

INTERVIEW WITH THE NMRA PREZ

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November 2025

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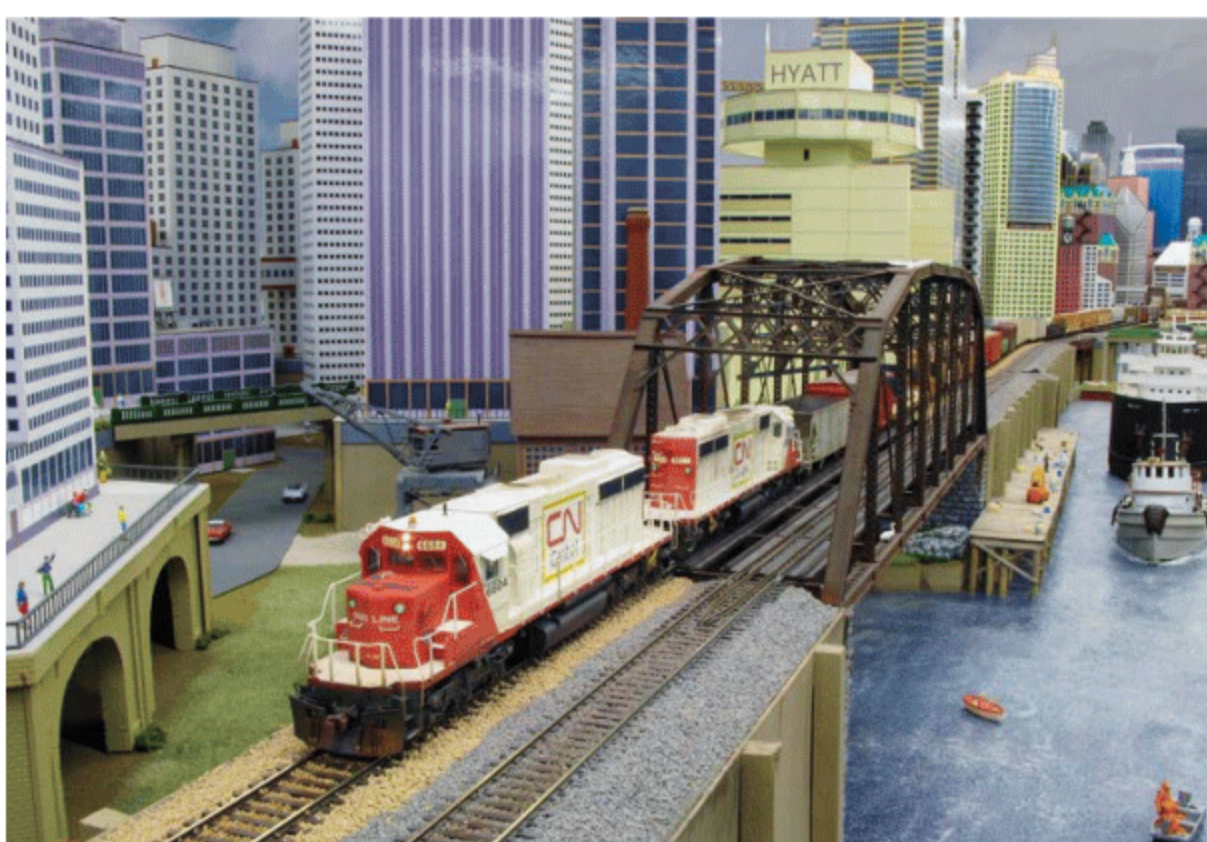
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On the cover: Nickel Plate Road Mikado 619 leads the KC Local across the Peoria & Eastern in Veedersburg, Ind.
Dan Munson photo



Next issue

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Model Railroader (ISSN 0026-7341, USPS 529-810) is published monthly by Firecrown Media Inc., 405 Cherry Street, Chattanooga, TN 37402. Periodicals postage paid at Chattanooga, TN and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Model Railroader*, PO Box 850, Lincolnshire, IL 60069.

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First-timer's view of an NMRA convention

Lucas Iverson joined the team from *Model Railroader* that went to the National Model Railroad Association National Convention in Novi, Mich., in July. Check out his first-timer's impressions of the event as part of our online coverage. Lucas was also behind the videos he and MR Editor Eric White shot at the convention.



Check out the world of L gauge model railroading

L gauge is the name **Lego builders** use to describe the model trains built with Lego bricks. Many of the train sets you can buy from Lego only vaguely resemble prototype trains, but there are modelers who are using the brick system to create reasonably accurate models. Learn more in this story on Trains.com.

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Anniversaries and milestones

It seems like everywhere I look, someone is celebrating an anniversary or a milestone. The two we're looking at this month are the National Model Railroad Association's 90th, and Tony Koester's 40th.

You may have heard about the NMRA's. On Labor Day weekend in 1935, a group of model railroaders, including *Model Railroader* magazine founder Al Kalmbach and Wm. K. Walther's Inc.'s very own William Walther, were among those who voted to create the National Model Railroad Association.

Back in the spring, we talked with NMRA President Gordy Robinson, and much of that interview is available on Trains.com. Some of the conversation was edited out, and we present that here, where Gordy tells us about his early experiences with the NMRA in Great Britain, and

how that shaped the way he's leading the organization today. You can read more about that on page 27.

Now what you may not know, unless for some reason you're keeping track of all sorts of MR statistics, is that this issue marks 40 years since Tony Koester's *Trains of Thought* column first appeared in the magazine. That's about 480 columns — yes, I know we repeated one last year — along with scores of other stories Tony has shared with us on these pages, not to mention *Model Railroad Planning*, which he's been editing since its debut in 1995.

Tony has also reached that mythical milestone of the "completed layout." Of course, the Nickel Plate Road St. Louis Division Third Sub. is still getting work done on it, for the most part, it's at the point of filling in the details,

replacing a few remaining stand-ins, and dealing with anything that new information uncovers.

To mark the occasion, photographer Dan Munson visited Tony's layout last year, and wrote the story you'll find on page 38. It gives a taste of what running over Tony's layout is like, something I'm glad to have had the privilege to do. I think you'll be entertained by Dan's unique take on the layout visit story.

But wait, there's more! One of the last buildings that needed to be upgraded was the depot at Veedersburg. Wayne Wesolowski was looking for something to do, and Tony needed a building, so they came to an agreement. See the result starting on page 32.

Now this issue isn't all Tony Koester. You'll also learn how to make late-autumn trees for



another longtime contributing editor's layout. Lou Sassi's wife, Cheryl, steps into her role as the Sandy River & Rangeley Lakes' chief arborist to share her easy-to-follow techniques, plus more.

As model railroading season gets into full swing, I'm sure you'll be able to find something in this issue to entertain and inspire you.

Model Railroader

Model railroading is fun!

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We welcome contributions from readers, including articles, photographs, and drawings. For more information on submitting material, email Editor Eric White at eric.white@firecrown.com. Model Railroader assumes no responsibility for the safe return of unsolicited material. We assume unsolicited material is intended for publication by Firecrown Media unless otherwise noted. We assume letters, questions, news releases, and club news items are contributed gratis.

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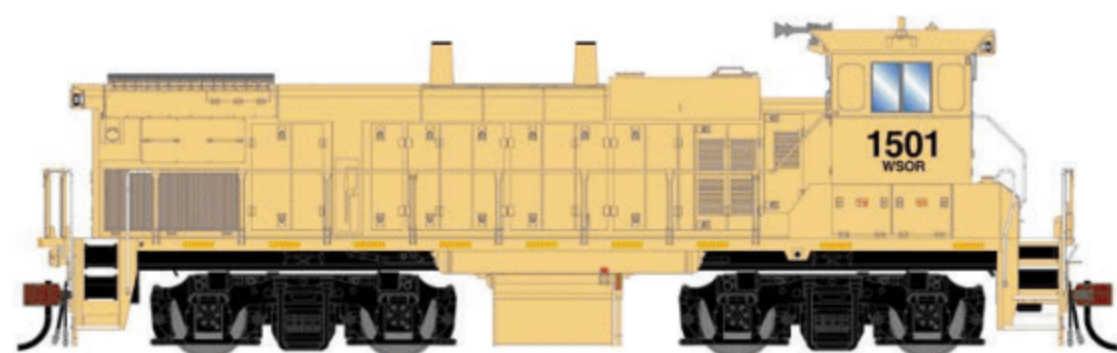
N scale



Electro-Motive Division SD35 diesel locomotive. Atlas Model Railroad Co. offers this six-axle road unit in new paint schemes, including Montana Rail Link, Cargill, CSX, and Great Lakes Central. New road numbers are available on models decorated for Baltimore & Ohio, Norfolk & Western (high short hood), Southern Pacific, and Southern Ry. (high short

hood). The N scale model has a Scale Speed motor, light-emitting-diode lighting, and body-mounted Accumate couplers. Direct-current models with a factory-installed speaker are priced at **\$134.95**. Versions with an ESU sound decoder list for **\$249.95**. Atlas Model Railroad Co., 908-687-0880, shop.atlasrr.com

H0 scale locomotives

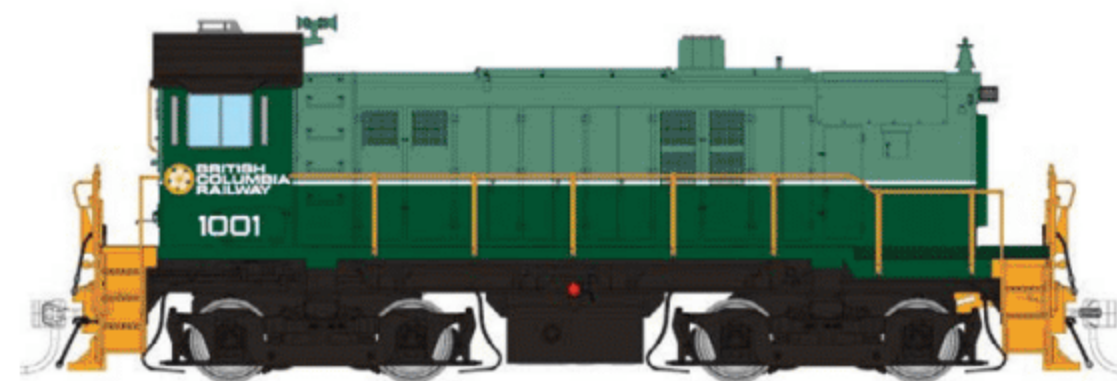


• **Electro-Motive Division MP15AC diesel locomotive.** Wisconsin & Southern, Carload Express, Seaboard System, Soo Line, Southern Pacific, Tacoma Rail, and *Transportación Ferroviaria Mexicana*. Detailed cab interior; factory-applied photo-etched metal and injection-molded plastic detail parts; detailed fuel tank with fillers, gauges, and breather pipes; flexible rubber train line and m.u. hoses; and die-cast metal frame. Genesis series. Athearn Trains, 800-338-4639, athearn.com



• **Seaboard Coast Line GP16 diesel locomotive.** Independent Locomotive Service (BTR Grain), Canton Steel, CSX, Family Lines (Clinchfield and Seaboard Coast Line), GATX Leasing, Palmetto, Pioneer Rail (Mississippi Central and Decatur Junction), Rail Link Commonwealth Railway, RJ Corman, Seaboard System, and Webb Asset Management. Injection-molded plastic body, die-cast metal chassis, and road-specific details.

With ESU LokPilot non-sound Digital Command Control decoder, \$269.95; with ESU LokSound sound decoder, \$339.95. InterMountain Railway Co., 800-472-2530, intermountain-railway.com



• **Montreal Locomotive Works S-13 and RS-23 diesel locomotives.** S-13: BC Rail, British Columbia Ry., Canadian National, and ex-CN but unlettered. RS-23: Canada Atlantic Ry., Canadian Pacific, CP Rail, Devco, Minnesota Commercial, and Windsor & Hantsport; also available painted industrial red and yellow but unlettered. Die-cast metal frame with separate details, photo-etched metal radiator grills, and metal grab irons. Direct-current model, \$249.95; with ESU LokSound V5 sound decoder, \$359.95. Rapido Trains Inc., 905-474-3314, rapidotrains.com

H0 scale rolling stock



• **Pullman-Standard PS-2 2,893-cubic-foot capacity covered hopper.** Atlantic Sugar Refineries Ltd.; Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe; Missouri-Kansas-Texas;

Monon; Soo Line; and Southern Pacific. Photo-etched metal running boards, 33" nickel silver wheelsets, and wire grab irons. Genesis series. Athearn Trains, 800-338-4639, athearn.com

• **Trinity Industries 5,161-cubic-foot capacity three-bay covered hopper.** BNSF Ry. (Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe; Chicago, Burlington & Quincy; Colorado & Southern; and Northern Pacific heritage schemes); AGP; Dakota, Minnesota & Eastern; Imperial Sugar; Kansas City Southern; Potash Corp.; and Union Pacific. Three to six road numbers per paint scheme. Etched-metal running boards (12 or 17 supports as appropriate); separate, factory-applied details; InterMountain metal wheelsets; and Kadee knuckle couplers \$59.95. Inter Mountain Railway Company, 800-472-2530, intermountain-railway.com



• **Halliburton pneumatic railcar.** Halliburton (1960s, 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s versions); also available painted gray and red but unlettered. Newly tooled from original blueprints and measurements. Full underbody details and piping, separate metal grab irons, stainless steel metal roofwalk, roller-bearing

trucks with metal wheelsets, and semi-scale metal knuckle couplers. Suggested minimum radius, 18". Single car, \$64.95; six-pack, \$389.70. Rapido Trains Inc., 905-474-3314, rapidotrains.com

HO scale transit



- **Rapido Toronto Transit Commission CLRV streetcar.** Toronto Transit Commission (multiple schemes), Boston Urban Transportation Development Corp. Demonstrator, and Urban Transportation Development Corp. (concept scheme). Fictional schemes: Boston, Buffalo, Philadelphia, and San Francisco. Road-number-specific details, interior with seats and operator controls, and factory-applied destination signs. Power collection via track power or combined trolley pole and track power. Direct-current model, \$208.95 to \$223.20; with ESU LokSound and MoPower capacitor system, \$313.45 to \$327.70. Rapido Trains Inc., 905-474-3314, rapidotrains.com

N scale rolling stock



- **Johnstown America BethGon Coalporter.** CIT Group (CITX and CEFX reporting marks), Conrail, Entergy Corp., and Minneapolis & St. Louis. Plastic body, removable coal load, and 36" machined metal wheelsets. Minimum radius, 9¾". \$249.99 (Primed for Grime, \$264.99). Athearn Trains, 800-338-4639, athearn.com
- **Four-bay cylindrical covered hopper.** Battle River Ry., Canadian National, Government of Canada (red, CNWX and CPWX reporting marks), Mobil Grain (Saskatchewan Grain Car Corp. patchout), Union Pacific (gray with Chicago & North Western marks and UP herald), and Willamette Valley Ry. Multiple road numbers per scheme. Knuckle couplers and metal wheelsets. \$39.95. InterMountain Railway Co., 800-472-2530, intermountain-railway.com

HO scale



Gunderson 50-foot boxcar. Paint schemes on this Proto-series car from Walthers include CSX, Arkansas-Oklahoma RR, BNSF Ry., and Canadian National. The HO scale boxcar (**\$49.98**) is offered in three road numbers per paint scheme; an undecorated model is also available. Product features include factory-installed and painted formed-wire grab irons; freestanding door rods and levers, end ladders, and crossover platforms; screw-mounted roller-bearing trucks with 36" metal wheelsets; and body-mounted Proto-Max metal couplers. Wm. K. Walthers Inc., 414-527-0770, walthers.com

N scale transit equipment



- **Budd 2600 Chicago Transit Authority 'L' cars.** Chicago Transit Authority (as-delivered, Speedlines logo, Circle logo, Work Motor, Pink Line promotional, and 75th anniversary schemes); also available painted silver and black but unlettered. Two-car set features one powered and one unpowered 2600-series car. Operating headlights, marker lights, and interior lighting on both ends and detailed underbody. Suggested minimum radius, 9¾". Two-car set: without sound, \$389.95; with sound, \$499.95. Four-car collector set: without sound, \$429.95; with sound, \$549.95. Rapido Trains Inc., 905-474-3314, rapidotrains.com

O scale locomotives



- **General Electric ET44 diesel locomotive.** CPKC, BNSF Ry., Canadian National (BC Rail and Elgin, Joliet & Eastern heritage units), CSX, Norfolk Southern, and Union Pacific. 1:48 proportion. Die-cast metal truck sideframes, pilots, and fuel tank; detachable snow plow; and two crew figures in cab. Features Proto-Sound 3.0 with Digital

Command System and ProtoSmoke diesel exhaust. \$799.95. Premier line. Atlas Model Railroad Co., 908-687-0880, shop.atlasrr.com

O scale details and accessories



- **45-foot Pines trailer.** Montgomery Ward Electric Avenue, GLKX (ex-Redon), National Piggyback Service, Neshanic Trailer Co., Norfolk & Western, and Southern Pacific. Adjustable hitch pin; raised and lowered landing gear; and working doors, bars, and latches. \$39.95. Master Line. Atlas Model Railroad Co., 908-687-0880, shop.atlasrr.com

Z scale rolling stock



- **Association of American Railroads 40-foot modified 1937 boxcar.** Southern Ry. (single car and two-pack). Etched-metal running boards, positionable doors, blackened metal wheels, and AutoLatch couplers. Contact manufacturer for pricing information. American Z Line, 614-764-1703, americanzline.com

Rapido HO United Aircraft TurboTrain



Rapido Trains Inc. has released an updated version of its highly detailed HO scale model of United Aircraft's TurboTrain. The firm is calling this release TurboTrain 2.0. Much like the real high-speed trainsets developed and built in the late 1960s and then upgraded through their service lives, Rapido's own HO model of the iconic gas-turbine-powered train has seen many improvements since its first offering in 2008. Most notable among the upgrades are better operating and running characteristics. These include slow-speed motor control and completely redesigned single-axle trucks between the cars. The new Turbo model is not compatible with Rapido's original 2008 equipment.

The TurboTrain started life as the Turbine Motor Train (TMT) project, proposed by United Aircraft in 1965 to modernize passenger train travel. United Aircraft built a total of seven trainsets, two for the U.S. Department of Transportation and five for Canadian National, although some CN equipment eventually migrated to the States. The U.S. trains were built by Pullman-Standard in Chicago; Canadian sets were built by Montreal Locomotive Works.

The trainsets were fabricated using aluminum construction with low centers of gravity. They used the Spanish Talgo design for single-axle trucks between the

cars with 30" wheelsets, providing a smooth ride for passengers at high speeds. The two Power Dome Cars (PDCs) in each trainset each had a single dual-axle power truck. U.S. TurboTrains were also equipped with 600VDC third-rail pickup shoes for operation in and out of Grand Central and Penn Stations in New York.

The U.S. trainsets operated between New York and Boston on the New Haven, and later Penn Central railroad, under contract with the U.S. DOT. Their Canadian counterparts ran mostly between Montreal and Toronto. The modern, comfortable trains were popular with travelers when introduced in late 1968 but suffered from growing pains. The CN trains required heavy upgrades to combat Canadian winters. The entire fleet of TurboTrains also required expensive maintenance, often after every run. Poorly funded Amtrak ended its TurboTrain service in 1976, while the CN trains passed on to VIA Rail and lasted until October 1982.

Rapido has produced three different Power Dome Cars (PDC) and six different Intermediate Cars (IC) to allow it to accurately reproduce the Turbo trainsets in all of their significant paint schemes and car configurations.

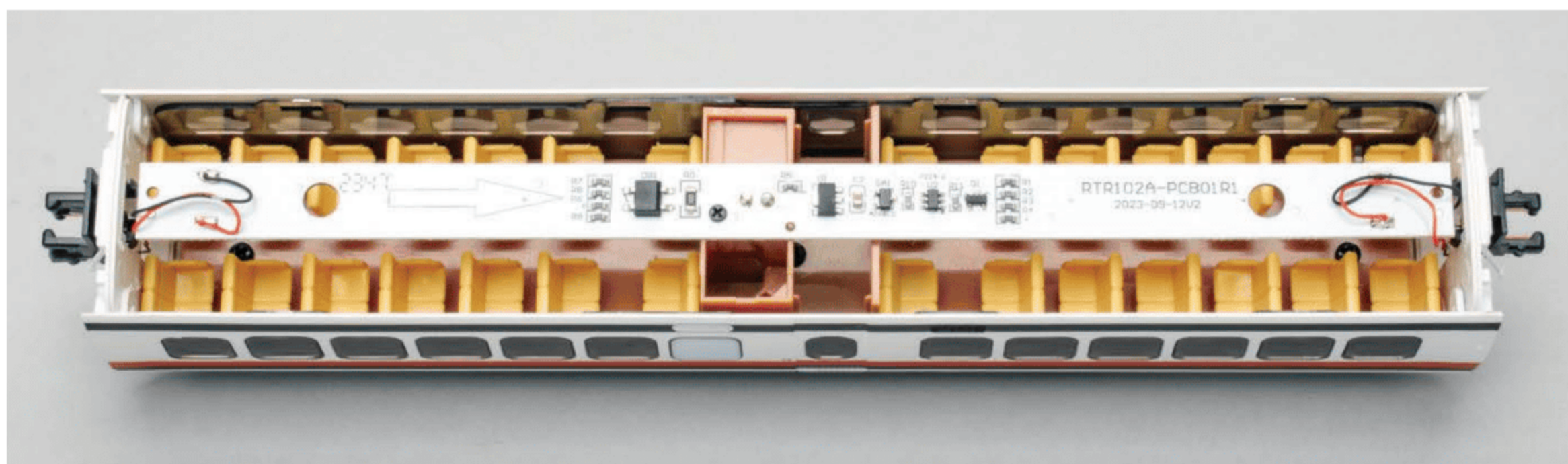
U.S. Department of Transportation trains were delivered as 3-unit sets, and

Rapido offers those decorated in both the original United Aircraft gray delivery and blue striped Penn Central color schemes. In 1972, the DOT expanded its TurboTrains to five cars by ordering two more Intermediate Cars and painted the trains for Amtrak. Rapido offers a five-car set in early Amtrak red/white/black (the one we tested), and in Amtrak's later red/white/blue paint scheme. Amtrak picked up an additional 4-car Turbo Train from CN in 1973, which can be depicted with the later Amtrak train by removing one coach.

The five Canadian National trainsets started with seven cars each, but after a significant modification program, CN swapped equipment to create three nine-car trains. Rapido offers the basic CN train as a five-car set, as well as a four-car add-on set to build either a seven- or nine-car train. The nine-car trains were repainted in the yellow and blue VIA CN scheme in 1976 before becoming part of VIA Rail in 1978.

We received a five-car early Amtrak set for review. The train consists of two PDCs (Nos. 28 and 29) plus two ICs (Nos. 36 and 37) and one snack bar/coach (No. 29). Note, the numbers refer to the car's UAC configuration and not to its road number. The decoration on the train is excellent, capturing the striking red/white/black early Amtrak paint scheme well. The plastic body shells feature many details, including separately applied windshield wipers.

The models include LED lighting inside and out, with gold-white headlights and roof-mounted interior lighting. The lighting circuit has a capacitor for



Eight tabs on the roof of the TurboCoach lock into tabs (four on each side) on top of the clear window glazing. The train features flicker-free LED lighting, and there is plenty of room in the detailed interior to add figures (not included).



Trains.com members can see the Rapido TurboTrain in action with this QR code.



even, flicker-free operation. There are dual headlights on each end, as well as a Gyalite (activated by function 3 on DCC). On the rear of the train, there is a red Gyalite. These lights automatically switch ends when changing directions. You can turn the interior lights off using the included magnetic wand.

The intermediate coach roofs are removable, allowing the modeler to add figures to the detailed interiors. They are held in place by 8 press-fit tabs, four evenly spaced on each side of the carbody. (I did not attempt to take the PDC apart.) Typical of Rapido Trains' attention to detail, the various ICs and PDCs match their prototypes' floor plans.

Rapido has made assembling the trainset as easy as possible. Since this is a Talgo-type trainset, the cars share the single-axle intermediate trucks. The undersides of the cars are marked with both position in the train and direction of travel. The cars clip to the center post on the truck. The black diaphragms press-fit between the cars by carefully compressing them one at a time and slipping them between the car ends.

If you clip the guidance arms from the intermediate trucks, the train will negotiate an 18" radius curve, although it will look a lot better on 22" curves or larger — no arm clipping needed.

The new TurboTrain features a motor in each PDC, plus an ESU sound decoder and speaker. On an NCE DCC system set for 28 speed steps, our train crept along at 1.4 scale mph at speed step 1. Top speed at step 28 was 88 scale mph. Though below the normal 100 mph cruising speed of the TurboTrain, it works well as a layout top speed as the train eats up the track quickly. Note: Be sure both locomotives are on the track before doing any programming.

Perhaps the most notable thing was how smoothly the train operated all through the speed range. Our sample had no performance issues and glided along effortlessly through the 28" radius curves and No. 5 turnouts.

The train features a host of sounds, including some made from actual TurboTrain recordings. They are activated using DCC functions. The doppler

horn was one of my favorites. Be aware that many of the sounds will only play when the function is first activated. For example, after activating F6 to play the "open doors" sequence, you will need to turn off F6 before activating it again.

As delivered, the TurboTrain's sound decoders are set for Canadian station announcements (F11 through F16). If you have an American TurboTrain, press F17 to switch to the train's U.S. station announcements (F11 through F15).

Rapido has done an excellent job revamping one of its iconic models. As the story goes, Jason Shron started Rapido Trains Inc. because he wanted an HO scale TurboTrain. I, for one, greatly appreciate the upgraded drive and operating characteristics and have really enjoyed running the TurboTrain on various layouts. — *David Popp*

Facts & features

Price: Three-car set, \$749.95; five-car set, \$899.95; four-car Canadian add-on sets, \$319.95; single coach, \$89.95.

Manufacturer

Rapido Trains Inc.
382 High St.
Buffalo, NY 14204
rapidotrains.com

Era: 1968 to 1976 (United States), 1968 to 1982 (Canada)

Road names: Amtrak (early and late), Canadian National, Penn Central/United States Department of Transportation, United Aircraft/U.S. DOT, and VIA Rail.

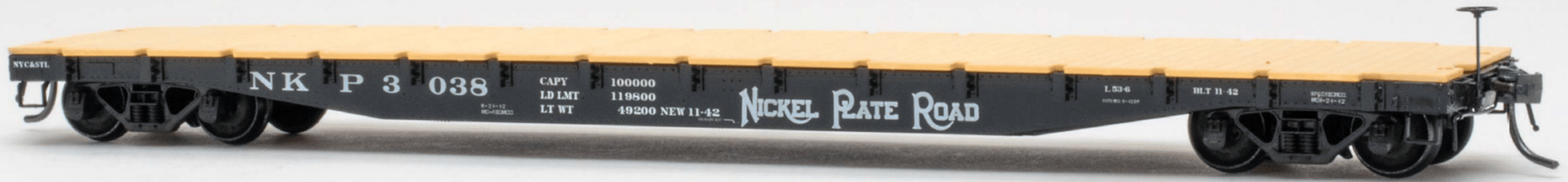
Features

- Metal wheels on plastic drive axle gears, properly gauged
- Minimum radius, 18" (with modification); recommended radius, 22"
- Weight: Power Dome Cars, 11 ounces; Intermediate Cars, 2.7 ounces



The Rapido Trains HO TurboTrain 2.0 includes a redesigned intermediate truck and coupler assembly, providing a reliable connection between the cars. The guide arms on the truck slip into eyebolts on the bottom of the cars. The diaphragm press fits between the cars once they are connected to the single-axle truck.

