. It is in two rooms of my basement with the main section 17' by 25' and the extension 10' by 12'. I have been working on the layout for over 30 years. I have a few of my father's structures and rolling stock.

My favorite modeling activity is building structures, now all scratch built. I post my work on my blog which is https://mrrminutiae.blogspot.com/.

I think one of the best facets of model railroading is that it gives me something useful to do. Over the years I have received many certificates for my models in convention contests but have no interest in the MMR program.

People who become model railroaders should attend modeling events and visit layouts and develop friends who can help them improve their modeling skills.

*****

Would you like to participate in our *Meet the Member* features? If so, please respond to as many of these questions as you want and add anything else you care to share. Send a photo of yourself with your layout visible in the background plus two or three layout or model photos. Thanks!

How did you get started in the hobby? How long have you been an NMRA member? How long with Potomac Division?

What's your favorite Division activity?

What do you model now: layout, scale? Do you still have your first engine/ train set? What was it?

What's your favorite part of the hobby? How about your least favorite? What projects have you been working on recently?

Describe your model railroad philosophy? What to you is the value of the AP program? Is shooting for MMR worthwhile?

What advice do you have for newcomers to the hobby?

Tell us a bit about your life, where you grew up, what jobs you held?

Send your submissions to: potomac-flyer@potomac-nmra.org

Harvest Season for Scenery Foliage

Article and Photos by Lee Stoermer

I am always on the lookout for various items and materials that can be repurposed for railroad modeling. My latest find was in a pile of yard waste.

Now I am sure you are saying, *"Yeah, yeah, we all know about tree and brush yard trimmings for tree armatures and such."* You are close, but that's not it.

Look along any place where a stream, railroad, or street cuts through the terrain. Besides common rock outcroppings that we model, you will find vegetation that has grown right up and out of the embankment. Weather continues to wash the soil away and further expose the roots of plants and trees.

Eroded embankment showing exposed roots of the plants and trees growing nearby

Here is how I take *"yard waste"* and with just a little effort, minimal time, and some creativity, convert it for detailing along my creeks and tree areas. (You may have other processes that work for you, so feel free to vary this and even share with us so we can learn different forms and see what works best for you.)

The first thing is to find some appropriate material. Do some detective work to see what you may have available at hand. For my modeling in HO, some plants that work

great are marigolds and sunflowers, which will be my emphasis in this article.

Photo left: On closer examination this is what really caught my eye and got me to thinking.

You should look for fine delicate root material, but don't discard everything that is larger, as much of it can be used for different purposes. Note that different plants, growing in different soil, will have varying colors. This can be adjusted later, but right now we are looking for the general "structure."

This photo (right), taken a couple of days after harvesting, shows several root structures that have dried and can be further cleaned. Note how the upper root ball is a darker color than the other two which are much lighter. Different varieties of plants will give you this variety.

Cut and sort material into more manageable sections. While fresh it is much easier to separate as it is still moist and pliable. You don't need, or want, to trim it to its final size or shape. Just get it to the point where you can separate the intertwined root fibers, clean out most of the soil and wash it out more easily.

Wash it well outside with the garden hose to remove most of the dirt, mulch and other debris. It is probably best not to send this dirt down your household drains. Also now is the time to check for critters. I had quite a collection of earthworms that came out of all this.

After some trimming, this is a sampling (above left) showing the selection of materials that you may have available, in various stages of being trimmed and sorted.

Allow the material to dry after washing. I find that about a week outside on the porch out of the rain or inside the garage gets it dry enough. The main thing is to have it dry enough so that it doesn't get on your layout and start decomposing. If it is trimmed down into smaller more manageable pieces, it will also dry more quickly, but this does take away the option of preserving larger items, something to consider in larger scales.

The key thing with the sunflower roots, marigolds and possibly others is that the roots should stay fairly pliable even after they have dried. If the ones you have get brittle quickly, there's still a chance that they might be usable, especially if it is of a unique coloring that is desirable. You will need to experiment with what you have on hand to see how it works for you.

Here (left) is a close-up view of the middle stage of a piece being trimmed. You can really see the random angles and shapes of the fibers.

If you feel the need, It is possible to treat these natural materials in a couple of ways to preserve their flexibility. I have heard about using glycerin, Mod Podge, matte medium or white glue. I prefer matte medium, as it preserves, dries clear and keeps the material flexible. If you have used Super Trees and worked with them for your tree branch structure, this is a similar method. I will do it on the larger pieces that have a lot of fine hair-like fibers that I want to preserve. It just depends on how brittle the material is. You will have to determine this for yourself. When I have chosen to, I use a mixture of matte medium at a 10:1 water to glue ratio mix with just a drop of dish soap to help it break the surface tension and soak in better. I will dunk the pieces in, give them about 15-20 seconds, remove and give them a little shake, then set them aside to dry. Drying time varies based upon the humidity where you have them stored. They stay soft enough to flex after this. If you are using these materials within a creek bed, and they are going to be encased in gloss medium or other scenery material, then you won't need to do this step.