Kadee HO 50-ton AAR flatcar



An Association of American Railroads (AAR) 50-ton flatcar is the latest body style from Kadee Quality Products Co. The newly tooled HO scale model features injection-molded plastic construction, a detailed underbody, and No. 158 whisker couplers.

The AAR recommended three 50-foot flatcar designs in 1941. In his book *Freight Cars of the '40s and '50s* (Kalmbach Books, 2015), Jeff Wilson wrote, "The 50-ton, 53'-6" AAR riveted design was based on a Union Pacific car built by Pullman-Standard (Class F-50-11). The car had fishbelly sides with a single taper and 15 stake pockets on each side (with the middle stake slightly to the right of center on each side)."

The sample we received is decorated as Nickel Plate Road 3038, part of the railroad's 3000 through 3049 series. The full-size cars were built under Lot 5720-A by Pullman-Standard Car & Manufacturing Co. in Michigan City, Ind., in November 1942. In 1958, 24 cars from this series were modified to haul trailers. Examples of these cars were still on the roster when NKP merged with Norfolk & Western in 1964. Some cars survived in Nickel Plate Road paint into the 1980s.

The plastic body on the Kadee flatcar consists of the sides, ends, center sills, body bolsters, and draft-gear boxes. Finely rendered plastic grab irons are located on the sides and ends at all four corners. Following prototype practice, the car has a brake wheel on a drop staff. Yes, you can raise and lower it on the model. Nice touch!

The stake pockets are molded on a plastic strip. Standoffs between the strip and pockets fit into notches on the top of the sides.

The plastic deck is tan with wood grain and fastener detail. A metal weight, painted a similar color, is

attached to the bottom of the deck. The color, along with flooring and stringer detail, help it blend into the model.

The crossties are part of a separate plastic casting that fits between the center sills. The air reservoir and 3/4" auxiliary and emergency reservoir pipes are part of the casting.

Flexible engineering plastic was used for the rest of the brake system. One casting has the brake pipe, air hoses (with angle cock detail), and uncoupling levers. Another has the brake cylinder, control valve, levers, brake rods, and related pipes. The plastic draft-gear box covers are attached with screws.

The Kadee flatcar also has optional, modeler-installed parts, including stake poles and single- and double-board sides. All of the parts, molded in tan similar to the deck color, are attached to sprues. I'd recommend tweezer-style sprue cutters to detach the parts.

Our review sample is neatly painted black with opaque white graphics. The placement of the road name, reporting marks, road number, and other data matches a prototype photo of car 3038 that I found on the Nickel Plate Road Historical & Technical Society website.

The flatcar is equipped with Kadee's Bettendorf 50-ton self-centering trucks with a two-piece split bolster. Information on the Kadee website states that this design provides "more efficient truck equalization [and] reduced axle friction for greater rolling performance."

The screw-mounted trucks are made from High Gravity Compound. The sideframes have raised foundry data and crisply defined details. The 33" ribbed-back wheels, mounted on plastic axles, are properly gauged. The face of each wheel has raised lettering that reads ASSOCIATION OF MANUFACTURERS OF CHILLED CAR WHEELS A.R.A. 1921.

Body-mounted Kadee No. 158 whisker couplers are installed at the correct

height. At 2.3 ounces the flatcar is 2.4 ounces too light per National Model Railroad Association Recommend Practice 20.1.

Prototype drawings of the 3000-3049 series of flatcars were published in *Nickel Plate Road Freight Car Diagrams* (TLC Publishing Inc.) The ready-to-run flatcar matches or is within scale inches of all printed dimensions.

For real-world testing, I put the model in a train on our Winston-Salem Southbound layout. The car performed without issue, comfortably navigating the No. 4 turnout and the 30-degree crossing that serve Atlas Supply Co.

For nearly 80 years, Kadee has been producing quality couplers, trucks, and freight cars, and the 50-ton AAR flatcar lives up to that reputation. Whether you put in on the rails straight from the box or install the user-added parts, this model will certainly be a standout in your freight car fleet. — *Cody Grivno, senior editor*

Facts & features

Price: \$54.99

Manufacturer

Kadee Quality Products Co.
673 Avenue C
White City, OR 97503
kadee.com

Era: November 1942 to 1980s (as decorated)

Road name: Nickel Plate Road

Features

- 33" metal wheels mounted on plastic axles, correctly gauged
- Body-mounted No. 158 whisker couplers, at correct height
- Minimum radius, 18"
- Weight: 2.3 ounces, 2.4 ounces too light per National Model Railroad Association Recommended Practice 20.1

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Atlas N scale EMD GP60



An Electro-Motive Division GP60 has joined the Atlas Model Railroad Co. Master Line. The manufacturer acquired the model, originally produced by Life-Like in 2004, when it purchased all N scale locomotive and freight car tooling from Wm. K. Walther Inc. in June 2018. Features on the four-axle road unit include an injection-molded plastic shell, Scale Speed motor, and body-mounted Accumate couplers.

Electro-Motive Division produced the GP60 from October 1985 until February 1994. During that time, 294 units were built. The 3,800 hp road locomotive was equipped with a 16 cylinder, 710G3 diesel engine; AR17 alternator; and D87B traction motors.

Our review sample is decorated as Southern Pacific 9761, part of the railroad's 9715 through 9769 series built between April and July 1991. The full-size unit was built under order number 907137 in June 1991.

Following the 1996 merger between SP and Union Pacific, the GP60 was scheduled to be renumbered 5860, but the road number wasn't applied. In December 2009 the GP60 was renumbered UP 2021. In October 2019 it became the railroad's 1172. The locomotive is still in service today.

The Atlas GP60 features a multi-piece injection-molded plastic shell consisting of the sill, long and short hood, dynamic brake blister, and cab. The handrails and stanchions are plastic, with the vertical railings painted white on our sample.

Freestanding parts on the long hood of the Espee model including radiator and dynamic brake fans and a three-chime air horn. A factory-applied Prime air conditioner is on top of the cab.

The speaker in both direct current and Digital Command Control versions is located in the fuel tank. Light tubes run from the printed-circuit board to the ditch lights on the front pilot.

Our review sample is neatly painted in Southern Pacific's scarlet and gray scheme. The separation lines between colors are sharp, and the white lettering and stripes are opaque.

The lettering placement matches prototype photos that I found online. A few warning labels were omitted, but would be easy to add with waterslide decals offered by various manufacturers.

The placement of the latches on the long hood doors didn't match full-size 9761 in a few instances. The ditch lights are below the anticlimber on the model, but should be on top.

Prototype drawings of the GP60 were published in the March 1993 *Railroad Model Craftsman*. The model's dimensions closely follow published data.

I tested the model at the workbench using an NCE Power Cab. At step 2, the GP60 crawled along at 2 scale mph. The road locomotive achieved at top speed of 80 scale mph at step 28.

Then I took the locomotive over to the Milwaukee, Racine & Troy State Line Route to see how it performed in an operating layout environment. The layout has a Digitrax DCS-210+ DCC

system. The GP60 had no issues navigating the 18" minimum radius curves and No. 6 turnouts.

It's good to see the Electro-Motive Division GP60 back on the N scale market. The paint schemes Atlas Model Railroad Co. has selected for the first run nicely cover the history of the locomotive from 1990 to the present day. — *Cody Grivno, senior editor*

Facts & features

Price: Direct-current model with factory-installed speaker, \$144.95; with ESU LokSound V5 sound decoder, \$254.95. Subtract \$10 for undecorated models.

Manufacturer

Atlas Model Railroad Co.
378 Florence Ave.
Hillside, NJ 07205
shop.atlasrr.com

Era: October 1985 to present (varies depending on paint scheme)

Road names: Southern Pacific, BNSF Ry., Denver & Rio Grande Western, Green Mountain RR, Norfolk Southern, Texas Mexican Ry., Union Pacific, and Vermont Ry. One to three road numbers per paint scheme; also available undecorated.

Features

- Body-mounted Accumate couplers, .010" high on both ends
- Metal wheel stubs on plastic drive axle gears, correctly gauged
- Weight: 2.9 ounces

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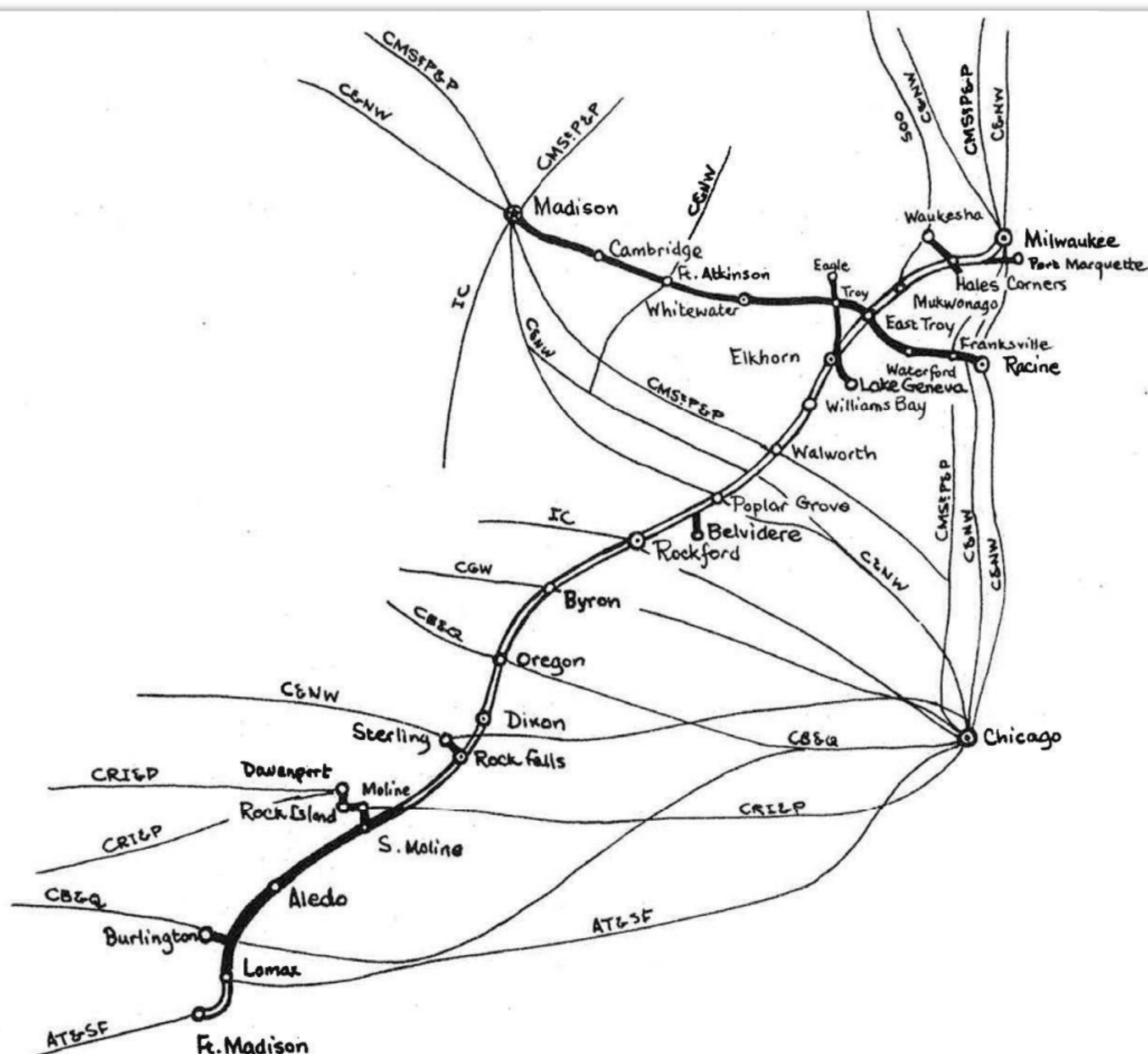


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This hand-drawn system map shows the original concept for the Milwaukee, Racine & Troy. The main line runs from Milwaukee, Wis., to Fort Madison, Iowa, the railroad's western terminus. A secondary main line operates from Madison to Racine, Wis. *Model Railroader* collection

Milwaukee, Racine & Troy western terminus

Q What was the western terminus of your HO scale staff layout, the Milwaukee, Racine & Troy?

Phil Stead

A Jim Kelly explained the concept behind the Milwaukee, Racine & Troy in "Meet the MR&T" in the December 1989 *Model Railroader*. "You may have already guessed that the initials in MR&T stand for *Model Railroader* and *Trains*. Finding town names starting with M and R was no problem, but T was a stretch. Troy is an unincorporated 'village' about 25 miles southwest of Milwaukee and just west of the better-known East Troy, home to a trolley museum.

"The MR&T is a hypothetical bridge line extending from Milwaukee to Fort Madison, Iowa. The line's lifeblood is interchange with the Burlington Northern and the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe, giving heavy machinery and other goods manufactured in southeastern Wisconsin a quick start on journeys west. Much of the eastbound traffic is destined for Europe and Africa via the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence Seaway. The MR&T's main selling point is that it avoids Chicago.

"The modeled portion of this fictional railroad extended from the Port Marquette terminal in Milwaukee to just beyond Williams Bay, about 50 miles that were represented in a little less than 3 scale miles on the layout."

In the same article, Andy Sperandio wrote about the second MR&T, located in our former Waukesha, Wis., offices: "The new MR&T will follow the same concept as the old railroad, and the operating schematic will be similar too. We like the railroad that the old 'Myrt' evolved to be."

Though we've built two versions of the MR&T in HO scale and one in N, none of the layouts have featured Fort Madison, Iowa.



Paul Rising's Step by Step article "Rare earth uncoupling" appeared in the August 2025 issue. This image shows where the magnets are located on the toothbrush. Paul Rising photo

Q In the August 2025 *Model Railroader* magazine, there was an article on page 22 about using a Sonicare toothbrush magnet for an uncoupler. Could the author explain where the magnet is within the brush head and how he removed it from the toothbrush?

Rich Bond

A I contacted Paul Rising, author of “Rare earth uncoupling.” He replied, “I certainly can explain, but a picture may be easier. One needs only to unscrew the brush wand. The magnet set (two magnets on a metal base) is at the opposite end from the brush. I use a utility knife to cut the set at the plastic base on which it is glued. When the magnet is free it will snap onto the knife blade. Be careful you don’t cut yourself getting the magnet off the blade. These have serious grabbing power.”

Q My layout is set in 1956 and I'm considering adding a cement distributor such as Walthers Medusa Cement. I have a small fleet of Atlas PS-2 covered hoppers to bring the bulk cement to the plant, but I don't know what kind of trucks would have been used back then to carry the product to the local ready mix retailers. Do you have any insights?

Tim Barnard

A Back in 1956 cement was transported one of two ways: In 100-pound heavy paper bags loaded in boxcars or on flatbed trucks and in steel dry bulk tank trailers.

Transporting bulk cement by highway was in its infancy back in the 1950s.

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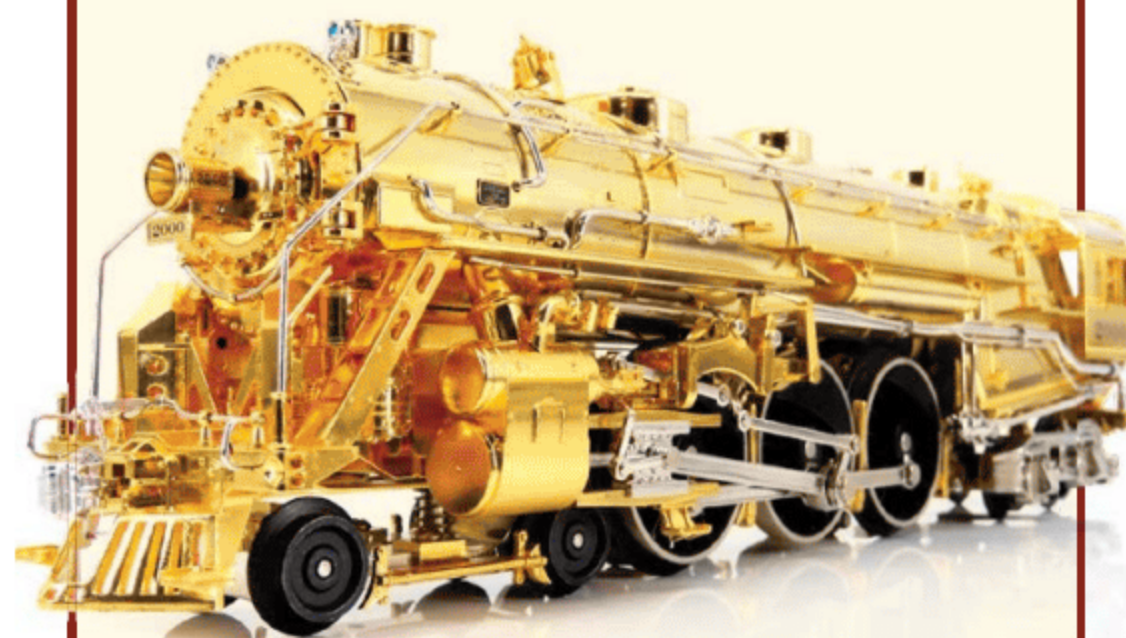
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Cement is heavy (dense) and usually messy because of cement dust generated during loading and unloading. So the dry bulk trailers used in this service were — and are — dedicated and relatively small, typically between 1,400 and 1,600-cubic-foot capacity. Loading is achieved by dropping the cement into the top of the trailer with a loading hatch for each of the pockets or compartments.

The blower unloading of bulk cement wasn't started until the 1960s and continues yet today because it is relatively quick. Prior to that augers were used instead of the venturi effect of the blowers.

Some trailers had augers along their bottoms that pushed the cement out the back of the tank. Other locations required augers that were placed under each pocket of cement trailer. The cement plants then had augers to get it into the storage tank and ultimately into the batch plant. — *Mont Switzer, founder, Switzer Tank Lines Inc.*

Q I would like to feature modern automobiles on my under-construction layout. Is there a manufacturer that makes vehicles from the late 1990s to modern day? If not, is there a way to make them?

Jake, via email

A You didn't specify your modeling scale, Jake, but there are multiple companies that produce vehicles appropriate for the 1990s to present in N and HO scales. Some brands you'll want to check for 1:87.1 offerings include Athearn, Atlas, Brekina, Busch, Classic Metal Works, Diecast Masters, First Gear, Herpa, Iconic Replicas, Promotex, Rapido Trains, Tonkin, Wm. K. Walthers, Wiking, and Woodland Scenics.



This Ford two-pack with F-350 (foreground) and F-250 trucks is among the N scale vehicle offerings from Atlas Model Railroad Co. The trucks are based on prototypes introduced in the 1990s.

Cody Grivno photo

For contemporary 1:160 vehicles, check out Atlas, Diecast Masters, Iconic Replicas, Oxford Diecast, Rapido Trains, and Wiking, among other companies.

Even if your layout is set in the modern era, it's OK to have some older vehicles on your layout. If you're modeling a downtown district, you could have a group of classic vehicles gathered together as part of a car show scene.

For additional inspiration, check out *Building Vehicles for Model Railroads* by Jeff Wilson (Kalmbach Books, 2018). Topics covered in the book include plas-

tic, metal, and resin kits; converting toys to scale models; and truck loads.

Stack 'em up. We received additional comments regarding the question on 20-foot intermodal container loading practices in the September 2025 Ask MR column. Larry DeYoung wrote, "My friend, National Model Railroad Association Master Model Railroader Jim Dalberg, was responsible for intermodal fleet management at Conrail back when I worked at CR many moons ago. He told me that 20-foot box containers exist mostly because they 'weigh out before they cube out.' In other words, they carry dense commodities.

"Often when you see a 20-footer on the highway, it's on a chassis with a three-axle tandem instead of the standard two axles, indicating that it's a heavily loaded trailer. Therefore, it is entirely possible that placing loaded 20-foot containers on top and in the well would overload the intermodal car. It could also destabilize the car's center of gravity.



A question about loading practices for 20-foot intermodal containers in the September 2025 issue of *Model Railroader* magazine generated additional feedback. This photo shows two 20-foot containers in the well of a 53-foot car and a 40-foot container on top. *Cody Grivno photo*



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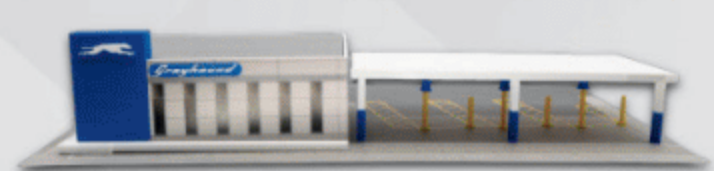
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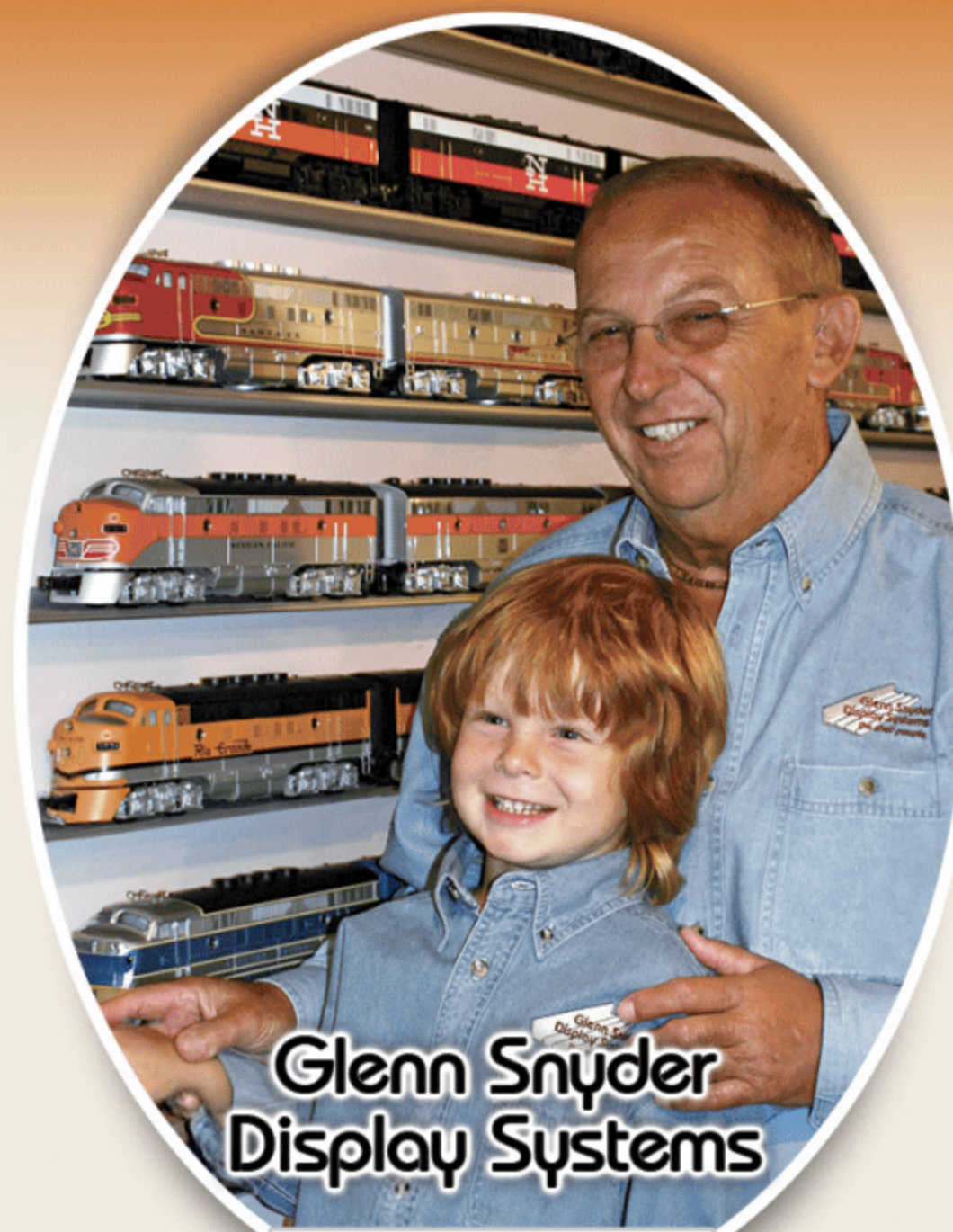
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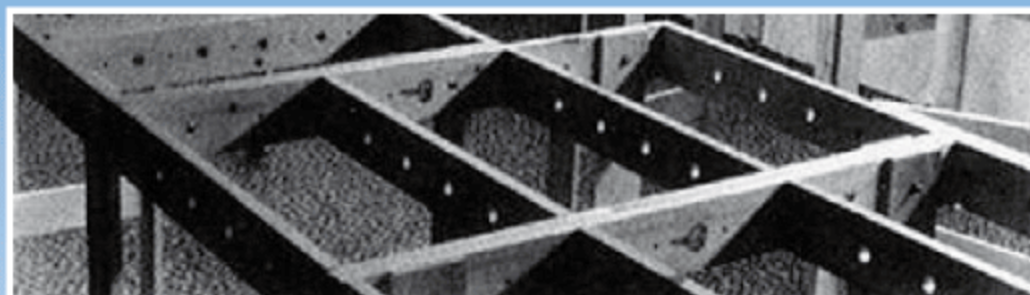


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Ask MR



A yard worker chats with the engineer of Chester & Becket Shay No. 4 at Chester Yard. A reader pointed out that our answer on F scale in the September 2025 issue needed to be clarified.

Doug Scott and Mike Tylick photo

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“It is also possible that when you see a 40-foot or longer container on top of two 20s, it is an empty or carrying a low-density commodity. If you can read the data on a well car, you may see specifications for the amount of weight to be carried in that particular well and how the containers are required to be stacked.”

Jessie Munoz, a Longshoreman at the Port of Los Angeles and president of the Belmont Shore Model Railroad Club, added that stacking cones are used on the corners of intermodal containers. Walkways on well cars provide access to the cones that secure 20-foot containers in the well to 40- and 45-footers in the top position. The lack of walkways in the middle of cars would make it difficult to safely reach the cones if 20-foot containers were stacked on top of each other.

F scale, take two. In the September 2025 issue, we replied to a question on F scale. It was brought to our attention that the answer needed clarification. The Chester & Becket is Fn3, not F scale.

Model Railroader contributor Jim Providenza added, “F scale, Fn3, and other large scale standards were developed by the NMRA in cooperation with many stakeholders in the early 2000s. F scale and Fn3 are both 1:20.32 proportion. This proportion is used almost entirely by those modeling 3-foot gauge railroads like the Chester & Becket RR.

“Fn3 uses the common garden railway 45mm, or 1¾”, gauge track. The NMRA standard for Fn3 track gauge is 1.766" (minimum) and 1.793" (maximum). For F standard gauge, the track gauge is 2.783" (minimum) and 2.845" (maximum).” **MR**



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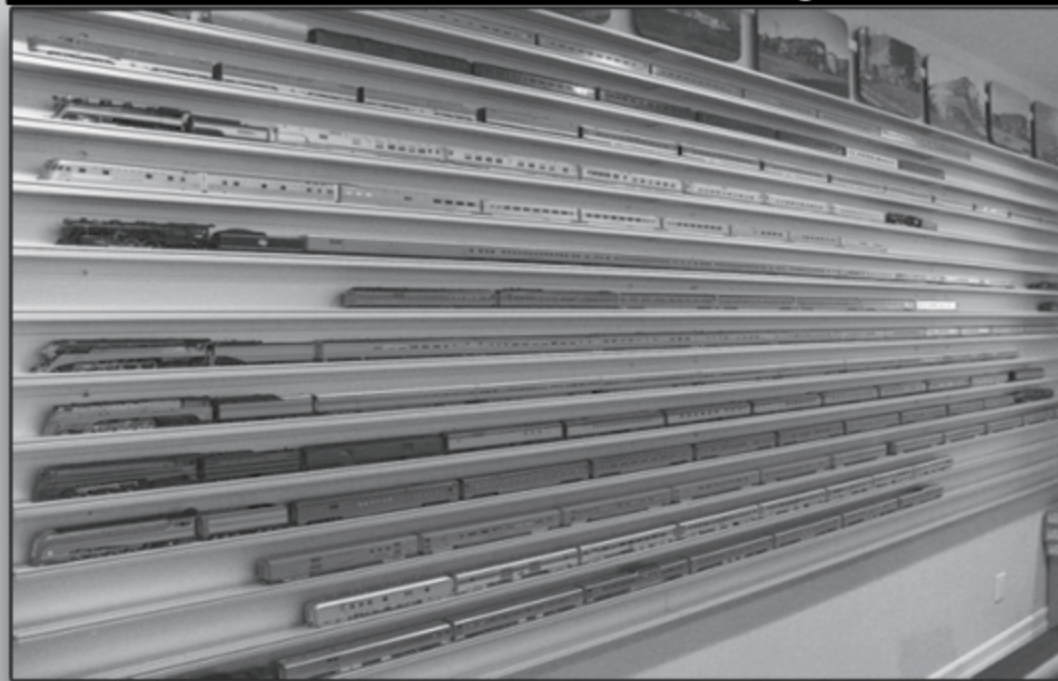
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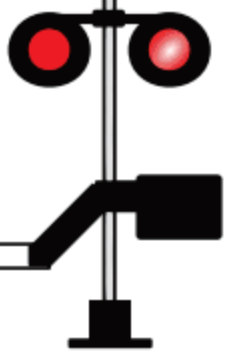


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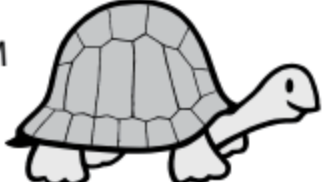


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STEP 1 BUILDING THE TRUNK



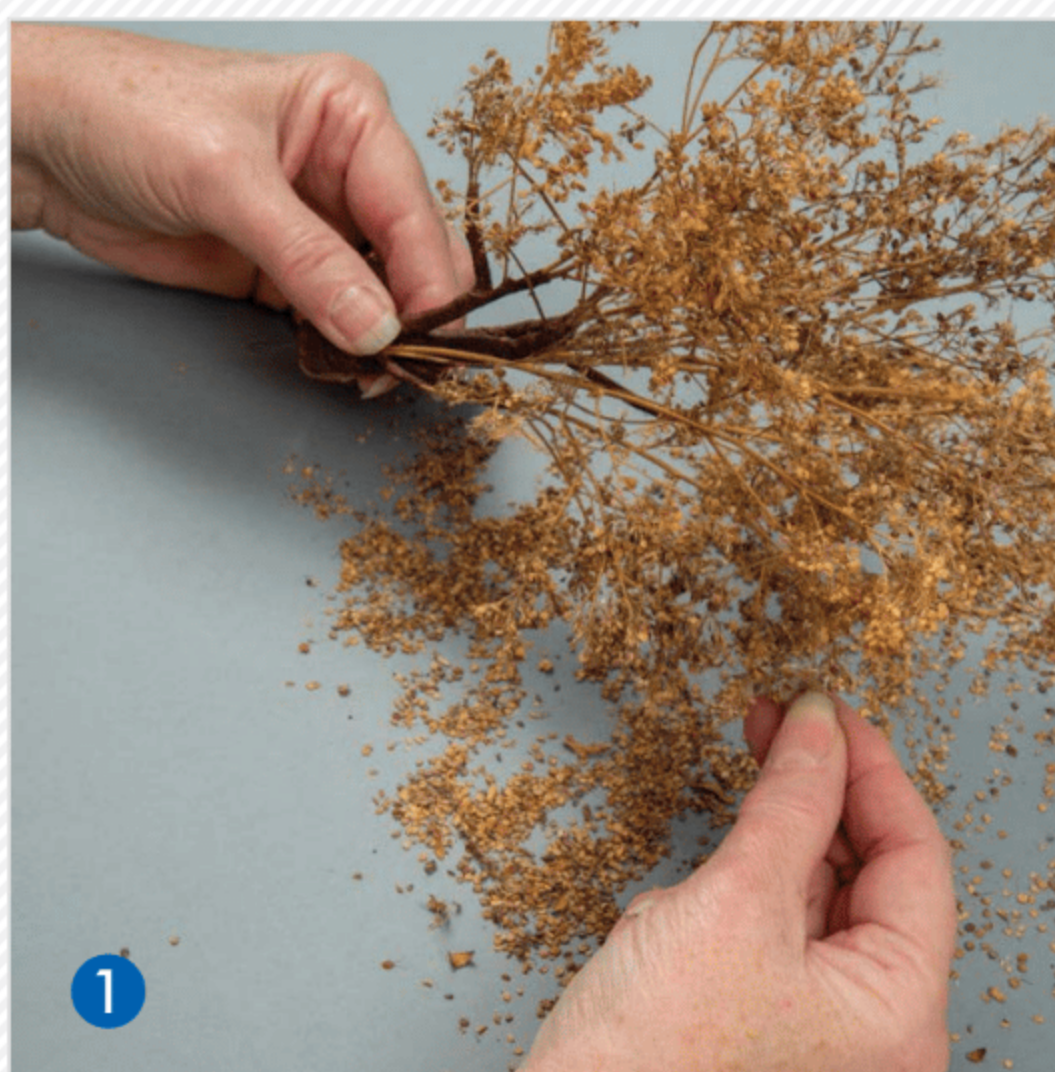
I began by wrapping clumps of peppergrass together with floral tape to form the basic trunk and crown of the tree. [Note, dried natural peppergrass is used in floral arrangements and home decorating and may require some searching to find it online. — Ed.].

I included a short length of pipe cleaner with each of the stalks as I wrapped them with floral tape ①. Adding the pipe cleaners allowed me to bend the branches to almost any angle I wished. Since I needed at least one horizontal branch on which to hang the tire swing, the pipe cleaners made it easy to do.

With the clumps assembled into the basic tree, I next wrapped additional branches with floral tape higher up the trunk to form the larger arms of the tree ②. Once I was satisfied with the configuration of the tree, I trimmed the bottom to the desired length with cutting pliers.

Next, I cut off the head of a No. 2 finishing nail and pushed it into the base of the tree ③. The nail makes it easy to hold the tree while working on it, as well as to plant it on the layout later. I also use it to fix the tree to the Styrofoam block that I use to hold trees while working on them, as will be shown in Step 3.

STEP 2 MODELING AN OAK TREE



Since I wanted this tree to represent an oak, and oaks do not lose most of their leaves in the fall, I removed just 75% of the foliage. The color (undyed) peppergrass foliage is a close match to dead oak leaves, so for this type of tree, the natural material works well. I used my fingers to thin the foliage on the tree to the desired amount ①.

Where the leaves were removed, the remaining branches on the peppergrass have what I refer to as “webs” at their tips, which can give the tree a furry look when finished. To limit this effect, I used a small pair of

scissors to trim some of the webs away at the tips of the defoliated branches ②.

Knots and cut branches give a tree character. These are places where branches were either loped off by someone or they broke off at some point during the tree’s life. I made the knots and cut branches for my tree by trimming short lengths of small twigs I found outside. I then attached them to the trunk with white glue. I held these small parts in place with fine tweezers until the glue set enough to hold them while it dried completely ③.

STEP 3 ACRYLIC TREE BARK



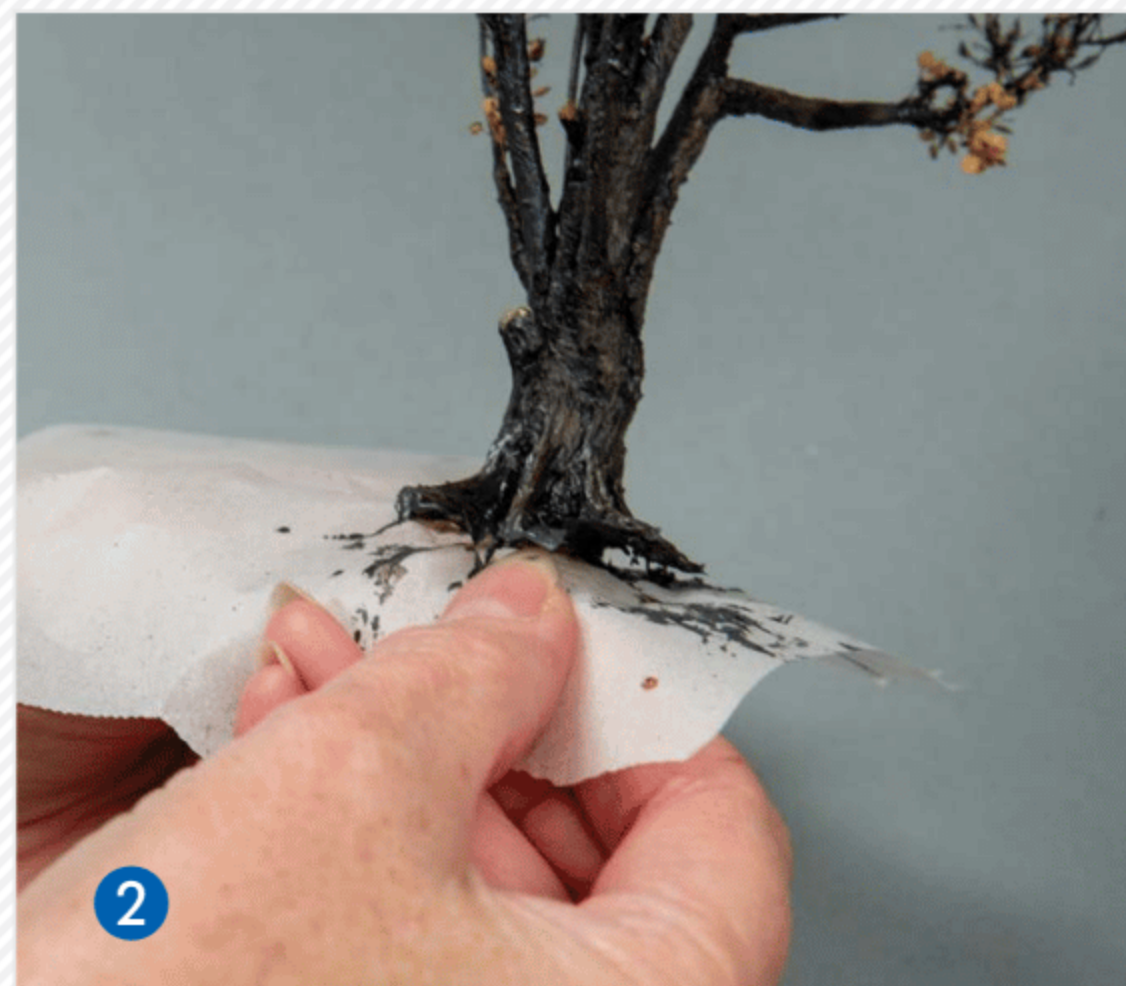
With the knots and cut branches secure, I used a stiff oil painting brush to apply a blend of Mars black, titanium white, and raw umber tube acrylics to the trunk and branches of the tree ①. I used multiple layers of acrylic paint to increase the thickness of some of the lower branches and blend them into the trunk, as well.

Next, I built up the roots of the tree using more acrylic paint. To begin this step, I mounted the tree into a foam block covered with wax paper. The wax paper prevents the acrylics from sticking to the foam and makes it easier to remove the finished tree from the block later. I then used

a pallet knife and a brush to sculpt the root system at the base of the tree using more artist acrylics. Working from photos of real trees can be helpful during this step ②.

Once I was happy with the general shape and position of the roots, I added some texture to the tree's bark using a stiff pet-grooming brush. You need to do this step while the acrylics are still somewhat soft, but not wet. I made light grooves in the trunk and roots by gently drawing the brush downward over the surface. Be careful not to overdo it. If you do, however, you can make repairs by applying more acrylic paint ③.

STEP 4 HAND-PAINTED DETAILS



Once the acrylics dried, I used a soft-bristle brush to hand paint the trunk and limbs with a mix of Grimy Black, Reefer White, and Roof Brown Model Master water-based paints. This allowed me to carry the color of the bark higher up into the tree and into the smaller branches ①.

The last step is to drybrush some highlights onto the bark. I used an acrylic concrete color for this step, applying it with a stiff-bristle brush. I also used darker colors to put shadows in the deeper areas of the trunk, particularly between the roots and where branches meet.

After allowing the paint to dry thoroughly, I removed the tree from the foam block and peeled away the wax paper, gently prying it away from the roots ②.

You'll likely have some excess acrylic around the base of the roots that acts like flash on a metal part. I used a small pair of scissors to trim the material away ③.

Finally, I applied a light spray coat of Testor's Dullcote to the entire tree. I then used a Wiseman Model Services cast-metal tire and some thread to make the swing and hung it from one of the branches. I planted the finished tree in the front yard of Ruth Forster's home on the layout.

Although you wouldn't want to build a forest using trees with this level of detail, the techniques shown here are easy to accomplish over several evenings of modeling work. And as the opening photo shows, the realistic results are worth the extra effort. **MR**



STARTING AT THE TOP at the NMRA

Gordy Robinson still has this original pair of Athearn RDCs from his childhood, although the rubber bands are long perished. Courtesy Gordy Robinson

President Gordy Robinson shares how he started with the NMRA, and where he hopes to take it

By Eric White
Photos as noted

Back in the spring, we had an online conversation with Gordy Robinson, president of the National Model Railroad Association. Much of that conversation was posted as a video on Trains.com, but there was more to the story.

We wanted to share how Gordy came to join the NMRA, and how those experiences helped guide him as he rose through the ranks and took a larger and larger role in the organization.

Gordy is interested in North American railroading, and one of his early models was an Athearn “blue box” Budd Rail Diesel car, which he recently found in a box of things his parents had kept.

“When I was a youngster, well I’m still young, but when I was a real youngster, when I was a child and I was reading *Model Railroader* as a child, I couldn’t have imagined. I mean, I had an RDC that had rubber band drive and I loved it, but I can’t imagine then when I had that having more than just a headlight and taillight, just having a directional headlight that turned on because the train was going forwards, I thought was great.

“So, yeah. So I had rubber band drive RDC and I thought it was awesome that



NMRA President
Gordy Robinson

it had directional headlights. So like the light was on at the front of the train, the direction it was going. How awesome was that? And now we’ve got locomotives with step lights, [ditch] lights, marker lights, everything lights, potentially even individual lights on the dash in the locomotive cab in the future.”

Finding his people

Gordy told us he grew up in a model manufacturer’s household. While that

exposed him to model railroading on a regular basis, his interests went beyond the family business, and being around products for sale wasn't always the ideal situation for a child fascinated by trains.

"My father was a manufacturer of brass O scale 2-rail passenger car kits. They were British, of course. But passenger car kits and locomotives.

"I was going to train shows from being 4 years old, helping on the booth and selling models and assembling kits on the weekend and things like that.

"But I was never allowed to touch them [the kits for sale] because everything had value. This is the problem with being a manufacturer's child. Everything that you touch has a value and it's for sale. So you're in a house full of trains, but that's a business. It's not the hobby."

Gordy's interests needed another outlet.

"I was operating layouts [at the shows] and that was great, but I needed to find my own avenue to model something that was unusual.

"So one of my dad's friends, who helped us pack the kits and ... helped in the business, took me one Saturday to an NMRA meeting in Manchester, which was not far from where the British region of the NMRA actually held its first meeting in August 1945.



A 7-year-old Gordy rides the Beer Heights Light Ry. in 1993 at Pecorama, Beer, Devon, home of Pritchard Patent Product Co. Ltd., better known as Peco, in England. Courtesy Gordy Robinson

"He took me to that group and I was just completely accepted by that group as a 14-year-old."

Gordy was in awe. While he was interested in North American railroading, there was no easy way to get information about the trains on another continent.

"I didn't know what I didn't know. The internet was a thing, but it wasn't like it is now. Just understand that for anyone younger, if you wanted to learn about things, you read a book.

"I learned about the United States from an NFL 1990 annual at my elementary school. And I knew about the Miami Dolphins and these New England people and then obviously was strongly attracted to the Green Bay Packers because they were a proper team.

"So that's it. All of a sudden I was there [at the meeting] and I was surrounded by these strange looking models that I couldn't see with my own eyes [on local rail lines]. We had a railway line that

ran just at the back of where we lived. So [the American trains] were so unusual, not the same as what I could see.

"And my dad used to — I tell this story all the time — my dad used to send me with, say, 5 dollars, the equivalent of 5 pounds of the Queen's money, to go out on a Saturday with this friend and [his] family.

"And for 4 pounds, I could buy an Athearn blue box kit and get, it was like a cone of, we call them chips, but you'd call them fries, for my lunch from the chip shop. And I'd get my kit. And then the guys just sat there and helped me assemble it. They'd tell me all about that railroad. They explained how railroads worked, how interchangeability worked, which wasn't really a concept in the U.K. at the time where it was a nationalized railway. It was all one railway, one railroad company. They explained all that."

Gordy was quickly finding his people.

"I got my 15 minutes of the meeting where I could run my trains around the modules that we had set up and I absolutely loved it. And those guys would spend so much time sitting down with me.

"And still all through my adult life — a lot of them have passed away now — I think there's only two or three still with us from that time when there was about 30 people.



This is one of the many locomotive kits Gordy's father, John Robinson, produced under the Chowbent name. It was offered in both 7mm (O gauge) and 4mm (OO gauge).



John Robinson's company also offered coach kits. "We used to pack these first in the attic in our home but later in a rented space above a model shop." Two photos, courtesy Gordy Robinson

But they still sit down with me like I'm 14, 15.

"How am I doing? What am I doing with the NMRA? What am I doing with my modeling? What have I learned this week? And they always encouraged me to go and learn something and then come back and tell them something.

"They sat with me and gave me a like, wow, these guys are as invested in me and they want me to be invested in them because they want me to go away and learn something and bring it back to them. Just like they're teaching me. It was outstanding. And that's what the NMRA was to me.

"Now, it's not the experience of everybody, but that foundational experience I've always carried with me and always had this willingness, and want to give back forever for my entire, entire time since then. They never, when I sat with them, they never told me what the NMRA was."

Gordy didn't know about the membership, or that the meets cost money to enter for non-members.

"It took me 18 months of going every month to realize that there was an entrance fee, because they all paid it for me. It's that kind of willingness and openness to just



The next generation: Gordy and his son, Magnus, look at the detail of Michael Burgett's HO scale Chesapeake & Ohio Clifton Forge Division model railroad on a layout tour during the NMRA National Convention 2025 in Michigan. Alix Robinson photo

give everything that you have to another model railroader that really became entrenched in my psyche of what I view the NMRA as, and I think we've lost our way with that and I'm trying very hard and so is the rest of the leadership of the national organization to bring that back, to bring that kindness back to the organization, that kindness back to the hobby."

A hobby of support

Gordy's friends at the Calder Northern Division of the British Region of the National Model Railroad



Gordy Robinson, Master Model Railroader, with Ken Bianco Jr. visiting Trainland in New York on his way home from the NMRA National Convention in 2025. Courtesy Gordy Robinson

Association, showed him what the organization could be.

"There's not many hobbies where we don't really compete. Yes, the NMRA has contests, but really you're competing as a model railroader. The only person you compete against is yourself. You set yourself a standard that you build your models to.

"So, but it's good. And that's why I love the NMRA. I love the hobby and everyone that's involved in it."

I asked Gordy about his experience once he became a member. "So when you joined, did you become like an officer of the region or the division you were in? How did you end up getting into the leadership of NMRA?"

"Through social media and because I didn't step back quick enough. No, joking.

"When I actually became a member, which was when I was an adult, I just became an ordinary member. And then in 2016 I went and attended my first region convention, which is a fantastic thing to do.

"If you're in your local division, you're in your local division, but there's so much, there's a whole world out there, right? There's a whole world beyond the village that you should always go and explore. And I went to my region convention, walked

through the front door of this country conference center in the U.K.

"If you're thinking while I'm saying this about *Downton Abbey*, you wouldn't be far off, OK? And I walked through the door of this very old place that was a conference center. And there was a London taxi driver called Mike Hughes who happened to be the marketing person.

"He always has a way of finding his perfect spot, right? Not right in front of the door, but so close to it that he can see you as soon as you walk in. And he grabbed me and was like, 'Ho! You haven't got much gray hair. Who are you?' And he just talked to me and I was like, back! — It's just like, this is my standard experience of being an NMRA member — and I talked to him for four hours before I realized there was anything else going on at this convention.

"And by that time he wouldn't leave me until I agreed to do something. Mike asked me to help him with the social media for the British region. And that was my first kind of voluntary role within the NMRA as an adult.

"And then I moved to Scotland. And when I moved to Scotland, as there wasn't a

very active local division, and I was like, let's get some stuff doing. Let's go to some train shows. Let's show what the NMRA does. Let's explain about who we are. Let's try to grow ourselves locally. And inevitably then the person that was the division superintendent said, you're really good at this. It's your job now. And that was my first little leadership role."

Gordy's working life has him doing a fair amount of travel, so he's frequently in the United States.

"And then I went, through work to the U.S., and it was the national convention in Florida. And I thought, I'll go to this. This will be a good idea. Let's broaden my horizons again. And within 20 hours of being there, I was running the national social media for the NMRA. And the person who was helping the NMRA with their marketing at the time said to me, 'Can you help me?' And I said, just give me the keys to the castle and I'll do it for you.

"And so I got the keys to the castle whilst building a model in a Modeling With a Master's session — which is a way you can have some of our very best model railroaders, potentially Gerry Leone from *Model Railroader* magazine — helping you and teaching you how to build models. And that was it. So I did that.

"And then during COVID, during the lockdown, the first lockdowns around the world in kind of this time [April] five years ago, I had this great idea of let's show everybody what the NMRA can do. Let's organize a 24-hour around the world — because we've got members all over — round the clock of people giving clinics for free on the internet. Let's just see if anyone wants to watch them because everyone's at home bored.

"I'm sick of reruns of every sitcom that the TV's got to show, this is absolutely terrible. There was no sports then.



Gordy pulls a pint while running the bar during a layout tour to his father's model railroad at the 2022 NMRA British Region Convention. This is part of a spoof cover of the NMRA British Region Magazine. Peter Bowen photo

There was absolutely nothing. It was awful. And I said, look, we need to break this up. Let's just do it. And that was what became then NMRAX.

"In 2019, I'd actually been asked, would I apply to be the at-large Worldwide Director because of my ideas and my vision and my wish to see the organization change ever so slightly back to what I'd experienced as a youngster. Unfortunately, I was unsuccessful, but in 2021, Jack Hamilton, who was successful in that election, needed to step back for health reasons. I was asked by the president, Pete Magoon, would I step up to the board at that point, which I did."

Gordy's next step wasn't too far in the future.

"We advertised for roles on the national board, so president being one of them, and nobody else put their name forward on the first round. So I said I would apply, which I did. That triggered a few other people to put their names forward. I think there was a potential putting a Brit at the top of the

organization and heaven forbid a youngster, was a bit too much for some people.

"But I was successfully elected and the rest is kind of history. So that's how I ended up going straight in at the top. But I've been in various leadership roles. I was in the military. I was in the Royal Navy. I went through

Britannia Royal Naval College, which is the U.K. naval academy. I've been in leadership roles my entire career in healthcare, in hospitals. I've been in very senior leadership roles in very

big hospitals at a very young age, in my early- and mid-20s. So I've been involved in these kinds of organizations and done transformational change, especially with a digital element for a long time.

"So that's how I've ended up here and subsequently been fortunate to be re-elected with the trust of the membership again. So we'll see where the future holds for Gordy, and how long I stay. I have goals that I set myself back in 2021 that I still haven't quite got to. So I'm

hoping there's more to do and I'm hoping that we can, I definitely don't want to leave the organization without seeing us return to a position of growth and having it set up to sustain for the future, and I'm not quite where I want it to be yet. So there's still more to come from Gordy. There's still more ideas we haven't got to yet.

"And there's, you know, the world changes all the time. So there'll be even more that I'll come up with, or that I have come up with already with the leadership team.

I told Gordy that I've seen a definite change in the NMRA, and that his energy and enthusiasm seem to be a large part of that.

"It seems like you're at the point now where you've kind of got the critical mass to get things really moving. And I hope to see things continue on this path."

"Thank you. I hope so, too. I really do. And hopefully you'll come to Trainfest and I'll get to see more model railroaders and they'll get to meet me."

I told him we would definitely be at Trainfest, as I couldn't imagine it happening without *Model Railroader* and the other Firecrown hobby brands being there.

"I will come and find you. I will be there. I would be coming to find you at your new office and finding a way to get you there, don't you worry."

"Yeah, we're only about 20 minutes from the Baird Center in downtown Milwaukee, so it's not that hard to get here. You can't use public transportation. You'll have to rent a car, but otherwise you can get here. But there's probably someone who would offer to give you a lift if you wanted one, especially if they're like, yeah, let's storm the offices of *Model Railroader* magazine with the NMRA president."

"Yeah, stranger things have happened." **MR**





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Wayne Wesolowski scratchbuilt an HO scale model of the Nickel Plate Road depot in Veedersburg, Ind., for *Model Railroader* Contributing Editor Tony Koester's St. Louis Division layout. The inset photo shows the prototype structure, which was recently restored inside and out. Model photo by Tony Koester, prototype photo by Steven L. Grigg



SCRATCHBUILD A STATION in HO

A longtime friend commissioned the Nickel Plate Road depot in Veedersburg, Ind.

By Wayne Wesolowski

Photos by the author unless noted

As a poor graduate student, I submitted a one-page article in 1969 to then *Railroad Model Craftsman* editor Tony Koester. A week later I received the equivalent of a modern text message: a postcard saying it would be published. The payment would mean extra gasoline and ice cream cones for my wife, Mary Cay, and me! I still have the framed postcard.

Included was a note, "I would like to hear from you if you have further ideas." My immediate positive reply was

followed by a four-page, handwritten letter from Tony mentoring me about model selection, photography, and artwork, among other items.

More than 180 bylines (and 55-plus years) later, I'm still working for Tony. This time he commissioned me to make an HO scale model of the Nickel Plate Road (NKP) depot at Veedersburg, Ind. The structure, built in 1903, served the NKP and predecessor and successor railroads until the line was abandoned in the late 1980s. Fortunately, the

depot wasn't demolished. Recent restoration efforts have turned it into an attractive community center, as seen above.