Here (right) is my work box of these pieces as I am installing them. I can grab a piece, trim as desired and the unused pieces fall back into the box tray to be used elsewhere.

I have a small box lid that holds the materials, cutters, and tweezers. Start by selecting an appropriate-sized piece, trim it to size, and then glue it in place with white glue, Mod Podge or another adhesive of your choice.

In progress view (photo left) for work as it progresses along a stream that is being constructed. Note varying sizes and colors to keep the random natural look.

For most of these materials the natural color seems to fit in well with the scene. Occasionally you may need to do some color adjustment.

Natural materials take thinned craft paints very well. It doesn't take much to blend a whole scene together if you feel the contrast is too stark, or you are looking for a muddier appearance. For the larger pieces, the process is a little different.

Remember those larger pieces I said you shouldn't throw away? They make for great dead trees when scattered throughout a forest.

Sample (photo right) of what a dead tree in our forested area starts out as.

A similar process is followed in using these larger pieces. Get an appropriately-sized section, do a little trimming and 'plant' it. Every forested area can handle a few of these scattered throughout.

View (photo above) of dead trees mixed in among the forest. These will be given a little grey weathering to blend in better.

The dead trees can sometimes stand having a little coloring applied to give them a weathered gray appearance, as when they are fresh the root material can appear more of a tan or a lighter colored wood. If you decide that they need some darkening, break out your craft paint selection and apply either by lightly spraying or brushing with a thinned mixture. Note that brushing will be more difficult and may lead to some damaged branches. Color and tint to your taste. These should be colored prior to the matte medium application to get the color to saturate into the natural material. You may find that the dead tree then does not need the matte medium treatment to remain flexible. Again, experiment with a few pieces to determine for yourself the best results.

Scene (photo left) down along the tracks showing the treatment so far along the embankments and also between the main and siding tracks.

Since this initial "*aha*" moment I have found that not all plant root material works out well as model scenery, and some materials work better than others. I have pulled and tried several others with mixed results, and the two offered here—marigolds and sunflowers—worked best for me. You will have to explore around your home and nearby areas to identify options that you can safely harvest. Be aware of plants that could be toxic, such as poison ivy. Poison Ivy looks good but the consequences of using it far outweigh any benefit!

Now is the time to get outside to gather scenery materials to last you through the next several months of scenery work. I probably have enough now for the rest of my entire layout although model railroad layouts seem to devour scenery materials. I will be looking forward to seeing your results.
—-

Lee Stoermer is the Clerk of the Potomac Division. He models the Western Maryland and Northern Central Railroads in HO scale.

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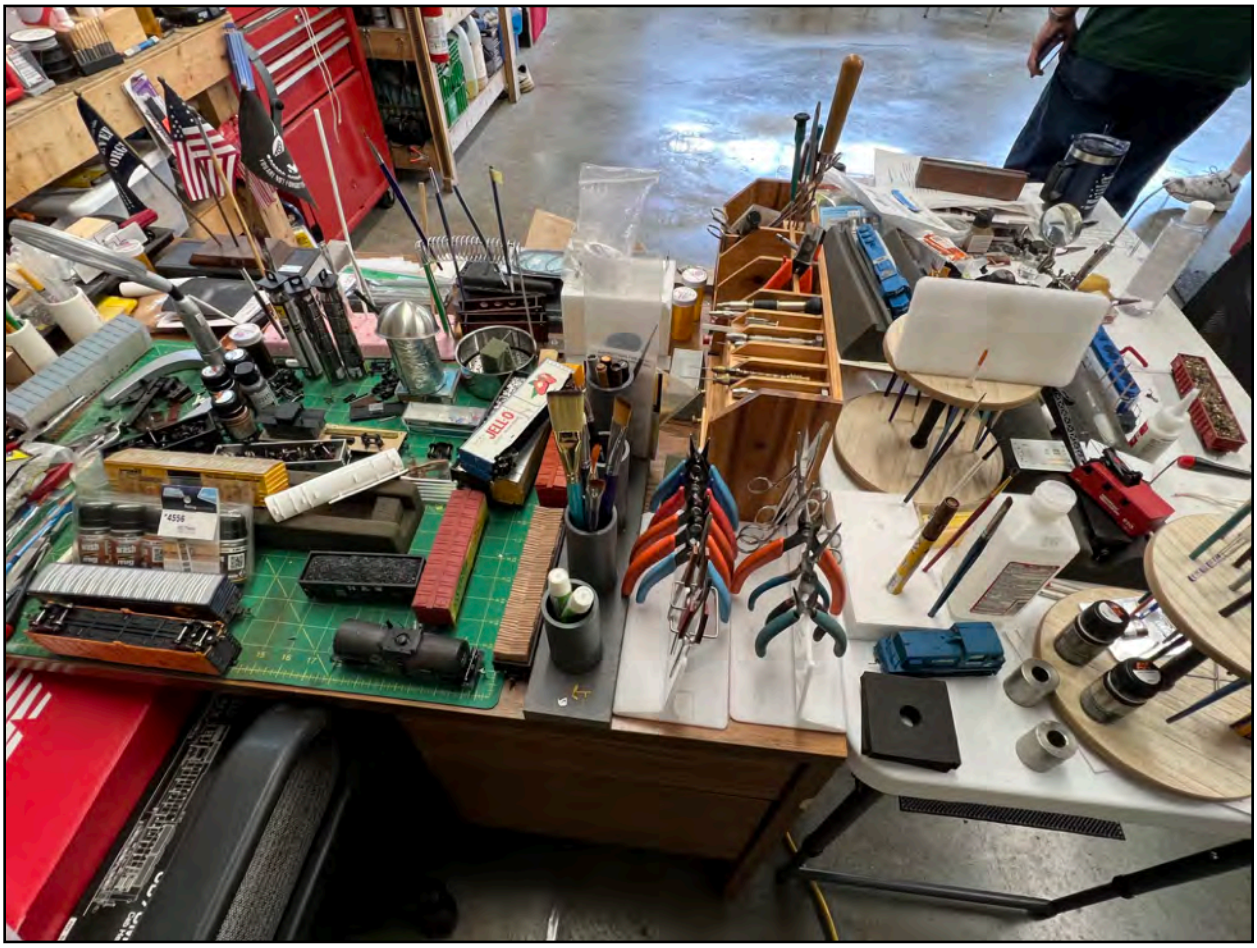
October 2023