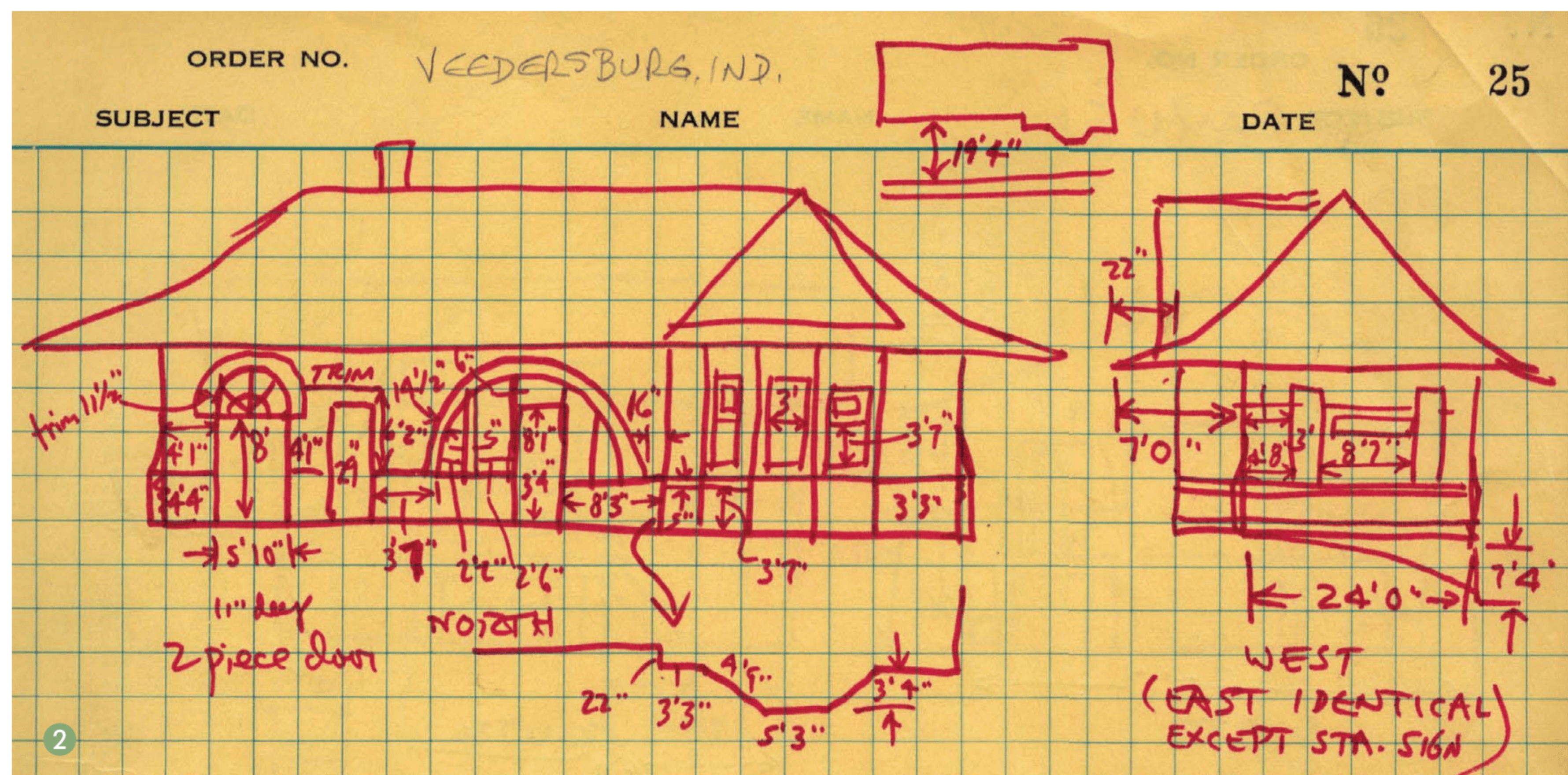
I was honored and delighted when Tony asked me to scratchbuild the depot. There was a tight deadline, and the foundation was in place on his NKP St. Louis Division layout, so the model had to fit perfectly.

Wayne Wesolowski lives in Tucson, Ariz. He has been a longtime contributor to Model Railroader magazine.

STUDYING THE PROTOTYPE

The small, rural Indiana depot offered some real modeling challenges. For example, both the roof and the clapboard siding are flared outward. The walls consist of three different treatments: brick, clapboard siding, and board-and-batten siding ①. The corners have no trim pieces, so the siding meets at a 45-degree edge. There's a wide roof overhang on all four sides with exposed rafter tails. Finally, the arched doorway and dormer windows aren't available commercially.

Fortunately, Tony provided excellent field notes ② and photos that give the basic dimension of all the wall sections and door and window openings, along with the shape and dimensions of the bay. Take a deep breath and let's dig in.



MAKING THE WALLS

Since each of the three wall materials is a band around the whole building, I began by slicing long strips on a precision miniature table saw. Each was cut to its different measured height. I had to subtract the thickness of the concrete cap on the brick wall.

For the siding materials, I used Evergreen Scale Models' clapboard (4051) and board-and-batten (4543) siding, both .040" thick. I used modern HO brick from The N Scale Architect (50001), which is .015" thick. I ripped a sheet of .025" plain styrene to the same width as the bricks without changing the saw fence location. This gave me a perfect backer for the brick and allowed it to match the siding in thickness. The concrete sill and the spacer between the clapboard and board-and-batten were left oversized. I sanded them down later.

The flare on the siding proved a real challenge. After several failures trying to build up a sloped section with thin pieces of styrene strips, I took a section of the clapboard siding to my mill and shaved off 75% of the material from the back **1**.



● MAKING THE WALLS (CONT'D)

Then I fashioned a styrene strip filler that would force the bottom of the siding out by about 5 scale inches. I glued this to the back of the siding and placed some weights on top ②.

All the corners, including the flared siding, had to be joined at 45 degrees because there's no trim. To accomplish this, I modified my large disc sander with a wide piece of soft wood, taped to the platform and sanded right up to the disc to make a zero-clearance guide.

The wall pieces are delicate and need to be supported during the sanding process. Without support, the styrene tends to chip, even if the sander is running at a slow speed. The flared siding will make a perfect 45-degree bevel if you sand it down far enough. A little bit of Elmer's Wood Filler can be used to hide small gaps at the corner ③.

The late Bob Kingsnorth's bevel tool would be a much better choice for making the 45-degree corners. You can read about it in the August 2023 issue of *Model Railroader*.

To assemble the walls, I started with the brick and worked up. Each type of material had to be fitted around windows, doors, and other openings. There's a tiny cap above the clapboard separating it from the board-and-batten material.

Be prepared to waste a few tries as so many parts have to fit perfectly. I cut slightly oversized pieces and used a fine file to make them fit. Work slowly and be patient during this part of the project.

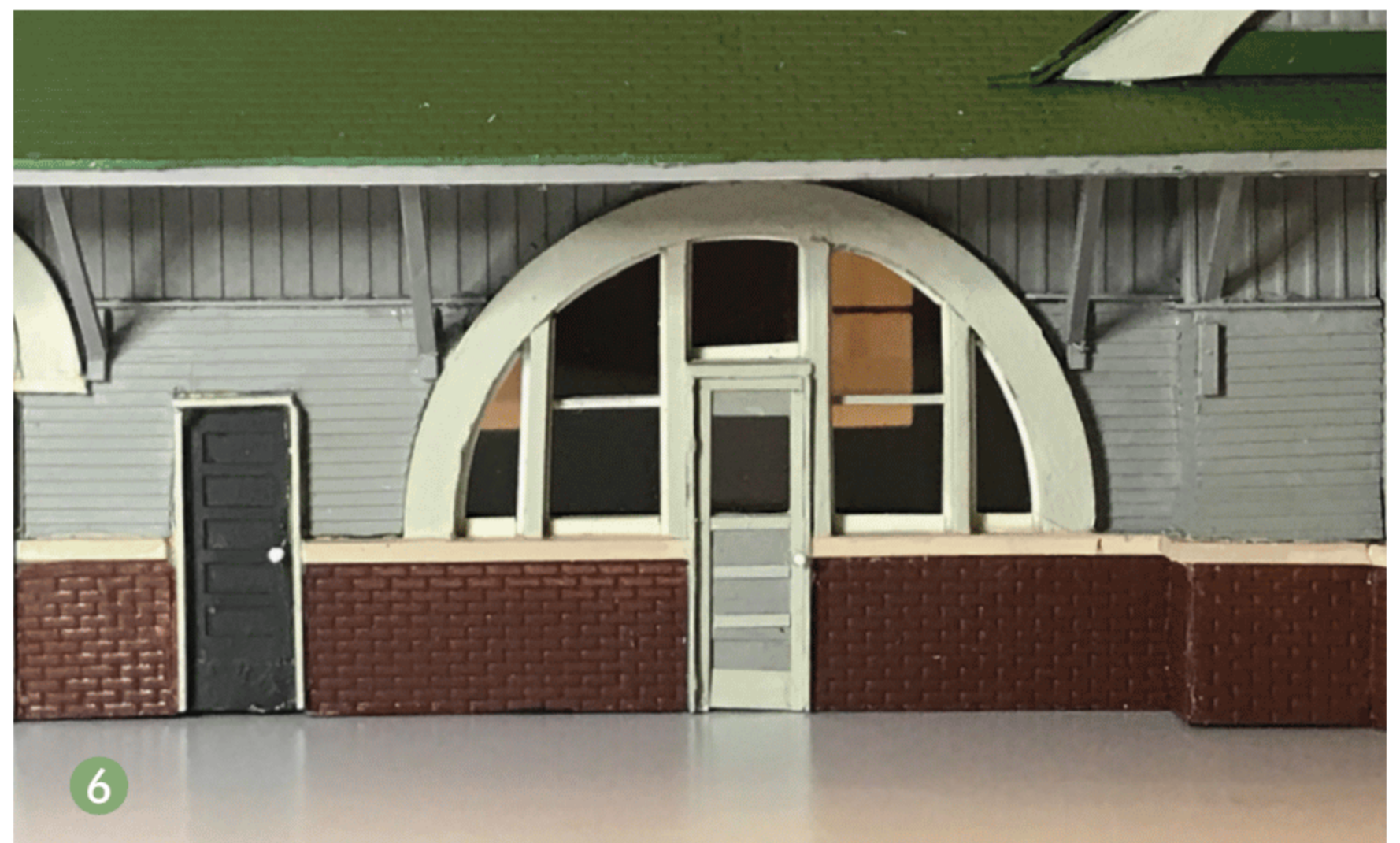
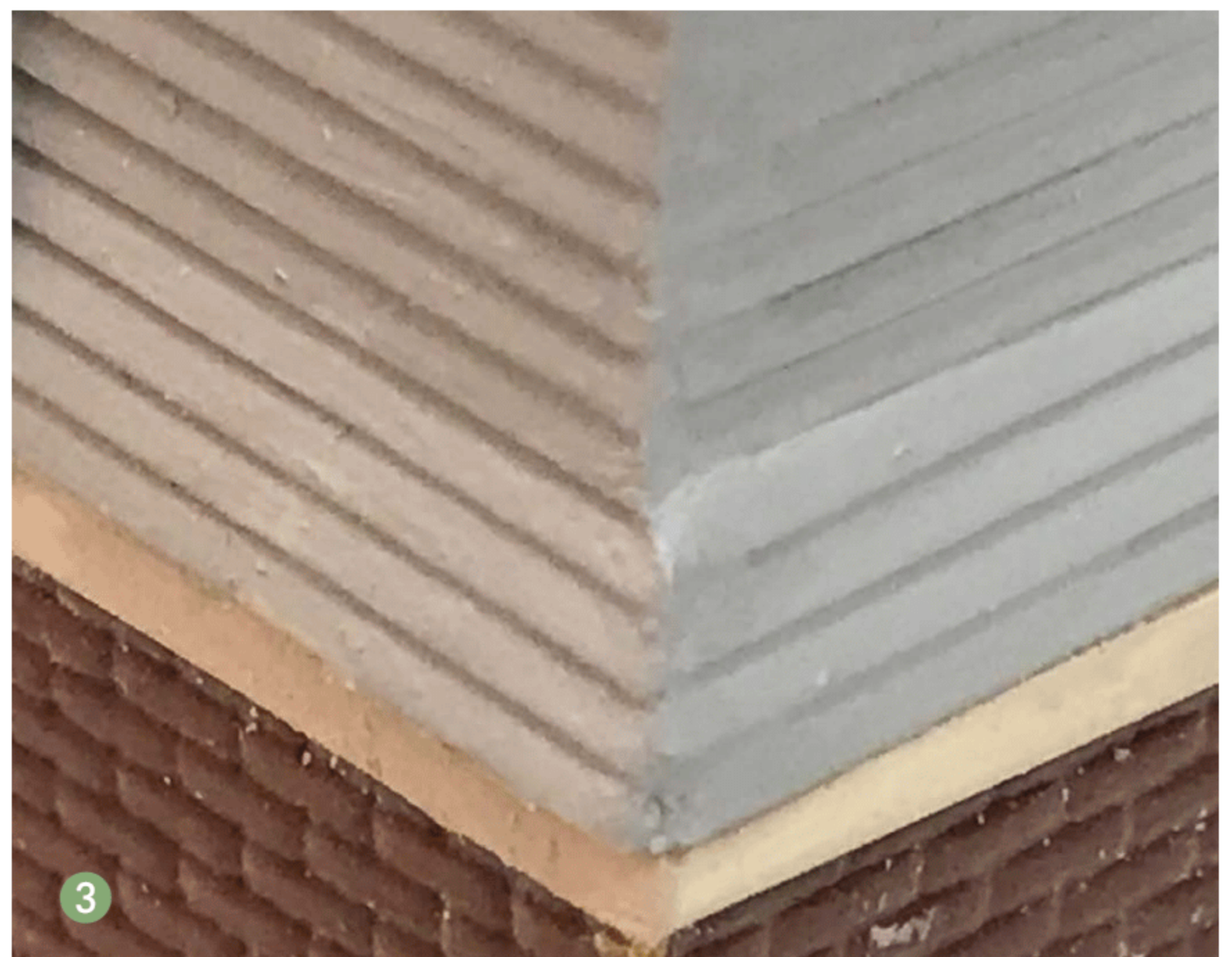
To model the large arch over the main door, I cut a thin slice off a piece of PVC Schedule 40 water pipe using a small, precision table saw (no longer available) ④. To make sure all of the parts fit, I assembled much of the building front over a prototype photo enlarged to HO scale ⑤. A portion of the completed front wall is shown in ⑥.

Because the wall is a uniform thickness, I added an extra sheet of .015" styrene to the back of each large, open area. This stabilized the entire wall. I allowed room for the plastic window glazing, which I added later.

Then I placed 6 x 6 bracing in the corners. I also braced the top and bottom, but inset it about 12 scale inches to allow for a floor and ceiling.

To keep the wall from "bleeding" light, I used a simple painting method. I first sprayed a coat of flat black primer on the interior walls. Once that dried, I applied a coat of a metallic paint (aluminum, copper, or chrome are all good choices). Finally, I sprayed a second coat of flat black.

A flashlight test showed no light leaking through. The metallic coating will reflect back rather than absorb, or pass, the light.



PAINTING THE DEPOT

Tony knew the colors he wanted and supplied me with the paint: Polly Scale Milwaukee Road Gray for the walls, Pactra Camouflage Gray for the trim, and Floquil Grimy Black for select doors. Floquil Depot Olive was used for the roof. Testor Corp. discontinued the Floquil, Pactra, and Polly Scale ranges. Similar colors are available from Rail Center, Revell, Tamiya, Vallejo, and other hobby paint manufacturers.

For the window glazing, I used .005" clear styrene cut oversize and attached from the back. I used Gem-Tac, a jewelers' form of canopy glue, to secure the glazing.

After I'd assembled the wall sections, I added the floor and some walls to block views across the building, which lacks a detailed interior. I also installed a ceiling to help with the roof shape.

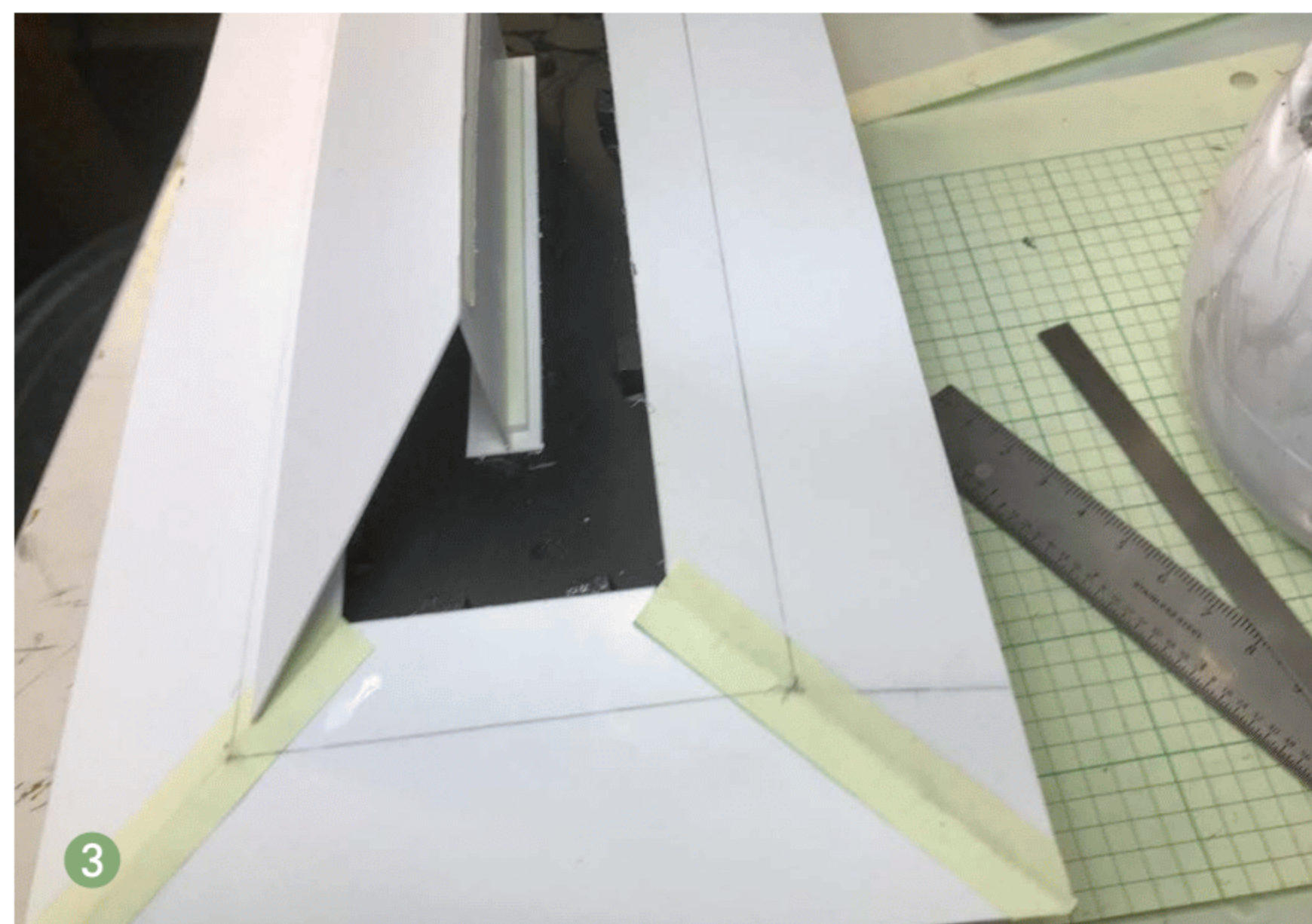
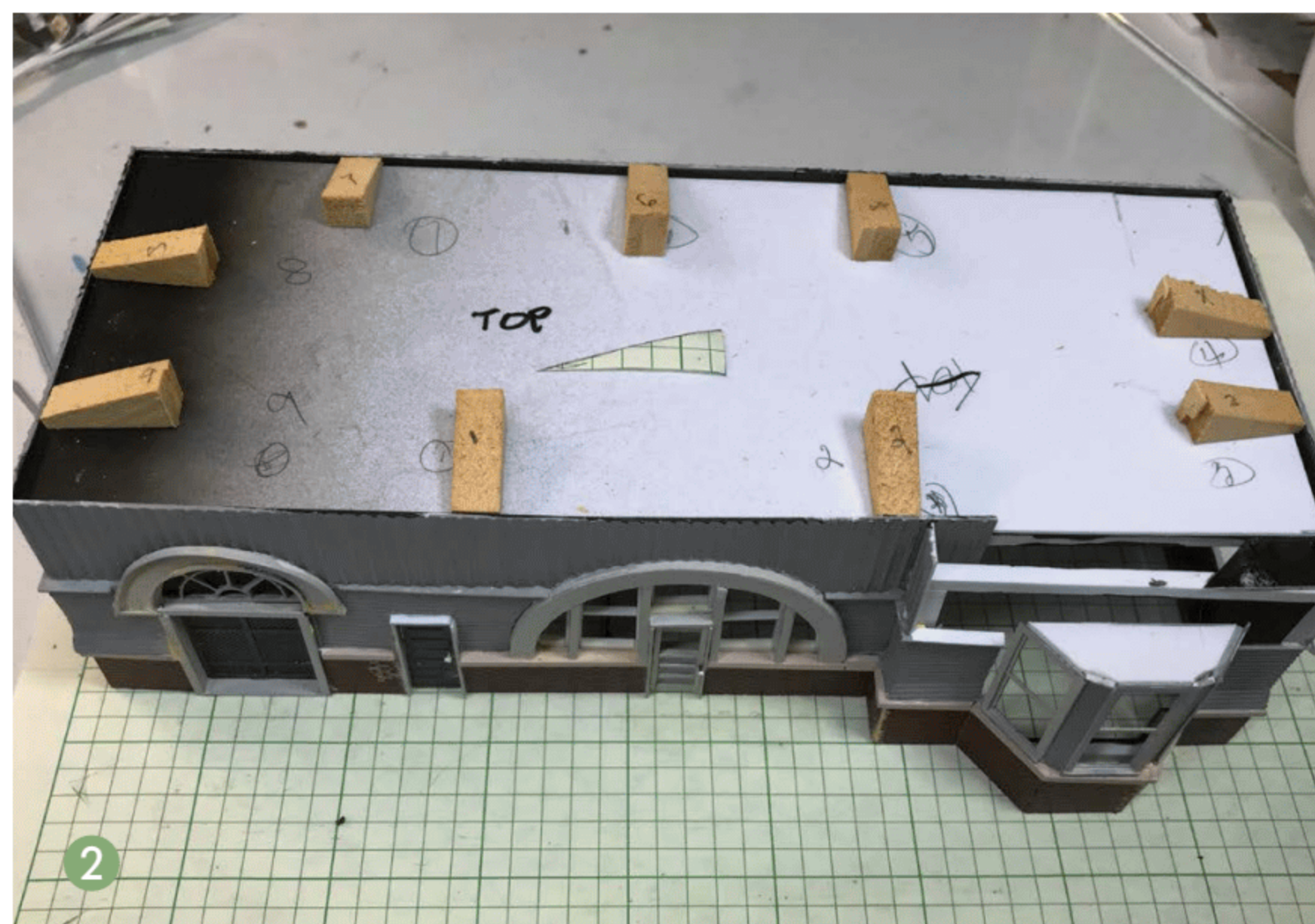


THE CHALLENGING ROOF

The roof was another challenge. The overhang needed to be the same on all sides, there are two distinct slopes that smoothly transition into each other, and the bottom of the overhang has rafter tail detail.

Using a prototype photograph, I determined the two linear slopes of the roof ①. Then, with small wood shims cut to the lower roof angle, I created the slope of the lower edge ②.

I glued a single piece of styrene down the middle of the ceiling to set the ridge line of the upper slope ③. Some of the .020" styrene underlayment can be seen in this image.



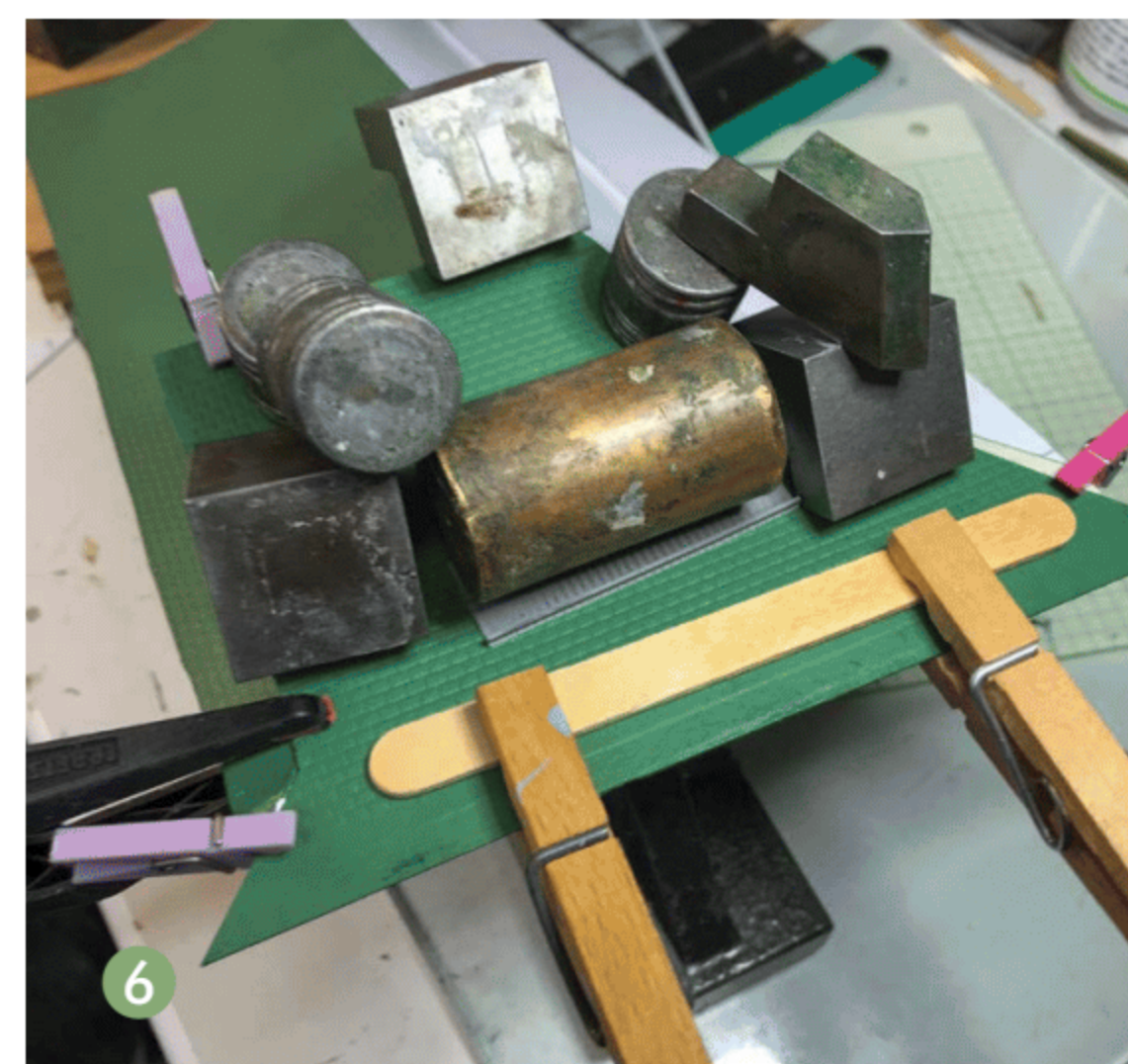
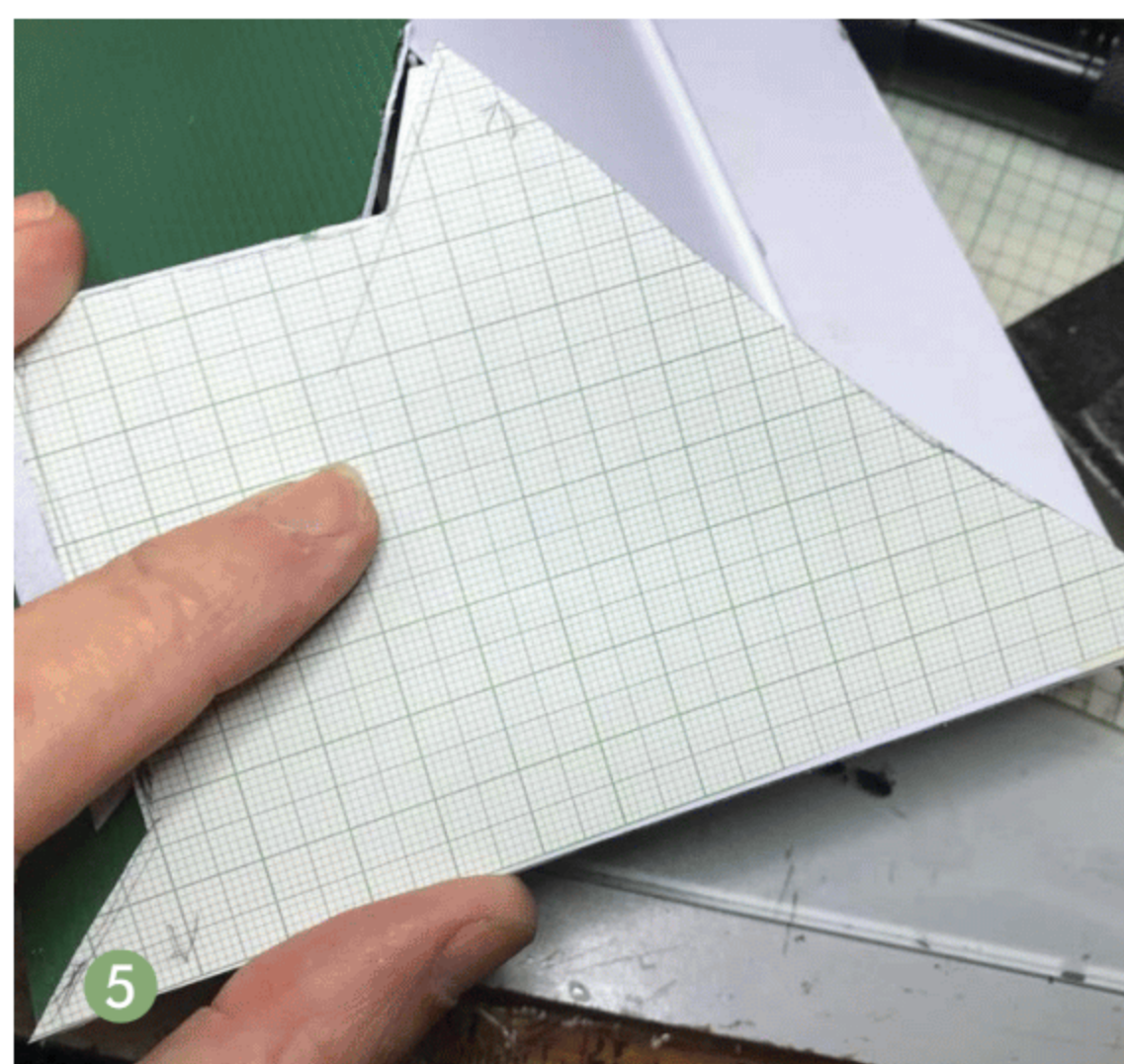
THE CHALLENGING ROOF (CONT'D)

To establish a uniform roof overhang, I glued a wood "foot" on the end of a metal square. All of the lower roof sections had to extend to this distance ④.

Next, I made graph paper templates for The N Scale Architect HO scale shingles. Fortunately, paper is cheap as it took several tries to perfect the templates. I then cut the shingles as one-piece overlays, leaving them slightly

oversized to account for the curve ⑤. I trimmed off the excess later.

I used epoxy to attach the shingles to the styrene underlayment. Weights, clamps, and clothespins forced the .015"-thick roofing material into a smooth curve while the epoxy cured. I finished the roof by adding ridge caps made from styrene strip ⑥.

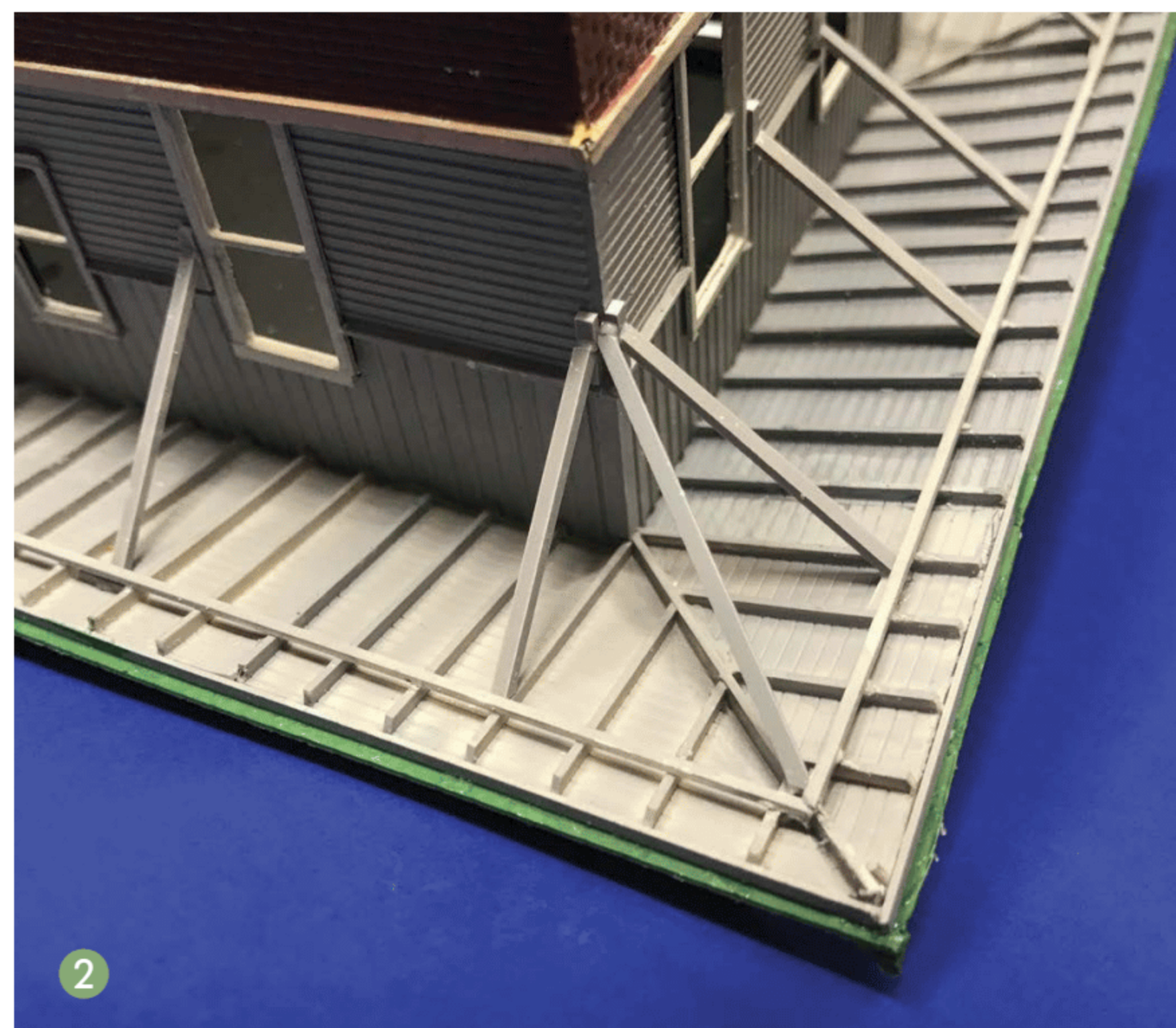
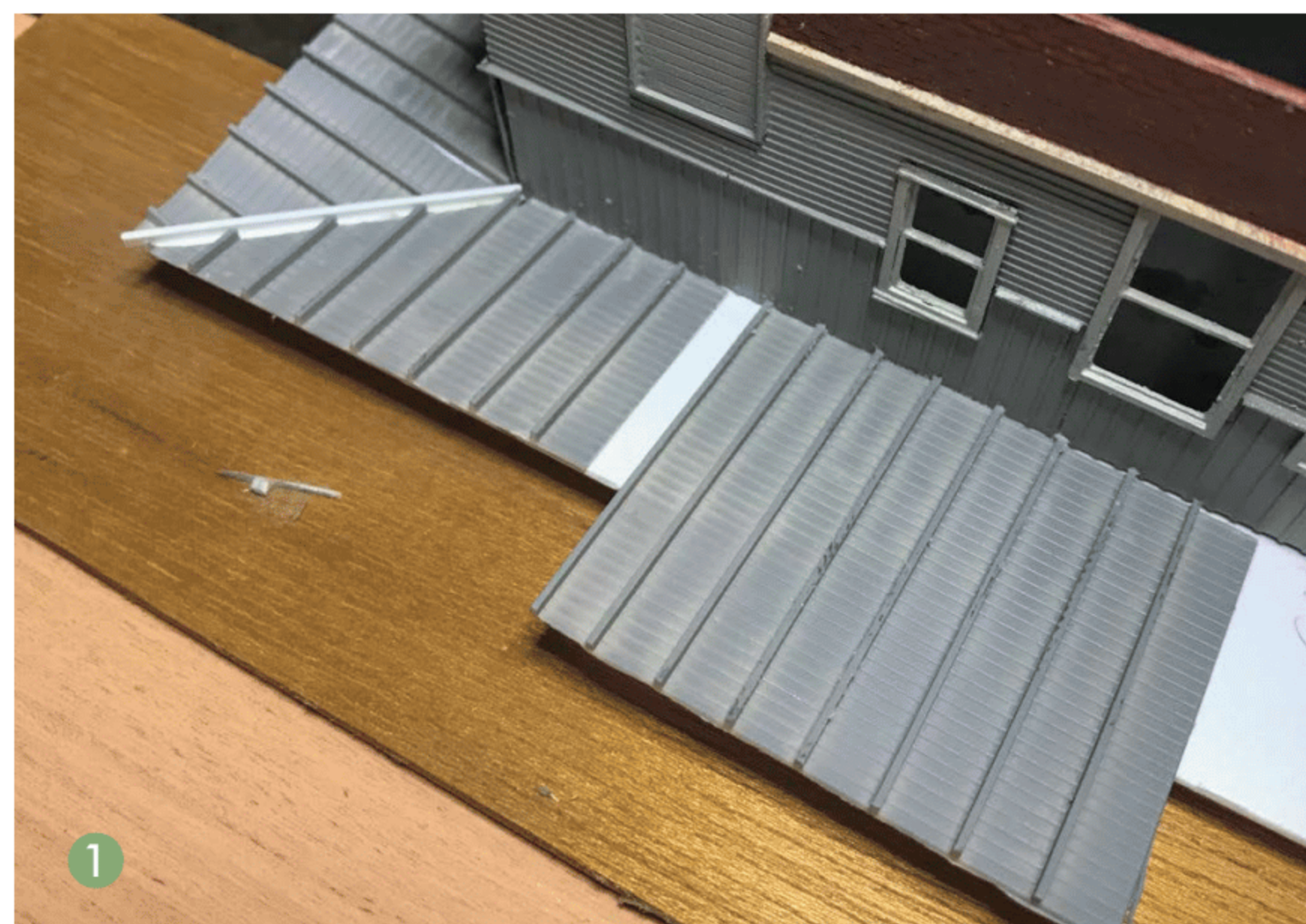


FINISHING TOUCHES

To simplify constructing the soffit (V-groove siding) and almost 100 rafter tails, I constructed a pattern. Then I made a rubber mold, cast copies in urethane, glued the sections in place, and trimmed off the excess ①. I made the roof support brackets from 2 x 3 styrene ②.

Instead of trying to cut the bottom of the chimney casting to match the roof angle, I made an opening in the roof and ran the chimney down to the ceiling ③. I used weights to hold it vertical while the glue dried.

Veedersburg is a handsome station that now graces Tony's NKP St. Louis Division layout. Even if you don't need to model this structure, hopefully you can put some of my techniques to use. [MR](#)



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A day with the

Follow along as No. 45 works between division points

By **Dan Munson** • Photos by the author



KC Local

1 Nickel Plate Road 2-8-2 No. 619 gallops along the high iron on a pleasant October day in 1954 in charge of No. 45, the westbound KC Local, operating between Frankfort, Ind., and Charleston, Ill., on Tony Koester's HO layout. Bringing up the rear is one of the line's 1000-series wood cabooses.





② Westbound train No. 49 off the Sandusky Division clatters across the Monon's Indianapolis line at Frankfort, Ind., with the last westbound cars that will make the cutoff time for today's KC Local. The brick building houses the Clover Leaf District superintendent's and dispatchers' offices.

It is the autumn of 1954, and my friend Doug Good and I have been hatching a plan to photograph the Nickel Plate Road's St. Louis Division, which is still in steam, during the busy fall grain rush. A letter in the mail from *Trains* magazine cemented our plans.

I had written *Trains* Editor David P. Morgan in the spring asking to do a photographic essay on the Nickel Plate Road around Frankfort, Ind., specifically the operation of its westbound local freight, No. 45, better known as the KC Local ①. Frankfort is about 25 miles southeast of Lafayette and a division point on the NKP. I received a letter back from Morgan, which said, "Contact the NKP superintendent's office at Frankfort yard. They will issue you authorization to be on the property. They are aware of your assignment to follow and photograph Train 45 westbound over the Third Subdivision of the St. Louis Division from Frankfort, Ind., to Charleston, Ill. Good hunting!"



③ As No. 49 prepares to enter the westbound yard at Frankfort behind Lima S-1 Berkshire 730, the power for today's Third Sub local No. 45, USRA light Mikado 619, takes a ride on the turntable to face west and take its turn to be serviced by the hostler.

Meeting the boss

The first order of business is to head to the division offices to meet with the division superintendent. Upon arrival, we are greeted by the general clerk and directed to the second floor, corner office. As we approach the door, we see shadows of figures moving back and forth through

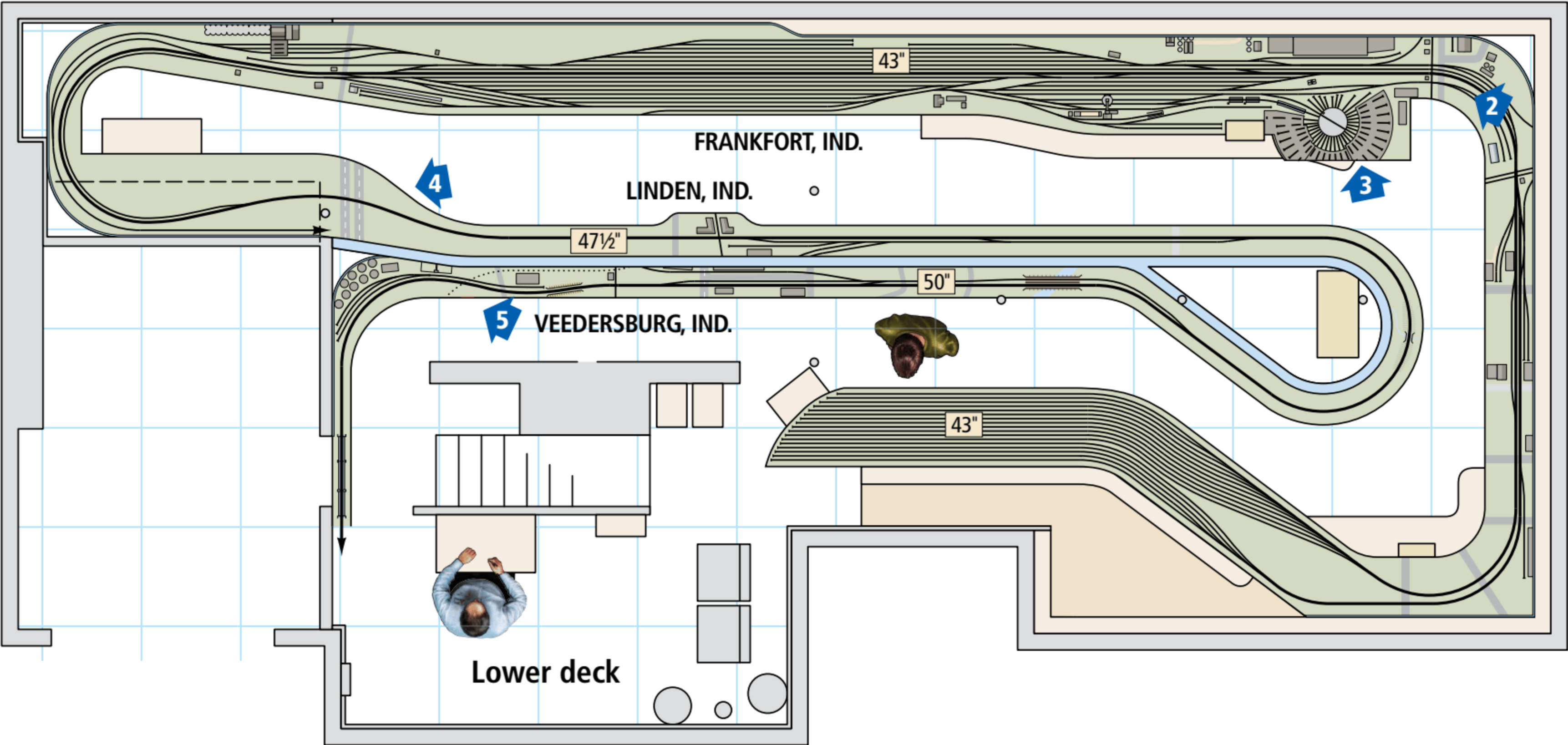
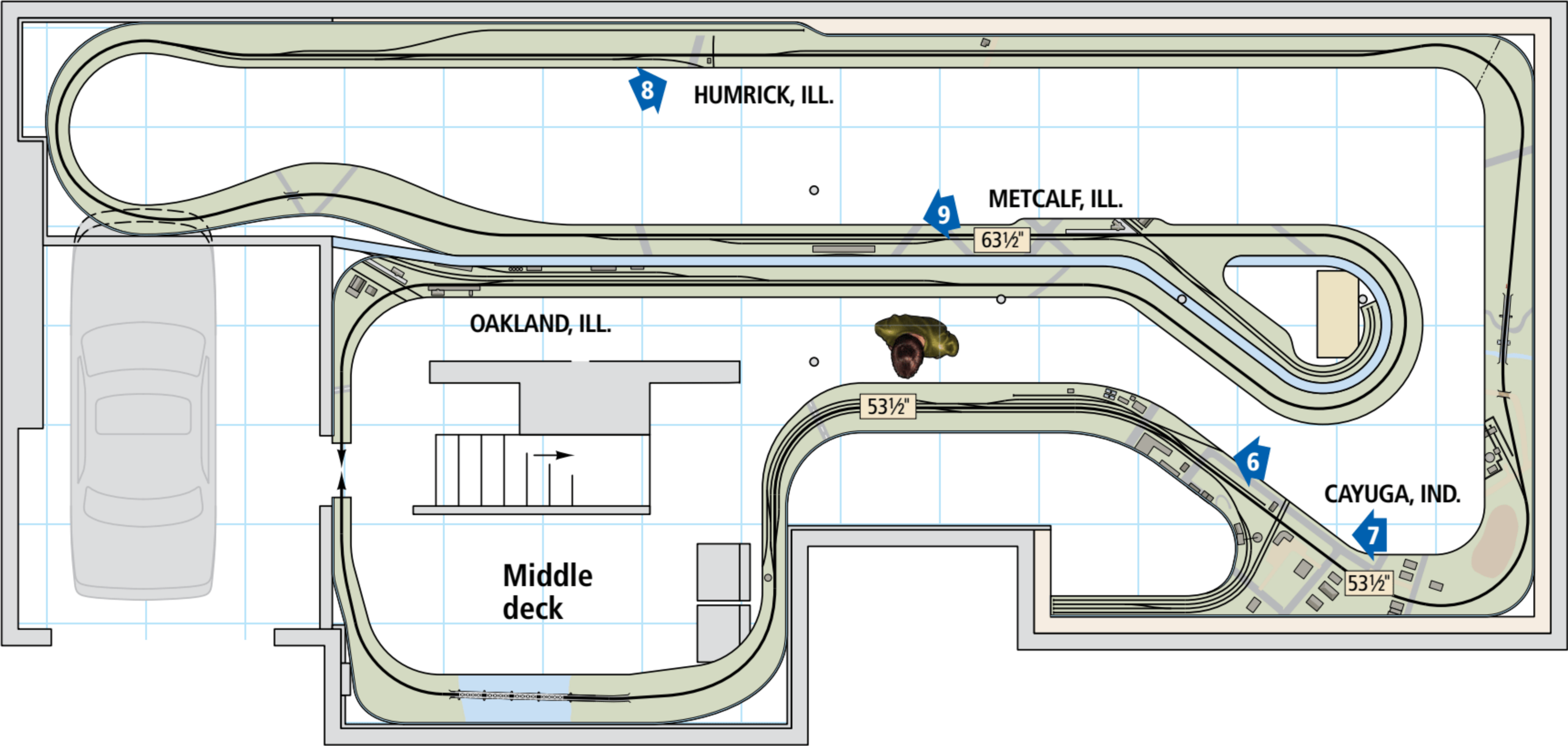
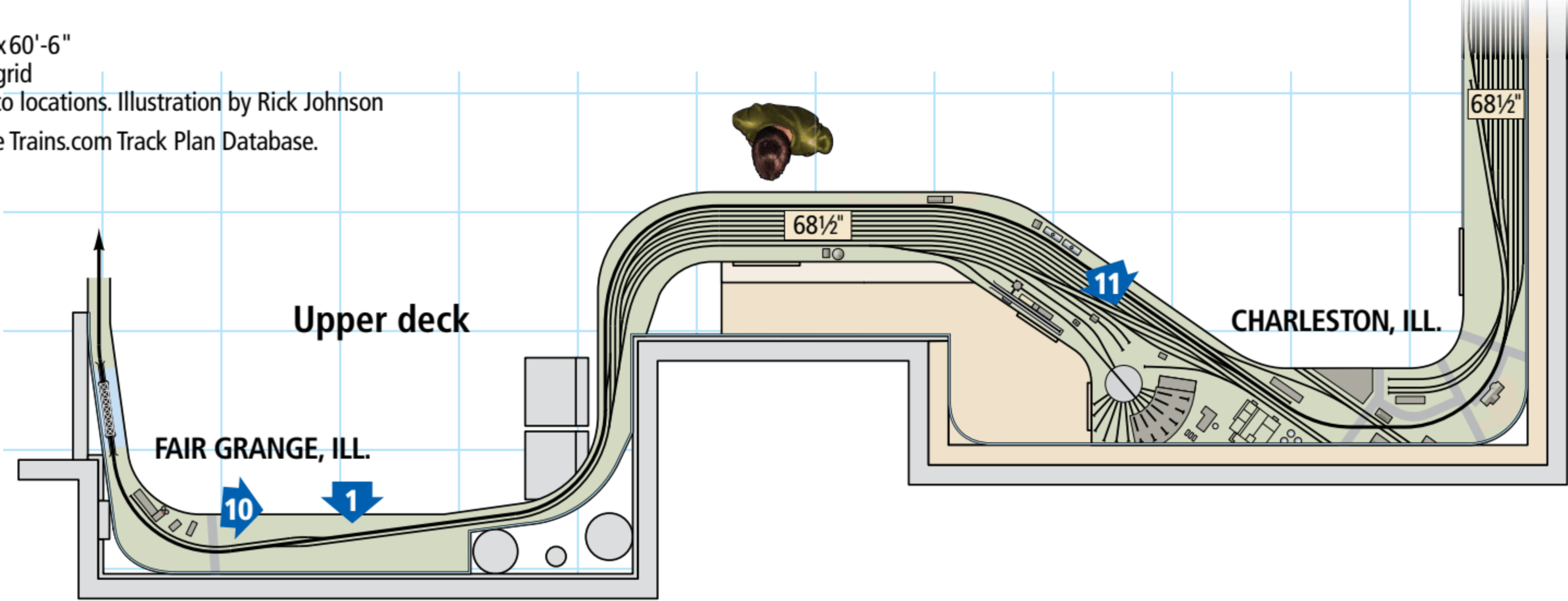
The layout at a glance

Name: Nickel Plate Road, St. Louis Division, Third Sub.
Scale: HO (1:87)
Size: 24'-6" x 60'-6"
Prototype: Nickel Plate Road
Locale: west-central Indiana, east-central Illinois
Era: fall 1954
Style: multi-deck
Mainline run: 500 feet
Minimum radius: 42"
Minimum turnout: No. 6 (yard), No. 8 (main)
Maximum grade: 1.5 percent
Benchwork: open grid;

plywood shelf
Height: 43" to 68½"
Roadbed: Homasote and Homabed
Track: Micro Engineering codes 55 and 70
Scenery: ¾" extruded-foam insulation board; plaster-cloth on screen
Backdrop: ⅛" tempered hardboard with digital images
Control: NCE radio Digital Command Control

The Nickel Plate's Third Sub

HO scale (1:87.1)
Room size: 24'-6" (main room) x 60'-6"
Scale of plan: 7/64" = 1'-0", 48" grid
Numbered arrows indicate photo locations. Illustration by Rick Johnson
+ Find more plans online in the Trains.com Track Plan Database.





④ One cow seems to be taking exception to having her morning grazing time interrupted by the KC Local as it passes through the tranquil Hoosier countryside and by the Daily farmstead.

⑤ Switching Wabash Clay Products at Veedersburg requires the use of a "handle" because of the poor condition of the track left over from when the Chicago, Attica & Southern switched the brickyard. Bricks for the original Indianapolis 500 race track were made at this industry.





the glazed window with the word “superintendent” painted across the top half, and we overhear two voices talking about a recent derailment. One of the voices is clearly not happy.

We knock and are told to come in by the voice that’s not happy. It’s Superintendent C.E. Yarnell. We introduce ourselves, and I offer the letter from Mr. Morgan to let him know who we are. He waves off the letter saying, “We knew you were coming,” and directs his clerk to get a letter for us. “This is all you need,” as he hands us an envelope. “My folks know you’re coming, but show them this letter if anyone questions you. I would appreciate copies of the photos you take,” he says as he hands me his card. Then he looks both of us straight into our eyes and

says, with his index finger pointing back and forth at us, “Be safe out there.”