Partnership Program

What Does Your Workbench Look Like?



Paul Hutchins says that while hosting a recent layout open house, a few visitors noticed and commented on his workbench. *"So after everyone left, I took a good look at the area and realized 'wow, what a mess.' So then I thought, 'well, aren't most modelers' work areas like this?'"* Paul says he works on many projects at once but mainly enjoys weathering. Much of the material on his workbench is linked to his weathering projects.

Paymaster's Report

by Jerry Stanley, Potomac Division Paymaster

1.Checking account (beginning balance)	$4783.23
2.Cash on Hand $0	$0.00
3.Total assets as of 9/29/2023 (end balance)	$4783.23

4.Deposits by date
a) $261.32 10/24/23

5.Total Deposits	$261.32

6.Individual Deposits
a) $261.32 10/24/23

7.Total Deposits	$261.32

8.Total payouts
a) 768 Lee Stoermer $113.40 10/23/23

9.Total Payouts	$113.04
10.Checking account balance as of 10/31/2023 (Lines [1+5]-9) =	$4931.15
11.Total Cash on hand 10/31/2023	$0.00
12.Total Assets (lines10+11)	$4931.15

Calendar of Coming Events

Dec. 9 Technical Clinic, 9AM: Ernie Little, MMR, and George Meyrick, “Using Decoder Pro to program decoders,” Jerry Stanley’s Hobby Barn, Hume, Va.

De. 17 Virtual Clinic, 3PM: Kurt Thompson, MMR: "Locomotive Build for AP Motive Power,” Zoom

Jan. 20 Technical Clinic, 9AM: Kurt Thompson, MMR, “Using TinkerCAD,” Jerry Stanley’s Hobby Barn, Hume, Va.

Jan. 21 Virtual Clinic, 3PM, Jonathon Jones, “Portrait of a Railroad,” Zoom

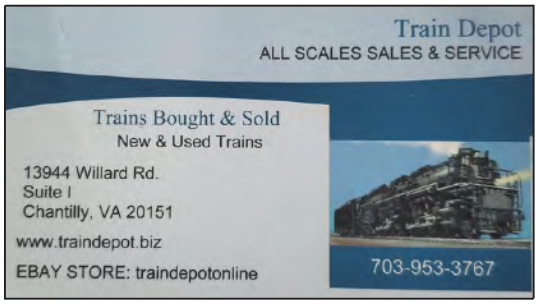
Feb. 10 Technical Clinic, 9AM: Ernie Little, MMR, and George Meyrick, “Using Decoder Pro to program decoders,” Jerry Stanley’s Hobby Barn, Hume, Va.

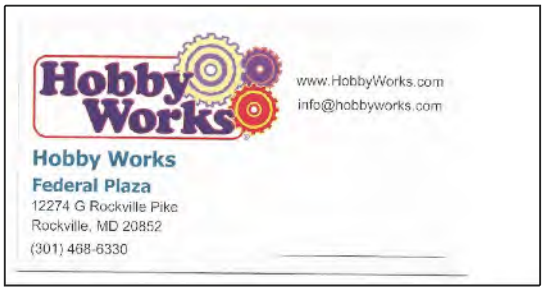
Feb. 18 Virtual Clinic, 3PM, John Gray, ”Modeling Railroad Marine Car Railcar Barge/Ferry Operations,” Zoom

March 9 Hobby Barn Clinic, 9AM, John Gray, "Prototype Practice,” Jerry Stanley’s Hobby Barn, Hume, Va.

March 17 Virtual Clinic, 3PM, Bernard Kempinski, MMR, “Backdrops,” Zoom

Hobby Shop Business Cards





Note: Train Depot has moved to 7249 Gabe Ct., Manassas, VA.

Also, Engine House Hobbies in Gaithersburg, MD. has closed.

END OF THE LINE