We acknowledge as he returns his attention to stack of papers on his desk. We head out the door, through the hall, and down the stairs. Doug and I don’t talk, but we exchange looks like a couple of kids who know what they are getting for Christmas, and it’s pretty neat!

We ask the general clerk directions to the general yardmaster’s office, and he points us down the hall: “Second door on the right.” As we enter the office, the yardmaster glances up at us over the top of his glasses, then looks back down at his paperwork and says, “You the photographers?” We say yes. “The KC Local is being built on track four. The east-end yard engine will add a cut of cars off inbound No. 49 out of Lima. If you head out to the eastbound yard office just past the coal dock, you should be able to see all of this going on.” He says without ever looking up from his paperwork, shuffling it while he talks.

We walk briskly out of the two-story brick building and toward the nearby Monon crossing. Shortly, we hear a westbound train and soon watch the big Berkshire heading up No. 49 pound the diamond **2**. We photograph the train’s caboose as it rattles across the Monon.



Our next objective is the roundhouse and the east end of the yard. We follow our instructions from the Superintendent and check in at the roundhouse foreman’s office. He is a short, stocky man named Dale Moses, with forearms like tree trunks who has obviously spent a lot of time handling heavy wrenches on steam locomotives. He comes off a bit gruff as we walk in, but then seems to soften up a bit after we tell him what we’re doing and present our credentials from Mr. Yarnell. We say we would like to get a photo from on top of the power plant.

He summons one of his assistants, Sam, and tells him to take us to the roof of the power plant. We tell Sam we would like to get a photo of No. 45’s power on the turntable from the roof. He asks us to wait outside the roundhouse and goes inside. Sam comes back quickly and says, “We’re bringing out No. 45’s engine right now. Which way would you like it facing?” We tell him south would be best.

As we arrive on the roof, No. 619, a USRA light Mikado (2-8-2) has just finished pulling onto the turntable, and the inside hostler turns it toward the south, then stops the turntable in a perfect position **3**. We take our photos and wave to the hostler, who then spots the engine on the ready track,

6 The KC Local crosses Division Street in Cayuga, Ind., as it prepares to stop at the joint NKP-C&EI depot to unload packages, then work Thompson’s Elevator, Jenkin’s concrete tile plant, the Standard Oil dealer, and Cayuga Brick Corp.

where the outside hostler will top it off before the road crew picks it up and runs it down to the west end of the westbound yard.

We finish up and walk back down to our car. Sam hands us his card and asks us to send him some photos. We agree, shake hands, and head to the west end of the Frankfort yard. Doug comments on how great it is to meet friendly railroaders.

We roll up on the county road that crosses the NKP at the west end of yard. The NKP has an ice house and two tracks for icing reefer cars, as well as other support buildings and the single-story WY Tower. I snap some photographs and quickly pile back in the car.

The chase is on!

We head out on Indiana State Road 28 westbound and are able to get ahead of the train, since it had to pull slowly out of the yard. We set up for the next shot just west of Jefferson, Ind., by a sweeping curve next to farm **4**. Most of the cows in the field



7 As the Chicago & Eastern Illinois crew moves boxcars loaded with soybeans over to the interchange track for the NKP to pick up, the KC Local sets out some empty C&EI hoppers. The depot serves both railroads.

adjacent to the tracks must be used to the trains, as they barely acknowledge the KC Local roaring by.

We quickly jump back into the car with Doug driving so I can try to get some pace shots, as Highway 28 parallels the NKP for a short time. We all hope the state and local authorities aren't on 28 today, as we are exceeding the posted speed limits.

We catch the caboose just outside of Fickle and race up to the head end as I'm taking photos of the train. I get a couple of shots the Mikado high stepping down the main line **1**. We try to race ahead to get a shot at the U.S. 52 crossing but can't make it.

Now Doug's train-chasing skills will be put to the test. The NKP cuts southwest most of the way from Frankfort to Charleston, Ill., while we have to run south or west on a grid-like network of roads. Rather than trust the gravel county roads, we decide to head west on Highway 28 and then cut back south on U.S. 231 into Linden.

As we roll into town, we see a headlight to the east. We beat the local into Linden! We head for the south side of the tracks and set up for a broad-side shot with the depot. The train rolls to a stop at the depot just short of the diamond crossing with the Monon's line to Indianapolis.

We walk up to the head brakeman between moves and introduce ourselves. "We heard you would be following us today," he says. "The conductor is wondering whether you guys are trying to qualify for the 500!" referencing the Indianapolis 500 race, since Doug was able to keep ahead of them. We all get a laugh out of that comment. He lets us know where all their work is for the day and tells us we should probably start heading west to keep ahead of them. Back to the car.

As we crisscross the Indiana countryside, we come across a nice curve in the main west of Linden. We decide to test Doug's driving skills again and wait for the train here and then race ahead to Veedersburg, the next work for No. 45.

At Veedersburg, the NKP crosses Coal Creek on a wood trestle, then the Peoria & Eastern, a subsidiary of the New York Central. The NKP also serves several local

industries here. One of the larger ones is Wabash Clay Products, the brickyard where the pavers for the Indy 500 track were made. No. 45 has to make a runaround move here to serve them, and we get a shot of the Mikado shoving cars into the brickyard **5**.

We wave to the crew and head toward Cayuga. We figure we should be able to keep ahead of them, since they still have to shove back onto their train and do an air test. It's another round of grid pattern driving to keep ahead of No. 45, plus we need to get some gas at Cayuga.

We cross the Nickel Plate Road at Lodi, Ind., on Highway 234, park the car, and scramble over to the western side of the NKP's Wabash River bridge, a series of Warren through trusses. While the Mike stops for water, we puff and pant back to the car and head into town to gas up and get ice cold bottles of Nehi orange pop at Julick's Sunoco station on Division Street **6**.

We then pull up to the joint L-shaped brick depot at the diamonds just a block away where the NKP crosses the Chicago & Eastern Illinois double-track Chicago to Evansville, Ind., main line. Doug runs in to check with the C&EI's station agent to



see whether anything is coming. He comes running out, yelling, "Their north local is on the bell!"

We quickly cross over the NKP main see the north local coming in on the northbound track. Good thing we are on the west side of the mains. We get a shot of the C&EI local hanging over the NKP diamonds **7**. The C&EI local works Thompson's grain elevator and the interchange with the NKP with its rear end still blocking the NKP. As we look east, we see No. 45 roll to a stop short of the red-over-red absolute home signal for the diamonds.

As I walk back toward



Doug, tower operator Bill Schwab calls to me from his second-story door. “Are you the photographers they told us about?” he asks. “Yes, sir,” I reply. “Come on up,” he says. He lets us know that the C&EI will have No. 45 blocked for a spell, but No. 45 can still complete most of its local work while waiting. He says it’s pretty regular that these two local trains meet here and battle over time on the diamonds. He offers us a cup of coffee, which Doug and I accept since it was a short night for all of us.

We notice a young boy is already seated in the tower and ask Mr. Schwab if that’s

his son. “No, this is Tony Koester,” he replies. “His dad runs the brickyard just west of town, and Tony likes trains too. He, um, helps me out when he has time. My daughter, Charlotte, was the Koesters’ first babysitter when they moved here from Iowa in 1951.” We shake hands with the budding crewcut railfan.

Mr. Schwab suggests we go to the bridge over the Little Vermilion River near the Illinois state line for a photo. He draws us a rough map on how to get there. We thank him, get a photo of him high-balling the local’s conductor as it starts the climb up notorious Cayuga Hill, and head

out, following his directions. We never would have known about or found it without his tip and map.

The bridge is about 4 miles southwest of Cayuga. Most of our chase has been on prairie land, so it’s nice to find this point on the railroad where a river has carved out part of the terrain. While waiting for the train, we grab a quick catnap before No. 45’s whistle lets us know the local is approaching.

“He isn’t going that fast over the bridge. Maybe he’s getting held up at Humrick?” Doug wonders aloud. But The KC Local is also battling the stiff westbound gradient out of the Wabash Valley and a

8 The KC Local holed up at Humrick, Ill., for eastbound through freight No. 48, due here at 12:22 p.m. but running about an hour late. Operator Larry Ratcliffe had the local lined up and pulled the last levers as soon as the caboose was off the circuit.

number of S curves left over from the days when this was a 3-foot-gauge railroad. It’s a tough climb to Humrick, Ill., with plenty of rail burns from slipping drivers to prove it.

Welcome to Illinois

We leave Indiana just west of the bridge and roll into the Land of Lincoln. We keep to a



9 The local crew shoves empty 40-foot boxcars suitable for grain loading into the Metcalf Grain Elevator. Boxcars loaded with soybeans will be picked up by the next eastbound through freight and delivered to Swift in Frankfort.

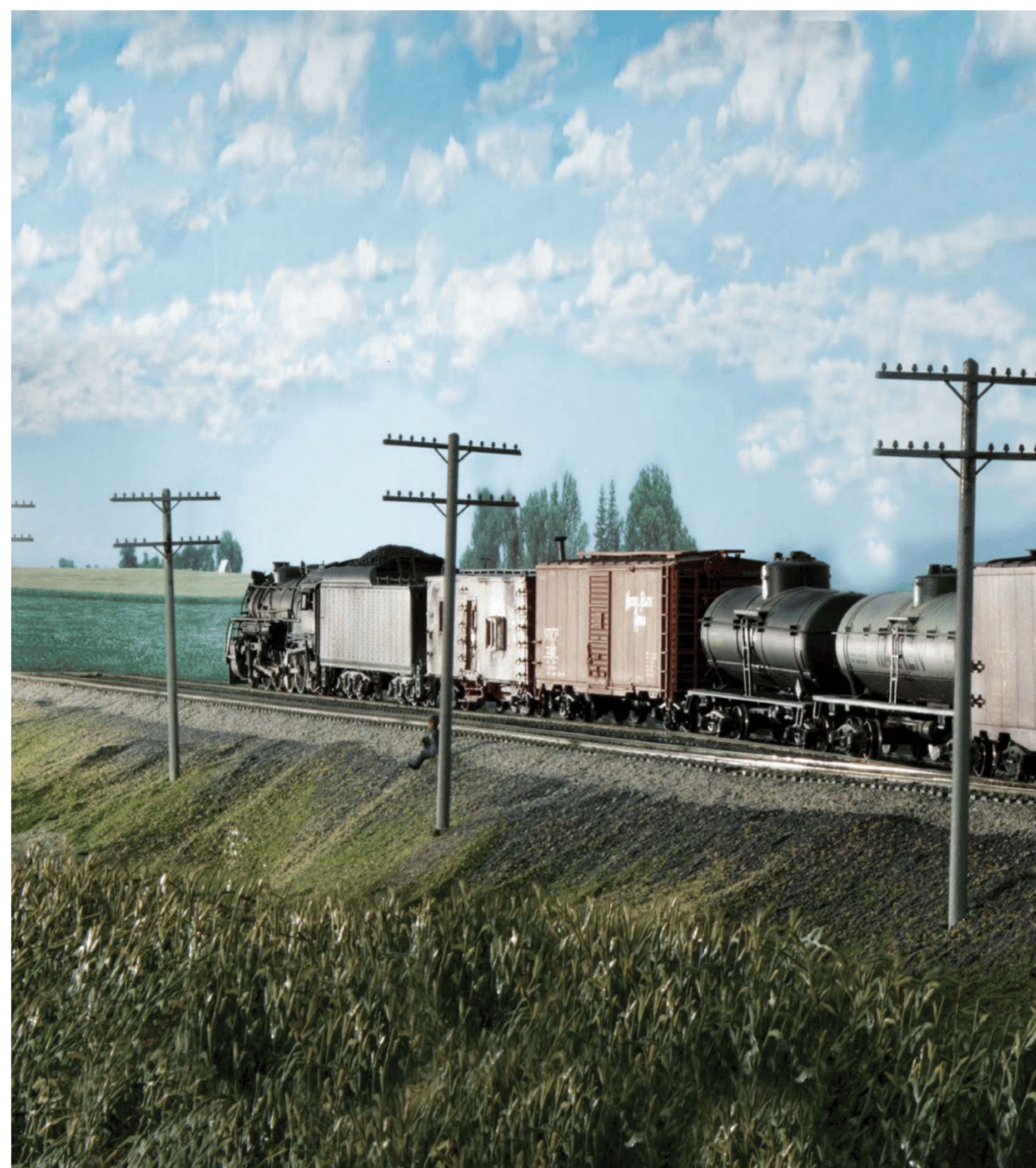
grid pattern of roads on the north side of the tracks as the NKP continues its southwardly trek toward St. Louis so we don't have to wait to cross the tracks behind No. 45.

As we roll up to Humrick Tower, which is located in a field just west of the very small village, we see a headlight to the west. No. 45 gets put in the siding to meet superior-by-direction No. 48, **8**. "They're carded to meet at Metcalf, but as usual No. 45 is a little behind today," tower operator Larry Ratcliffe tells us after both trains clear the diamond. He points us down a railroad access road to photograph No. 45 switching out the

interchange tracks with the Milwaukee Road west of the tower. To me, the Milwaukee Road always seemed out of place in Illinois and Indiana, but "the Southeastern" is a primary source of coal for its steam fleet.

We roll into Metcalf just as No. 45 comes to a stop. Then they cut off the caboose and set off the remainder of their cars, all empty 40-foot boxcars, at the elevator **9**. A Baltimore & Ohio line between Indianapolis, Ind., and Springfield, Ill., crosses the NKP here. No. 45 will have to wait for a B&O local to clear the diamond before heading west as a caboose

10 Evening shadows have traded places with the morning shadows that greeted No. 45's crew when they went to work as the local swings into the yard lead at Charleston, Ill., and prepares to yard their train.





hop plus the rider car containing LCL and Railway Express Agency packages.

Next up is Oakland, Ill., where the NKP crosses a low-density Pennsylvania RR branch. We roll into town and find No. 45 sitting in front of the station and most of the crew out visiting with the agent on the platform. Today's train is short enough not to block any crossing while they are stopped. They

have some work here, picking up three cars from the elevators and petroleum dealers. We snap a few photographs, then head back to car so we can keep ahead of them.

We had hoped to get a photo of the trains crossing the Cloverleaf bridge over the Embarras (pronounced "ahm-braw") River between Oakland and Fair Grange, but it would have required us to hike into the shot.

We race up to the yard limit sign just north (railroad east) of Charleston, Ill., and get a going away shot of the local pulling into the yard east of this small Illinois city **10**. Back into the car — I'm driving now — and we race into town on the north-south highway that parallels the railroad along the west side, spot the brick "YD" two-story yard office, and figure the engine terminal has to be just ahead. I cut down a residential side street and pop out by the roundhouse and coal dock. Doug thinks I was just lucky; I claim railfan instincts.

No. 45's light Mike has cut off its train and is now chuffing toward the roundhouse. We snap photos of the locomotive pulling onto the turntable **11**. We meet the engineer, fireman, and head brakeman just outside the roundhouse. They asked whether they looked good in the photos and kid us more about Indy 500 driving. They

11 The Charleston hostler has filled the tender with coal and water, blown down the boiler, dumped the ash pan, banked the fire, and is taking the USRA light Mikado for a spin on the turntable. It will get a good inspection before heading back to Frankfort tomorrow morning on a through freight.

had a light workload today, so they were in a hurry to leave and enjoy the extra time away from the railroad before heading back home, probably on "Old Maude" — Second 98 — tomorrow. There is no east-bound local on the Third Sub.

Doug and I head for a local diner for a big meal, then drive over to the brick NKP depot near the Big Four crossing to wait for NKP No. 10 from St. Louis. We revisit the best parts of the day, make lists of folks we said we'd send photos to, and promise to keep in touch. The time passes quickly, and it's not long till we hear No. 10 coming down a narrow passage between industrial buildings, including Buster Brown Shoe Co., and residences right on time at 9:20 p.m. No. 10 will get to Frankfort in a little less than two-and-a-half hours, the same distance it took us and No. 45 to cover in a full day.

Doug and I overnight nearby, then head toward our respective homes with a sense of "mission accomplished" in hand. **MR**

The CN

A highly detailed HO scale model railroad scene. In the foreground, a CN train consisting of three red and black GP40-2 locomotives and several freight cars is crossing a black metal truss bridge over a blue river. The locomotives have "CN Central" and their numbers (9563, 9486, and a third partially visible) on them. The freight cars include a yellow one with "A" and "55" markings, and a red one with "CN" and "55" markings. In the background, a stone tunnel entrance is visible in a rocky cliff face. The surrounding landscape includes green grassy banks with small red flowers, a rocky riverbank, and evergreen trees on a distant hill.

1 A trio of former Canadian National GP40-2LWs have just exited Tunnel 4, and are crossing over the South Boo River bridge with their manifest in tow on Matt Gellings' HO scale CN Central model railroad.

Central



Skyscrapers and mountains coexist on this layout

By Dave Rickaby

Photos by the author

Matt Gellings is a masterful creator and builder of architectural wonderment, albeit, in HO scale. His former layout, the Soo Line Central, appeared in the December 2023 issue of *Model Railroader*. The layout featured many skyscrapers, all of which were scratchbuilt by Matt. After that article was published Matt tore down the layout, which had resided in his parents' basement. He and his wife moved to their new house in Fond du Lac, Wis., which had a much bigger basement and more opportunity for Matt to build a larger layout, and yes, more of those marvelous structures!

The journey continues

As a young boy, Matt was given a train set for Christmas. But he knew right away that he wanted more track to expand it, and pretty soon Matt was building his first layout. He chose to build an over and under layout design he had seen in a track plan book. Reminiscing back on that first model railroad, Matt listed it as a disastrous effort.

That didn't deter him from learning or building future layouts. As a young man he built a model railroad that was loosely based on Malcolm Furlow's Carbondale Central that was featured in the January, February, and March 1988 issues of MR. That was Matt's first layout that featured skyscrapers, although at that time he built them from readily available plastic kits, many of which he kitbashed. He and that layout were featured in a local newspaper



② It's early evening and the shadows are starting to form in the canyons of the Kariboo Mountain Range, as CN Central No. 2943 pokes its train out of

article. Matt proudly displays a framed copy of the story in his layout room. To this day, he credits Malcolm Furlow as his inspiration to extend his layouts vertically. On Matt's present model railroad he features both urban and mountainous canyons. The eye of the viewer has more options than just seeing the trains running horizontally because your eyes are forced to look up as well.

The layout

Matt and his family moved into their present home in 2019. Shortly thereafter, he proceeded to build the HO scale CN Central.

Because he was constructing a fictional setting, he felt that although he really liked the Canadian National, he also wanted to represent other roads. This led him to adopt the Central part of his railroad's name, which related to his former layout's name. To this end, he designed his own logo in a CAD program and had decals produced by Circus City Decals.

Matt had a desire to build a much bigger layout this time around. Whereas the Soo Line Central layout was 8 x 22 feet, this one comes in at 17 x 31 feet.



③ Two former Soo Line SD40-2s, No. 6604 and No. 6603, now lettered for the CN Central, are passing the East End engine facility at the Metropolitan City Yard.

This gave him the opportunity to greatly expand his metropolitan, Chicago-like city (aptly named Metropolitan City), which in turn enabled him to add 40 more scratchbuilt skyscrapers. Along with this he chose to add another peninsula with a Canadian-esque mountain

range, complete with seven tunnels, nine high bridges, and beautiful gorges carved out by rivers and lakes.

In the design stage of the CN Central Matt didn't know if he wanted to just build a very large city layout or add a mountain range. He didn't have the

The layout at a glance

Name: The CN Central RR

Scale: HO (1:87.1)

Size: 17'-6" x 31'-4"

Prototype: Canadian National, CN Central

Locale: Wisconsin and Canada

Era: 2010 to the Present

Style: island walkaround

Mainline run: 125'-6"

Minimum radius: 24"

Minimum turnout: No. 6

Maximum grade: none

Benchwork: Open grid box frame around door slabs, folding steel legs

Height: 36"

Roadbed: cork

Track: Atlas code 83 flextrack

Scenery: extruded-foam insulation board, construction paper, plaster board

Backdrop: 1/4" tempered hardboard between the city and mountains

Control: NCE ProCab, Wifi Trax, and JMRI Engine Driver Throttle (Engine Driver) app on cellphone

room for mountains at his parents' home and decided to go all in on the new layout. When he first started building the model railroad he admits that he really didn't know how to tackle building mountain scenery.

Matt has used about two-thirds of the buildings from his former Soo Line Central layout on the new model railroad. These buildings are 10 to 12 years old. Since he started work on the new layout, Matt has constructed an additional 40 new scratchbuilt structures, giving him a total of 69 buildings.

The layout is built as a free-standing, "U" shaped island walkaround design, with two peninsulas. The model railroad has a footprint of 17'-6" x 31'-4" with a zero gradient and has an elevation of 36" above the floor. The main line is 125'-6" long with a minimum radius of 24". The city features a double-track main line, which then drops to a single-track main line through the mountains. There is a large five-track yard, with a west and east engine facility on one side of the city.

There isn't any off-layout staging, and this yard acts very efficiently as open, visible staging. The end of the city peninsula and down the right side is where the railroad meets the water. Here you will see docks, many bridges, and water-borne shipping, including a carferry. Upon leaving the relative noise and commotion of the city, the trains pass

through the mountains, snaking their way through tunnels, over bridges, and past meadows, before returning to the city.

Most of the substructure of Matt's layout was built with hollow core doors, while some areas are sheets of plywood. He added 1 x 4 frames to the top of each of these pieces. He then installed three layers of extruded-foam insulation board on top of the frames to the track height,

two 2" layers and one 1" layer. The water is modeled on the base frame. The entire layout is supported by strong folding table legs. Matt had to saw the legs to the length desired and shimmed those that were cut a little too short.

All of the track on the layout is Atlas Model Railroad Co. code 83 flextrack. The turnouts are code 83 No. 6s and are manually operated with Caboose Industries ground throws.

The CN Central Railroad

HO scale (1:87.1)

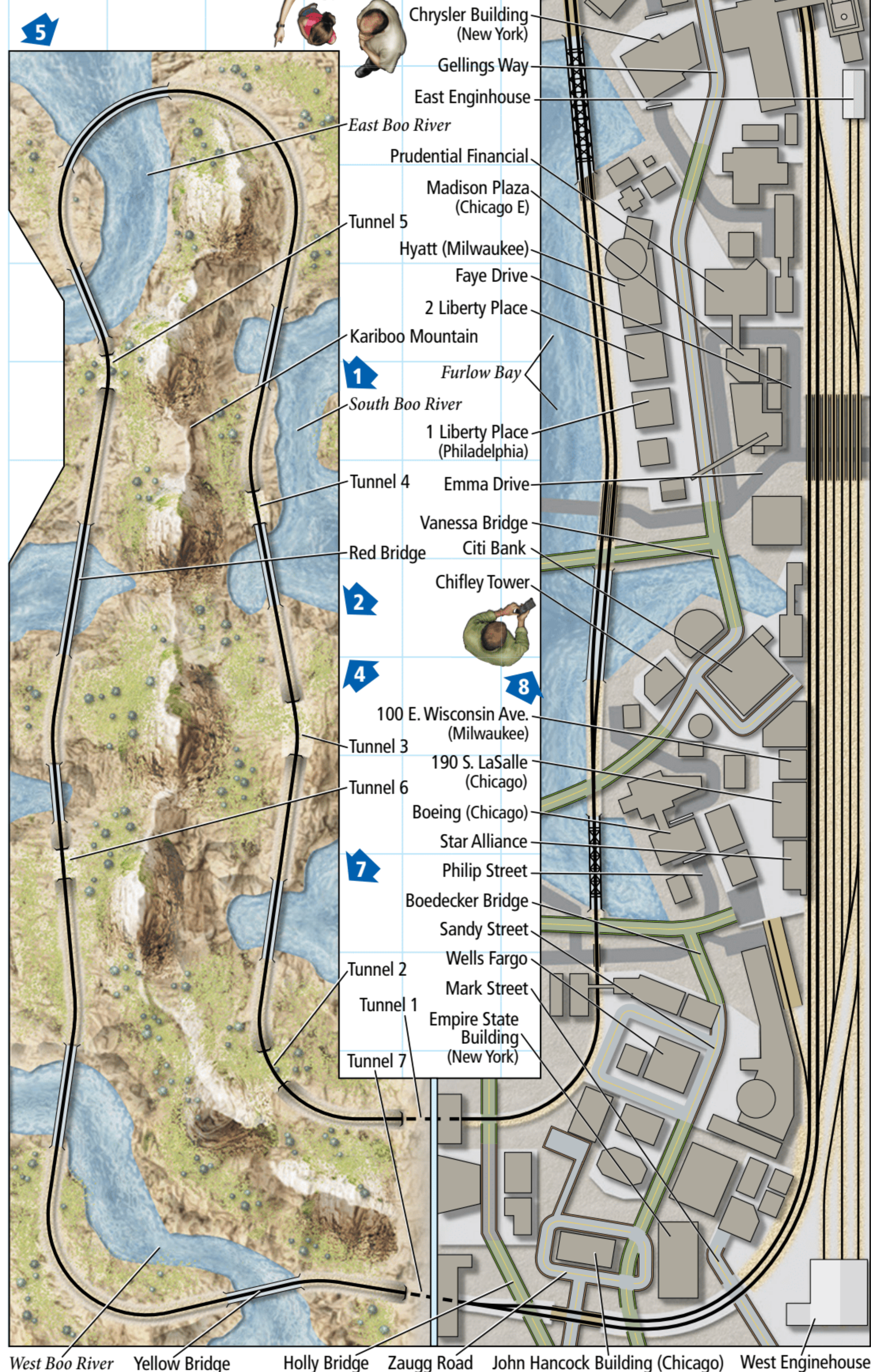
Room size: 17'-6" x 31'-4"

Scale of plan: 1/4" = 1'-0", 24" grid

Numbered arrows indicate photo locations

Illustration by Kellie Jaeger

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4 The CN Central Business Train stretches out along the South Boo River as it traverses Tunnel 4.



Motive power

What caused Matt to change the name of his railroad? On his former Soo Line Central layout, Matt had several Soo Line, Milwaukee Road (bandit patchout), Canadian National, and Wisconsin Central locomotives. The one problem he found was that his locomotives weren't equipped with stay alive capacitor technology as part of the Digital Command Control decoders. He sought to upgrade to locomotives that had stay alives already installed by the manufacturer. At this point, he divested himself of most of his old roster and decided to primarily use units lettered for Canadian National, plus CN-related locomotives such as the Grand Trunk Western, and former lease units that had been added to the fold.

This also forced Matt to model more of the present day. He kept a few Soo Line SD40-2s. He also purchased the newer Siemens SC44 Charger units for his Amtrak trains.

Matt's diesel fleet has locomotives from Athearn, Aurora Miniatures, Bachmann, Broadway Limited Imports, and ScaleTrains. All of the models have DCC, sound, and stay-alive capacitors. Most of his locomotives have either ESU LokSound or SoundTraxx Tsunami2 decoders in them. He programs his locomotives with JMRI Decoder Pro and an ESU LokSound programmer.

The trains are powered using an NCE Power Pro DCC system. Matt uses WifiTrax and the Engine Driver app on his cell phone to run his locomotives.

Rolling stock

Matt has a modest fleet of rolling stock that rounds out to about 120 freight and passenger cars. Manufacturers represented include Athearn, Tangent, ScaleTrains, Bachmann, Rapido and Walthers models. Most are weathered with water-mixable oil paints, which he bought at Michaels craft stores, and powders.

All of the cars with graffiti are each a unique piece of artwork as Matt hand-painted them. He considers them to be rolling canvasses. Matt used prototype photos in a book on railroad graffiti as a

5 As the rafters steer through the rapids of the East Boo River, Amtrak train No. 179 crosses the Boo Bridge high above them. This branch of the Boo River system is the most popular with the local rafters in the Kariboo Mountain Range.



guide. He found many examples of tagged cars that he was able to re-create in HO scale.

Mountain scenery

When he built his Kariboo Mountain range, Matt used 2"-thick extruded-foam board to create a skeletal framework to support his mountains. The open areas were filled in with balled construction paper. Over this, he laid pieces of used upholstery fabric dipped in a soupy mix of 20 minute Sheetrock plaster.

To create the ground cover, Matt applied Woodland Scenics static grass and flocking. He also turned to the company's scenic mats, which he tore or cut into pieces and applied in various areas, especially on the mountain side. In addition, Matt installed Woodland Scenics course ground foam and bushes.

Matt used latex rock molds from Woodland Scenics along with some large sheet molds, using Windex as his mold release agent. He poured a soupy mix of 5-minute Sheetrock plaster into the

molds and placed them on the sides of the mountain. Matt estimates that he used between 600 and 700 pounds of plaster. As you might imagine, there are hundreds of castings on the mountain.

Matt used multiple stains to color his rocks. He started by using a gray paint that almost had a darker mossy green color to it. First, he sprayed water on the rock surfaces. Then he dabbed the color in and sprayed it again, allowing the wash to flow down the rock faces, filling in and highlighting the cracks. Matt also used Burnt Umber, Burnt Sienna, Brown, Black, and Green.

When Matt was constructing the mountains, he built the tunnels as short bores in case there were derailments. If there were a derailment inside of a short bore, the offending rolling stock can be pulled clear and easily rerailed.

Matt used a few different products to create his water scenes. For the water areas around the city he used Realistic Water from Woodland Scenics. He painted the base a grayish blue color. Once the Realistic Water hardened, he

6 This inbound freight train has just passed a car ferry that is being led to its berth by a tug boat. A lot of waterborne traffic serves Metropolitan City.

brushed on gloss Mod Podge to simulate a rippled, sudsy surface. To create the Boo rivers, he used Alumilite Amazing Clear casting resin, which allows you to pour $\frac{3}{8}$ "-thick layers at a time. Matt first painted the bottoms, then added pea gravel and rocks. He slightly tinted the resin as well.

The bulk of the trees on Matt's layout are from Trees by Rose. Rose Tolley, who resides in Madison, Wis., hand crafts and sells trees at model train shows. The rest are a mix of Grand Central Gems and Bachmann; some came from the Kettle Moraine Ballast Scorcher's Model Railroad Club in West Bend, Wis. Matt is a member of the group.

Buildings and bridges

Matt started building scale skyscraper buildings in 2012 out of Plexiglas. He originally used modelers tape to create



each line on the sides of the buildings, which he found to be very intricate work and time-consuming.

Matt has a degree in mechanical design and is comfortable using CAD. He decided he would try to draw the sides and additional pieces of the structures in Turbo CAD, a 3D software, and print them in color on his HP Design Jet T120 24" printer. Matt has since had to replace that printer with a HP Design Jet T100 24" printer, which he protects with a cover he sewed to keep out dust.

The paper he used came in large rolls and had a high-grade gloss finish. Though most would use a flat finish, Matt thought he could better represent the reflections from the windows with gloss paper.

Turning away from the Plexiglas structures, Matt began creating the physical shape of each building by cutting 1/2" foam core pieces and gluing them together with Loctite All Purpose Power Grab to form the boxes, as he refers to the core sections of the models.

Matt purchased a large mat board cutter. The images of the sides from the printer were glued to mounting board, which was then cut out with the mat board cutter. The cutting process is very tedious because the cuts have to be exactly on the line and the corners all have to be beveled. Matt started out building smaller structures to see if his methodology was correct.

After some trial and error he realized that spraying the back of the printed image and the front of the mounting board with 3M Scotch-brand Photo Mount was the best approach. The foam core boxes are not created until after the printed building drawings are mounted and cut off with the mat board cutter. The pieces are then glued to the foam core substructure.

As on the former layout, with skyscrapers the sky is the limit. In Matt's parents' basement (the location of the previous layout), the ceiling was the limit, which caused him to build the structures to more of an N scale height. Some of his buildings took one to two

7 The CN Central business train, with GE ES44AC No. 2943 and ET44AC No. 3165, has just emerged from Tunnel 2 in the Kariboo Mountain Range on the mountainous half of the layout.

months to build. His Chrysler Building has over 80 pieces in its spire alone! Matt takes his time because he wants to get it right. He enjoys the intricate detail, and loves the reactions from viewers who see the buildings for the first time.

Since Matt's current layout is in a taller basement, it has allowed him to expand vertically. The tallest structure, the Empire State Building, stands a little more than 4 feet tall and has King Kong on top of it.

Matt now uses a Mod Podge matte sealant spray on the exteriors of his buildings to cut down on the glare from the room lights. The clear finish gives the buildings a little bit of a faded and weathered look. The radio towers on top of the structures were made from the supports for water towers. He bought these at model train shows already assembled and thought they looked

right. All he had to do was to remove the tanks from the supports.

To re-create the rusted look found on many full-size bridges, Matt first painted them with a can of black wrought iron spray paint. After the paint had dried, he applied an orange wash to the bridges. The wash dried to a slightly muted color. Then he finished the bridges by randomly applying an orange powder.

Backdrop substitute

Since Matt built a walkaround island layout, he didn't have to use a backdrop. The only portion of the model railroad that has a backdrop is the transition piece of 1/4" tempered hardboard that separates the city from the mountains.

Matt didn't feel the need to install a backdrop on the city portion of layout because the skyscrapers would act as one. You can't see a train on the other side of the layout from your vantage point with the exception of being able to look down the streets and seeing them at a grade crossing. This, in effect, forces visitors and operators to follow the trains. Even though the model railroad was built as a continuous run around the perimeter of the structures you still have the illusion of distance.

Matt also used 1/4" tempered hardboard for the fascia. To keep viewers and operators focused on the model railroad, he painted it black. The entire layout is adorned with a matching black pleated skirting that is held on by hook-and-loop fasteners. The layout space is illuminated by 26 4-foot light-emitting diode tubes.

A railfan's layout

Unlike many other model railroads you see in the hobby press, Matt's layout was not built for operations. In fact, he can only run one main line train at a time. Rather, his model railroad was built as a railfan's layout to watch trains run while being dwarfed by skyscrapers and tall mountains.

Matt enjoys hosting annual open houses. He advertises the events on his CN Central Facebook page and welcomes people to follow and like the page. Matt regularly posts photos of the model railroad on the social media site.

He'll also host people who want to see the CN Central during other parts of the year. The layout has been open for tours during the National Model Railroad Association Winnebago Division Fall Meet. Check the division's website for more information.



8 A manifest freight takes the siding along the harbor on Furlow Bay at Metropolitan City. At left, the crew and passengers of the business train sit and wait for the main line ahead to clear.

Thinking outside the box

Matt always knew he was going to build another layout when he moved into his new home. His motivating factor for constructing the CN Central was to build a layout that would be different than any built before. Matt feels he has achieved that goal. All he wanted to do was build a "field of dreams" where he could sit back and watch his 35- to 40-car trains run through urban and mountain scenery.

When people walk down to the basement, one of the first things they say is "wow," or "Oh my God!" He enjoys the fact that they are amazed at what they see. When they leave he hopes they will spread the word that this layout is here and is available to be seen.

For Matt, his favorite part of the hobby is creativity. Curiously, he doesn't think of himself as much of an artist. Yet though the HO scale CN Central Matt has truly built an amazing array of 3D art. It was also for this reason that he built his layout without a backdrop, so the viewer can see everything from more than one vantage point. A model railroad with a backdrop limits visitors and operators to looking at a scene in only one primary direction.

If Matt can talk his wife into it, he would like to further expand his layout into an adjoining storage area. He would like to build on to the west end of his yard and proceed into the storage area, where he would like to build a passenger

station and coach yard, plus 30 to 40 additional city buildings.

Matt reminds other model railroaders that they don't have to be like everyone else in the hobby. He would like to see more modelers come up with their own ways and techniques for building a layout. He wants to challenge modelers to dare to be different, dare to be out there, imbue a pioneer spirit, and challenge the norms. Be creative! Architecturally speaking, for Matt Gellings, the sky's the limit! **MR**



Meet Matt Gellings

Matt and his wife, Vanessa, live in Fond du Lac, Wis. Matt is a 1998 graduate of Moraine Park Technical College, attaining a degree in mechanical design and later a degree in CNC (Computer Numeric Control). Matt owns his own small business and is self-employed as a re-upholsterer at HomeStar Upholstery in Fond du Lac.

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Kickin' it old school



John Pursell explains how he uses sawdust, lichen, and other “old school” products.

How to use older materials in today's modeling

By John Pursell • Photos by the author

To those of us of a certain age, it often seems that we live in a world of almost unbelievable hobby riches. Super-detailed locomotives and rolling stock are available in abundance; structures, painted and assembled, are widely available. Enough tree, bush, and other scenery supplies exist to create an entire forest.

Of course, it wasn't always like this. Modelers in the 1950s, '60s, and even later often had to make do with whatever materials they could find. Green painted sawdust was supposed to represent grass, lichen was for trees and bushes, and sand or kitty litter often was used for track ballast. The commercial material sold as ballast was crude and oversized.

Now, I don't for one second want to go back to those days! But I often think there are still uses for some of the materials we used decades ago, and we

shouldn't be so quick to consign them to the scrap heap. Here are some examples.

Revisiting sawdust

The first thing that comes to my mind is sawdust. Building model railroad



1 Sifting sawdust through a screen results in a nice, fluffy type of material.

benchwork usually amounts to an abundance of it, free of charge. In the “old days,” modelers would often dye it a green color and apply it to represent grass. I don't use it for grass per se, but I do use it to represent a coarser type of ground cover.

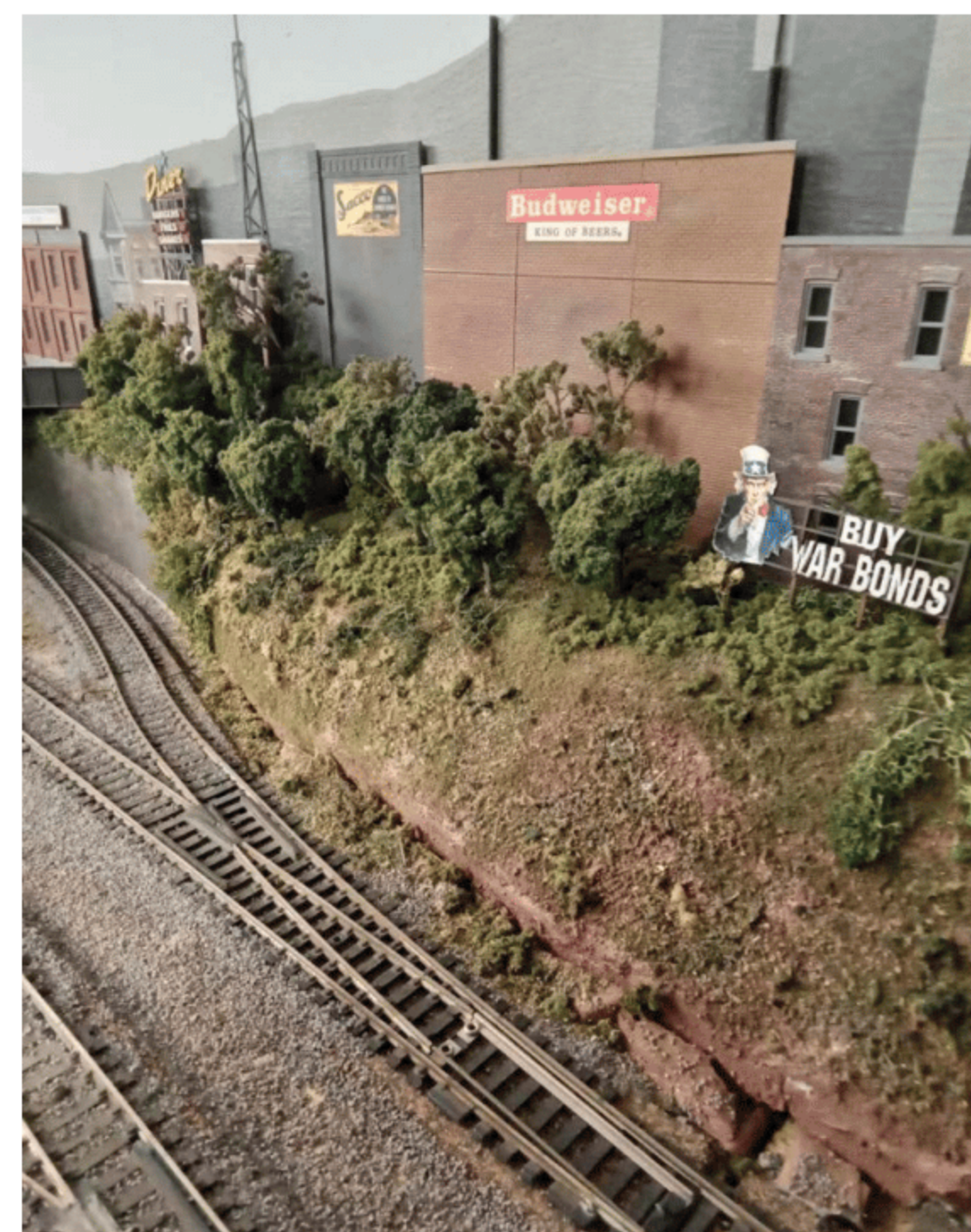
I sift it through screen to get rid of bigger pieces of wood and get it as fine as I can **1**. Then, I either spread it out and lightly spray it with a muted green or olive color, or I put it in a container with alcohol and ink to stain it a grayish color. Sometimes I do both. If spraying, I hold the spray can so it sprays up instead of down; the paint then floats down onto the sawdust instead of blowing it around.

After it dries, I mix it with an equal amount of Woodland Scenics fine ground foam turf, usually Burnt Green. This all goes into a container. As I periodically sweep up the areas where I'm working on scenery, collecting tiny pieces of foam and other debris, I mix that in too! The result is then used anywhere I want a coarser, more weedy look, as seen in the photo at left.

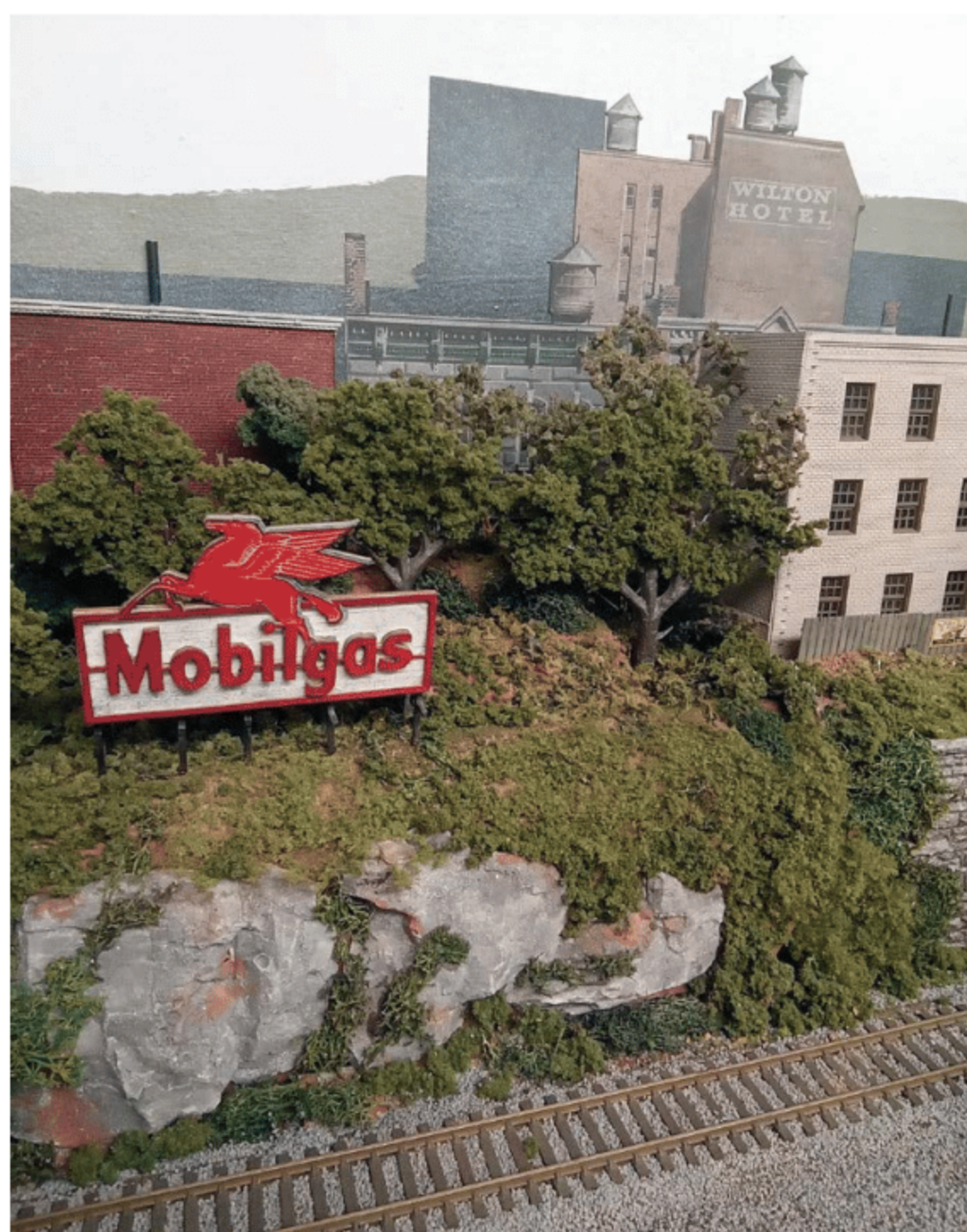
On occasion I've used all-sawdust dyed a muted green as a forest floor, which would be closer to the backdrop and a few feet from people's eyes. Combined with some Woodland Scenics Clump-Foliage, it looks like an unkempt, overgrown area **2**.

Liking lichen

Another old school item is lichen, although this is one item still used today. In the pre-ground foam era, modelers used to pile it up to represent bushes or tried to glue it to a tree armature. Many



2 John finished the area under the trees with dyed sawdust.



③ Vines made of lichen stems climb up the rock wall.

modelers moved away from lichen when ground foam became prevalent. But it's still easy to use, widely available, and offers another option for scenery.

Lichen is commonly used to represent bushes. The easiest way to improve lichen is to spray it with hairspray or Testor's Dullcote, then coat it with fine ground foam. I also use lichen in combination with Clump-Foliage to add different textures. In addition, I use it for vines: Pull off most of the finer pieces, leaving just the center stem and a few branches. These can be glued along walls, rock cliffs, and more ③.

Chicken grit ballast

Ballasting has greatly improved from the kitty litter or sand era. However, old school is appropriate in some situations. The Cumberland Valley Model Railroad Club, of which I'm a member, ballasted its HO and O scale layouts with chicken grit. Not only does it represent ballast well, but the cost is significantly lower than off-the-shelf products.

The grit has a natural, subtle color variation that adds to realism, as seen on the mainline of the club's HO layout ④. Chicken grit is usually available at farm supply houses; the drawback is they may only have it in larger bags of 25 or even 50 pounds. If you and a friend go in together on a bag, you'll probably have enough for at least two layouts each.

Balsa and cardboard

Years ago, modelers would use balsa for all kinds of structures, often taking the time to carve in clapboard siding



④ This photo shows chicken grit ballast on an HO scale layout.

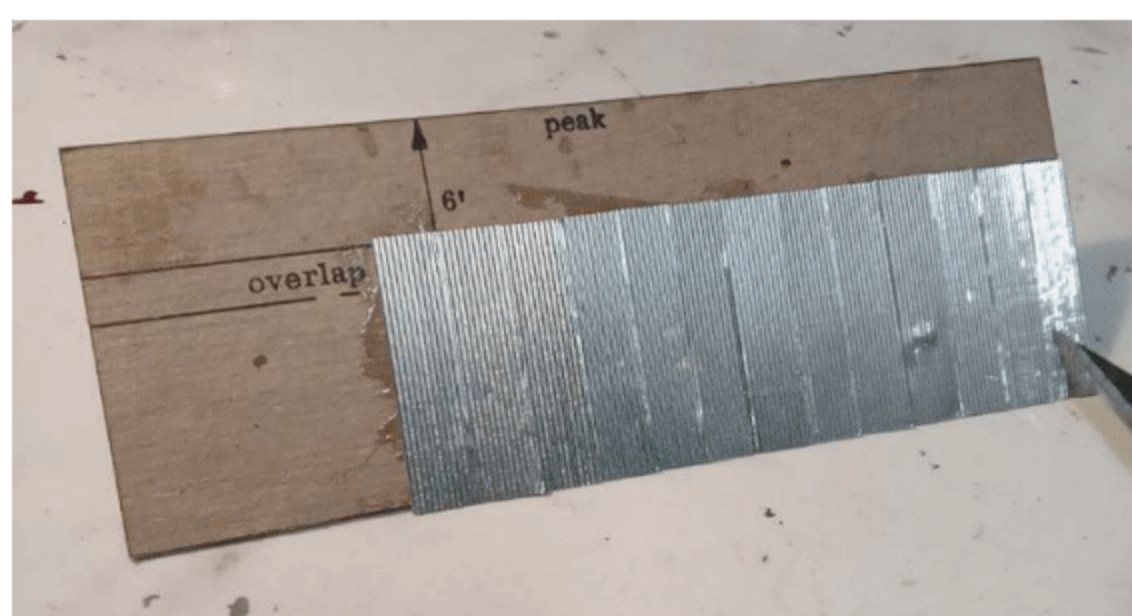
using the dull side of a knife blade. The down side to balsa is its propensity to warp significantly. A lot of interior bracing is needed to keep building sides and roofs straight. It also has coarse grain that requires sealing before painting. But it is inexpensive.

Balsa is especially handy for building foundations ⑤. It can be glued on a base, solving the warping problem; the painted heavy grain represents concrete reasonably well. I still use balsa to scratchbuild structures. I don't mind adding bracing. Even with the bracing it's usually much cheaper than using basswood or plastic.

Well, if we talk about balsa, how about cardboard? Using cereal box cardboard to create buildings and rolling stock was a common method used by early modelers, since they often had nothing else. Again, it requires bracing, but it's cheap. I often use cardboard as a subbase and glue on siding material ⑥.

The case for code 100 track

Many modelers would consider code 100 track to be old school, as smaller and more scale sizes are now widely available. However, I still use code 100 track on my HO scale Lehigh Valley layout. When



⑥ Cardboard and cardstock can be used as a subbase for siding.



⑤ This building has a foundation made of strip balsa, painted Aged Concrete.

painted, ballasted, and weathered, the overall effect is just fine. I also find code 100 to be more "forgiving," so to speak. Using normal care in track laying has resulted in a virtually derailment-free layout ⑦.

Take another look

Some of the old ways are still viable in today's model railroading. When combined with new methods and materials, sawdust, lichen, and other products can open up a wide range of options. Plus, the items are often significantly lower in cost than modern alternatives. **MR**

Dr. John Pursell and his wife, Bette, live in Chambersburg, Pa., where he models the Lehigh Valley in HO scale. He welcomes comments at johnpursell@msn.com



⑦ When painted and weathered, code 100 track looks just fine.

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Out in the country

Railfans and modelers long hid these interests when they applied for railroad jobs. Most employers would jump at the chance to hire someone with such a genuine interest in the business, not be suspicious of it, but that's railroad-ing. Happily, enthusiastic railroaders who join our hobby are eager to share prototype information. I began asking about their pet peeves. What disappoints them in operating sessions because they never worked this way on the railroad?

Station work drew many comments. They cringe when they see a crew pull its entire train into town. This backs up traffic at road crossings, usually for long periods while the conductor figures out the pulls and spots. It frequently blocks a runaround that's needed to serve industries with facing point switches, too. The old heads left the train "out in the country," meaning outside town on the main track. The crew took only the cars needing work into town. Pleasing drivers was easier; a runaround became a quick move because the main and its double-ended siding were clear. Hand signals governed switching before radios became common, so handling fewer cars was another advantage. The fewer cars, the fewer crew members needed to pass signals.

Did they put out a flag behind the part of the train left behind? It depends. Here's where reality departs from the book. Some crews satisfied Rule 99 by dropping a fusee as the train



Aptly titled "Hand Switching," this *Classic Trains* photo of the day shows railroaders of Union Transportation Co., a New Jersey short line, valiantly repositioning a car with pinch bars and muscle power in the late fifties. Aaron G. Fryer photo

approached town. Its 10-minute burn protected a quick move. Many dropped a flagman behind and whistled him in when ready to depart. He'd leave a fusee to continue protection while he returned. A few crews relied on knowledge of train movements. They knew about regular trains in the timetable and cheated against extras based on what they learned from operators along the line. They flagged very . . . well, casually.

Mike Porter, a long-service

Chicago & North Western veteran with Chicago Great Western roots, warms up every good story with "No kidding, this really happened!" One crew's casual flagging fed up another engineer. Marshalltown, Iowa kept them busy every night and he knew about where

they'd be. "He turned off all the lights, coasted down and got up right behind them." You know what comes next. Mike continued: "He turned on the headlights and Mars light and at the same time blew the whistle" and two terrified railroaders bailed off the caboose, fast!

Cherry picking, moving only one car at a time, also makes the pros shake their heads. The more work a town requires, the more a good conductor thinks ahead. It's like a chess game. How few moves does the work need? Andy Sperandio devoted his March 2014 column in *Model Railroader* to the basics of switching. It's a how-to about facing points, trailing points, runarounds, pulls, and shoves.

A switch list is handy to map out moves. I go through the waybills for my train, list the cars town by town and write down which tracks they're headed for. I "walk" a town to see the trackage, find the pickups, and add them to the list. This suits me better

than shuffling waybills like a deck of cards.

Good plans or not, situations can demand heroic measures. Take the Union Transportation crew in the above photo, muscling a car into position. It reminds me of another daunting situation. A prominent modeler invited me to a session and delighted me with a branch line freight. The local served a town with heavy station work.

Determined to leave a good impression, I scribbled a switch list, left the train out in the country, and went at it.

One facing point setout bedeviled me. It lurked until I coupled the train back together, ready to depart. Stealthily, I peeked up and down the aisle and around the corner. Not a soul about. While I hesitated, a nimble hand descended from the heavens and quickly 0-5-0'd the vagrant. This pleased Mike. He smiled: "I've never been afforded an 0-5-0 moment, and I'll never do it again." No kidding, this really happened! **MR**

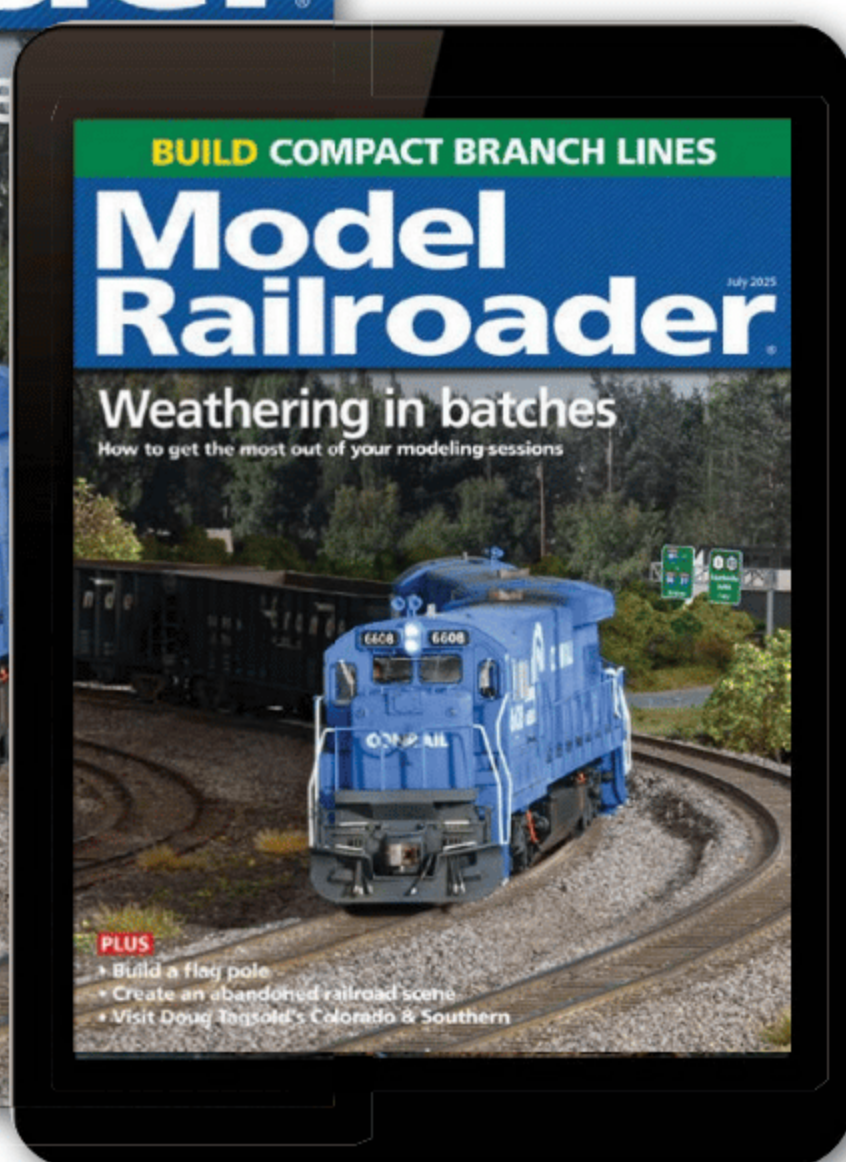


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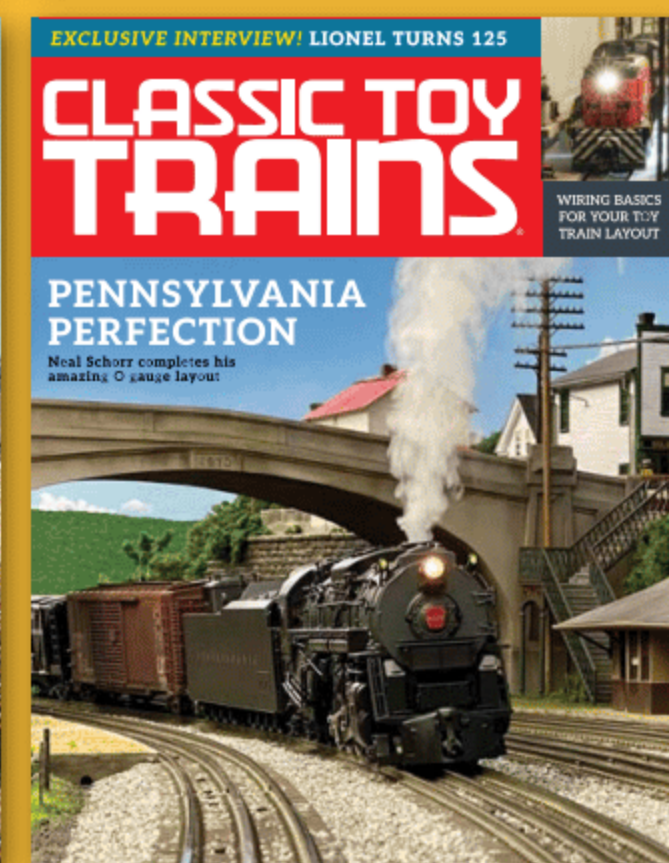
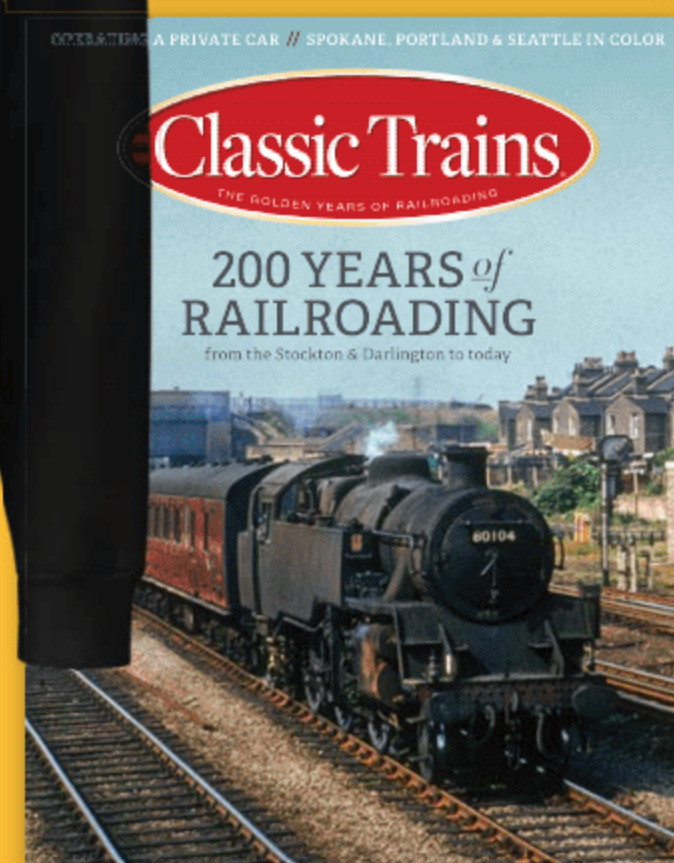
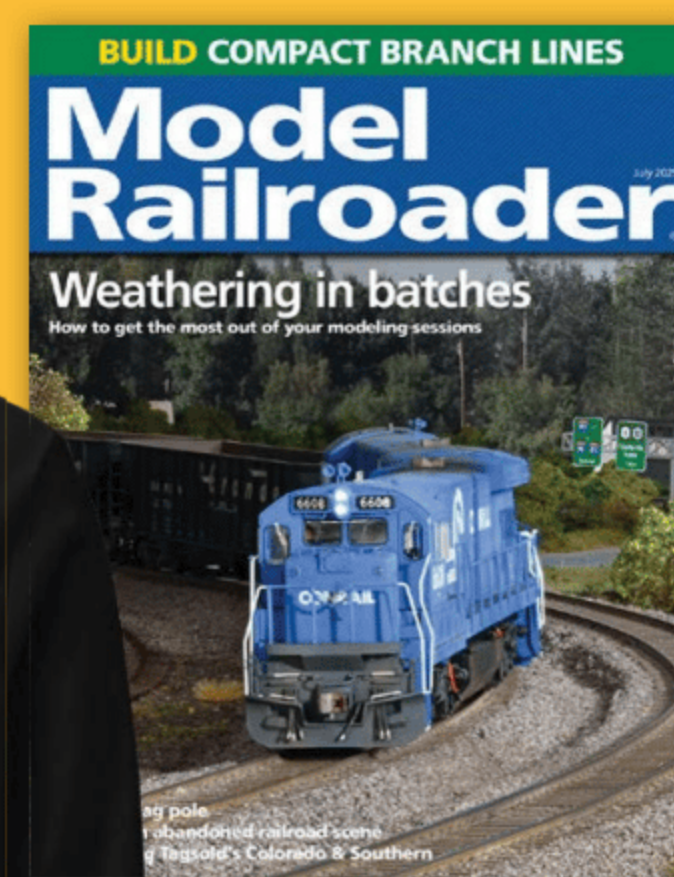
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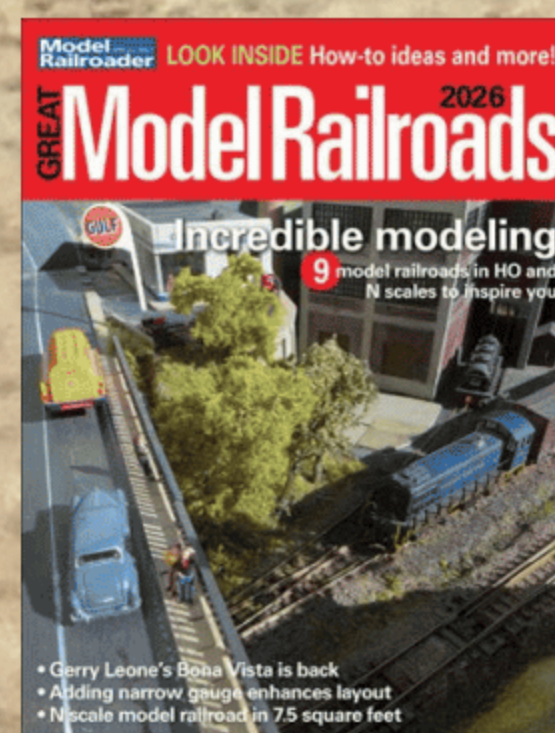
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● Trackside Photos

Ann Arbor RR TF5 (Toledo to Frankfort) heads west along south shore of Crystal Lake, Mich., in July 1955 on Ralph Moxley's Ann Arbor model railroad. This train is approximately 1 mile west of Beulah. Small wooden cottages overlook the lake and railroad tracks.

Craig Wilson photo





Great Model Railroads 2026 is available now! This year's issue features nine fantastic model railroads showcasing the best work from

across the country. Get a sneak preview of what's included in this month's Trackside Photos.



The peaceful summer day's solitude is shattered as Soo Line Mikado No. 2836 thunders across the Eagle Lake bridge on its way to home rails. Building a new house allowed Gerry Leone to design and construct his double-deck dream layout, the fifth and best incarnation yet of his freelanced HO scale Bona Vista RR. Gerry Leone photo



Hopefully all of that laundry will still be clean after Boston & Maine 2-6-0 Mogul No. 1431 passes through Millville on Bob Van Gelder's HO scale South River & Millville model railroad. The neighborhood at right was scratchbuilt by the late Dick Elwell for his Hoosac Valley RR. Lou Sassi photo



A couple pauses on the Morningstar Road overpass to watch a North Shore local rumble below on Marc Pitanza's Staten Island Rapid Transit North Shore Sub. The overpass is scratchbuilt from styrene following the prototype.

Marc Pitanza photo

As a local fisherman tries to reel in the big one in the Quinebaug River, northbound freight M6 passes overhead on its way to Worcester on Bob Murphy's New York, New Haven & Hartford Norwich and Worcester Branch. Bob used Famowood Glaze Coat, a two-part epoxy used for bar counters and craft projects, to model the water. Dan Munson photo



Send us your photos

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The Annvile roundhouse crew is busy servicing assorted steam locomotives on Bob Bartizek's 3-rail Pennsylvania & Western RR, including (front to rear) a class H10s 2-8-0, I1sa 2-10-0, and Q1 4-6-4-4. The models are from Weaver, Sunset/3rd Rail, and Lionel. Lou Sassi photo



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Schedule of Events

CA, SACRAMENTO: International Railfair. November 8-9, 2025. Cal Expo, Building C, 1600 Exposition Blvd., Sacramento, CA 95815. Saturday 10am-5pm and Sunday 10am-4pm. Admission: At Gate- Saturday \$15, Sunday \$12; Online- Saturday \$12, Sunday \$10. Kids 12 and under free. Operating Layouts, Vendors, Kids Activities, on-site food and more! Visit: internationalrailfair.com or contact Tom Campbell at tom.c.irf@gmail.com

CO, LOVELAND: Rocky Mountain Train Show, November 29-30, 2025. The Ranch Events Complex, 5280 Arena Circle, Loveland, CO 80538. Saturday, 9am-5pm, Sunday 9am-3pm. 200+ sales tables, 50+ vendors, operating layouts, model trains of all scales. Admission \$10.00, 12 and under free. Free parking. 303-364-0274 www.RockyMountainTrainShow.com Information@RockyMountainTrainShow.com

FL, BROOKSVILLE: Regal Railways presents Toy Trains & Hobby Show. Hernando Fairgrounds, 6436 Broad St., Brooksville, FL 34601. Saturday, November 22, 2025. 9:00am-2:00pm. Admission: \$6.00 adults, children under 12 free. Vendors and model train layout. Lunch available. Contact: Joe at 727-244-1341 or visit: www.regalrailways.com for more information.

FL, OCALA: Lions Tri-Annual Train Show. First Christian Church, 1908 E. Fort King St., Ocala, FL 34471. Saturday, November 1, 2025, 9:00am-2:00pm. Model trains, accessories, detail parts and toys. Admission \$5.00, children 12 and under free w/paid adult. Bring two canned goods and receive \$1.00 off admission. Food/snacks available. Information: Bob 352-694-6381 or cell 352-547-0938

FL, OCALA: NMRA-Sunshine Region's 2025 Annual Convention. October 9-11, 2025, beginning at 4pm on Thursday. Ocala Hilton, 3600 Southwest 36th Ave., Ocala, FL. Top-notch clinics, operating sessions, modeling contests, raffles, and a Meet & Greet! Also, Saturday night banquet with a guest speaker. Event is open to anyone who loves TRAINS! For more info, visit: NMRASunshineRegion.org

FL, OCALA: "Trains for Christmas" Free train show November 8-9, 2025. Saturday 10am-4pm, Sunday 11am-4pm. Experience multiple layouts and participate in great raffles. We are a collection site for Toys for Tots. No vendors. NEW LOCATION: Marion Oaks Community Center, 294 Marion Oaks Lane, Ocala, FL 34473. Information, contact Bill Quast at 352-209-5422 or email wmquast@gmail.com

FL, PINELLAS PARK: Suncoast Model Railroad Club Train Show/Open House. Saturday, December 6, 2025. SHOW- New venue! Pinellas Performing Arts Center, 4951 78th Avenue N., Zip: 33781. 9am-3pm. Admission: \$8.00, Children \$3.00, under 11-free. Free parking. Tables: Event Planner, smrrclub@gmail.com, 727-523-1860. OPEN CLUBHOUSE- 12355 62nd Street North, Suite A, Largo, FL 33773. Admission: FREE. www.suncoastmrrc.com

IA, DELMAR: Delmar Train Show & Swap Meet. October 11-12, 2025. Saturday 10am-4pm and Sunday 10am-2pm. Delwood School Gym, 311 Delmar Avenue, Delmar, IA 52037. Admission: Free Will Donation. Free tours of Delmar Railroad Museum. Vendor tables: \$25 each (limit 10 tables per vendor). Food & drink available. Free parking/handicap accessible. Information: bradgeneralcontractors@gmail.com

IA, HAMPTON: NCIMRRC Train Show. Franklin County Convention Center, 1008 Central Avenue W., Hampton, IA 50441. Sunday, October 26, 2025. 9:00am-3:00pm. Admission \$5.00. 10 and under free with paid adult. Trains (all scales), memorabilia and collectibles to buy, sell and trade. Table rental fee \$20.00. For information or table reservations contact, Eastside Trains, 641-456-1998, email: eastsidetrains@gmail.com

IA, IOWA CITY: 5th Annual Iowa City Train Show. Sunday, October 19, 2025. 10am-3pm. 4261 Oakcrest Rd. SE, Iowa City, IA 52246. Admission: \$5, children 10 and under free w/adult. New club building open house! All different scales! Displays and layouts to see! Sponsored by the Hawkeye Model Railroad Club and Scale Signs! lowacitytrainshow@gmail.com or visit: www.hawkeyemodellrrclub.com

IL, EAST MOLINE: Quad City Society of Model Engineers Open House and Swap Meet. Saturday, November 1, 2025. 9am-2pm. 740 16th Avenue, East Moline, IL 61244. (The Old East Moline Public Library.) Admission: \$5 (cash only), children 12 and under are free.

IL, ST. CHARLES: 34th Annual Chicago Railroadiana and Model Train Show and Sale. Kane County Fairgrounds, (Front Building), 525 South Randall Rd., St. Charles, IL 60174. Sunday, October 19, 2025, 10:00am-3:00pm. Admission: \$6.00 (includes tax). Children under 12 FREE. Tables starting at \$65.00. For information: 847-358-1185, RussFierce@aol.com or www.RRShows.com

IN, DANVILLE: Central Indiana Division-NMRA 18th annual Danville Train Show. Saturday, November 22, 2025. 10:00am-3:00pm, Hendricks County Fairgrounds, 1900 E. Main St., Danville, IN. Operating layouts, displays, door prizes, vendors, food. Free parking, \$3.00/adult, under 16 free. Dealer Tables \$16.00 each. Contact: Dave Mashino at danvilletrainshow@gmail.com or 765-860-1560. More info at www.cidnmra.org

IN, LA PORTE: La Porte County Train Show and Swap Meet. La Porte County Fairgrounds Community Building, 2581 In-2, La Porte, IN 46350. Sunday, November 23, 2025, 9:30am-2:00pm (Chicago time). Adults \$5.00, youths 6-12 \$1.00, 5 and under free. Contact: Dave Novak at trains86@myyahoo.com or 219-778-3195.

MA, MARLBOROUGH: Hub Division NER/NMRA. Royal Plaza Trade Center, 181 Boston Post Road West (Rte. 20 West), Marlborough, MA. Saturday December 6, 2025, 10am-4pm, and Sunday December 7, 2025, 10am-4pm. Admission: \$15.00; Children under 12 and Scouts in Uniform FREE. Admission is good both days. Information: Ray, 781-910-9581; e-mail: TE.info@hubdiv.org; website: www.hubdiv.org

ME, BREWER: Eastern Maine Model Railroad Club Show. Jeff's Catering in Brewer, 15 Littlefield Way, Brewer, ME 04412. Saturday, November 22, 2025, 10:00am-3:00pm. Admission \$5.00 for adults, under 12 free. Dealers, silent auction, and operating layouts. Geoff Anthony, PO Box 187, Blue Hill, ME 04614, 207-374-2786, dahak@roadrunner.com

MI, EAST LANSING: Lansing Model Railroad Club Show and Sale. Michigan State University Pavilion. Sunday, November 9, 2025, 10:00am-4:00pm. Admission \$8.00, under 12 free. Michigan's largest train show: layouts, demonstrations, and 500+ tables. Free parking. Flyer, table forms and map, visit: www.lmrc.org or call John Hartmann 517-290-8948

MI, KALAMAZOO: Southwest Michigan Train Show & Sale. Kalamazoo County Expo Center, 2900 Lake Street. Sunday, November 2, 2025, 10am-3pm. Admission \$6.00; Children 12 and under free. Operating layouts, vendors, railroad memorabilia, model trains, accessories, door prizes. Free parking, concessions and more! Presented by Kalamazoo Model Railroad Historical Society. Contact David Hayes-Moats 269-344-0906, http://www.kmrhs.org

MN, ST. CLOUD: GRANITE CITY TRAIN SHOW AND SALE. River's Edge Convention Center, 10 4th Ave S, St. Cloud, MN 56301. Saturday, November 8, 2025. 9:00am-3:00pm. \$6.00, Kids 10 and under FREE. Buy/sell model/toy trains, books, videos, railroad collectibles. Operating model and toy train displays. Win a LIONEL train set! 612-558-6484; GraniteCityTrainShow@gmail.com or visit www.GraniteCityTrainShow.com

MO, JOPLIN: Joplin History & Mineral Museum Model Train Show and Swap Meet. Saturday, November 8, 2025. 9am-3pm. In Schifferdecker Park, 504 South Schifferdecker Ave., Joplin, MO 64801. Admission: \$5 adult, 12 and under admitted free with paid adult. Swap Tables \$20 each. Contact Steve Gardner, 620-230-9545 or email: sogardner1@att.net

MS, GULFPORT: UPDATE - POSTPONED. NEW DATE COMING! Mississippi Coast Model Railroad Club: 1st Annual Train Show. CTA Hub & Event Center...on the beach! (Corner of 20th Ave and Hwy 90, next to the MS Aquarium). Admission: \$10 Adults, \$2 Children (5 & under FREE), \$8 Active 1st Responders-Military-Seniors. Contact: Rob Mooney, crmoon051@gmail.com, 228-596-5740

Events Continued

NC, RALEIGH: Neuse River Valley Model RR Club 41st annual FALL TRAIN Show; November 8-9, Sat 9-5; Sun 10-4. NC State Fairgrounds. 400 tables of model railroad-ing, 12 operating layouts. Displays & Judging of Craftsman Structures & Rolling Stock. Admission: \$10 covers both days, children 12 and under free with an adult. Contact: bobwitwer@gmail.com. Visit: www.nrvclub.net

NH, DOVER: The Great Northern New England Train Show. Dover Lodge of Elks #184, 282 Durham Road, Dover, NH 03820. Saturday, October 25, 2025, 10:00am-3:00pm. Admission: \$5 per person, children under 12 free. Exhibitor tables \$35, includes entrance fee. All scales, operating layout, railroadiana items, and food on premises. Contact Ed Martin, efmenter@aol.com or 603-362-4300

NJ, BRICK: ECTP and Collectibles LLC presents The Brick Train Show. Elks Lodge, 2491 Hooper Avenue, Brick, NJ 08723. Sunday, November 2, 2025, 9:00am-2:00pm. Admission: \$7.00; under 12 free with adult. John LaLima 732-845-5966. Go to www.eastcoasttrainparts.com and click on The Brick Show.

NJ, EAST RUTHERFORD: METCA/NYSME All Gauge Train Show. November 1, 2025. St. Joseph's School, 120 Hoboken Road, East Rutherford, NJ 07073. 9am-2pm. METCA/NYSME members admitted free at 8am, public at 9am. Admission: \$5.00 per person 16 and up. Layouts, refreshments, and door prizes. For tables and information, contact the NYSME Office at 201-939-9212 or email: contact@modelengineers.org

NJ, WAYNE: ECTP and Collectibles LLC presents The Wayne Train Show. P.A.L. Hall, 1 Pal Drive, Wayne, NJ 07470. Sunday, October 26, 2025, 9:00am-2:00pm. Admission: \$7.00; under 12 free with adult. John LaLima 732-845-5966. Go to www.eastcoasttrainparts.com and click on The Wayne Show.

OH, DAYTON: 49th Original Dayton Train Show. The Montgomery County Fairgrounds, 645 Infirmary Road, Dayton, OH 45417. November 1-2, 2025. Saturday 11am-5pm and Sunday 11am-4pm. Admission: \$10.00 per adult, children 12 and under free with a paid adult. Dayton Train Show Mgr, PO Box 341233, Beavercreek, OH 45434, 937-424-6413. Email: NMRA.Div.3@gmail.com or visit: www.DaytonTrainShow.com for updates.

OH, MASSILLON: CJ Trains Winter Train and Toy Show. Massillon Knights of Columbus Hall, 988 Cherry Road NW, 44647. Sunday, December 14, 2025, 10:00am-3:00pm. Admission: \$5.00, 12 and under FREE. \$25/dealer table, 152 - 8' dealer tables. Jon Ulbright, PO Box 446, Wooster, OH 44691, 330-262-7488, cathijon@ssnet.com www.cjtrains.com

OK, OKLAHOMA CITY: The OKC Train Show, November 15-16, 2025. Saturday, 9:00am - 5:00pm, and Sunday, 10:00am - 4:00pm. Bennett Center at the State Fairgrounds in Oklahoma City. It's Oklahoma's largest train show and sale with 100,000 square feet and over 300 tables of vendors, manufacturers, layouts, clinics and more. Visit www.okctrainshow.com for more information!

PA, ALLENTOWN: ATMA First Frost Train Meet. Allentown Fairgrounds Agri-Plex, 1925 W. Chew Street, Allentown, PA 18104. November 8 & 9, 2025. Saturday 9am-4pm, Sunday 9am-3pm. Advance tickets \$15, admitted at 8am. At the door, admitted 9am: \$10 adults, 12 and under FREE with adult ticket purchase. For more info, visit: www.allentowntrainmeet.com or call 610-442-2859

PA, BEAVER FALLS: BLRHS Fall Train Show. Saturday, October 11, 2025, 10:00am-3:00pm. Chippewa Township VFD Social Hall, 2568 Darlington Rd., Beaver Falls, PA 15010. Admission: \$5.00 (\$4.00 if you mention Model Railroad ad). Children 12 and under FREE. Tables \$25 each. For show info: www.blrhsinc.org. For table reservations: Tom Bianculli, tjbian64@gmail.com or 412-585-3614

TX, HOUSTON: Houston Area Model Train Show, November 15-16, 2025. Saturday 10am-5pm, Sunday 10am-4pm. Adults \$7, 17 and under free. All scales, operating layouts, club/museum displays, table sales and more. Pearland Knights of Columbus Hall, 2320 Hatfield Rd., Pearland TX 77581. More information at http://houstonttrak.org or by email info@houstonttrak.org. Sponsored by Houston Area T-TRAK Association, Inc.

WA, CHEHALIS: Lewis County Model Railroad Club, Annual Fall Train Show and Swap Meet. Southwest Washington Fairgrounds, Blue Pavilion Building, 2555 N. National Ave., Chehalis, WA 98532. October 18-19, 2025. Saturday 10:00am-4:00pm and Sunday 10:00am-2:00pm. Admission \$5.00. Free parking. Contact information: Ted, 360-985-7788, or email: TedsTrains@LewisCounty.com

WA, KENT: Boeing Employees' Model Railroad Club Annual Swap Meet. Saturday, November 8, 2025, 9:30am-4:00pm. Kent Commons Community Center, 525 4th Avenue North, Kent, WA 98030. Admission: \$10.00, under 16 free. Ed Sherry or Caleb at: seattleandnorthcascades@gmail.com

WA, LONGVIEW: November 22, 2025. LK&R Model Railroad Club presents our 2025 Holiday Model Train and Toy Swap Meet. Cowlitz County Event Center, 1900 7th Ave. 10am-4pm. Admission \$5.00. See https://www.cowlitzeventcenter.com/contact-event-professionals/. Scroll down for directions. Information for vendors and guests, visit: http://lkrtrains.yolasite.com or contact Howard Flick. 360-751-7276, email: flickh@yahoo.com

WA, SPOKANE: River City Modelers Fall Model Train Show, Spokane Fairgrounds, 404 N. Havana. Sunday, October 12, 2025, 9:30am-3:30pm. Admission: adults \$8, 12 & under free. 200+ tables of Railroad-related items for sale, operating layouts, Free-MO, Operation Lifesaver & more. Free Parking. For table rental or general info, contact: Shirley Sample, 509-991-2317 or email: shirleysample13@gmail.com

All listed events were confirmed as active at the time of press. Please contact event sponsor for current status of the event.

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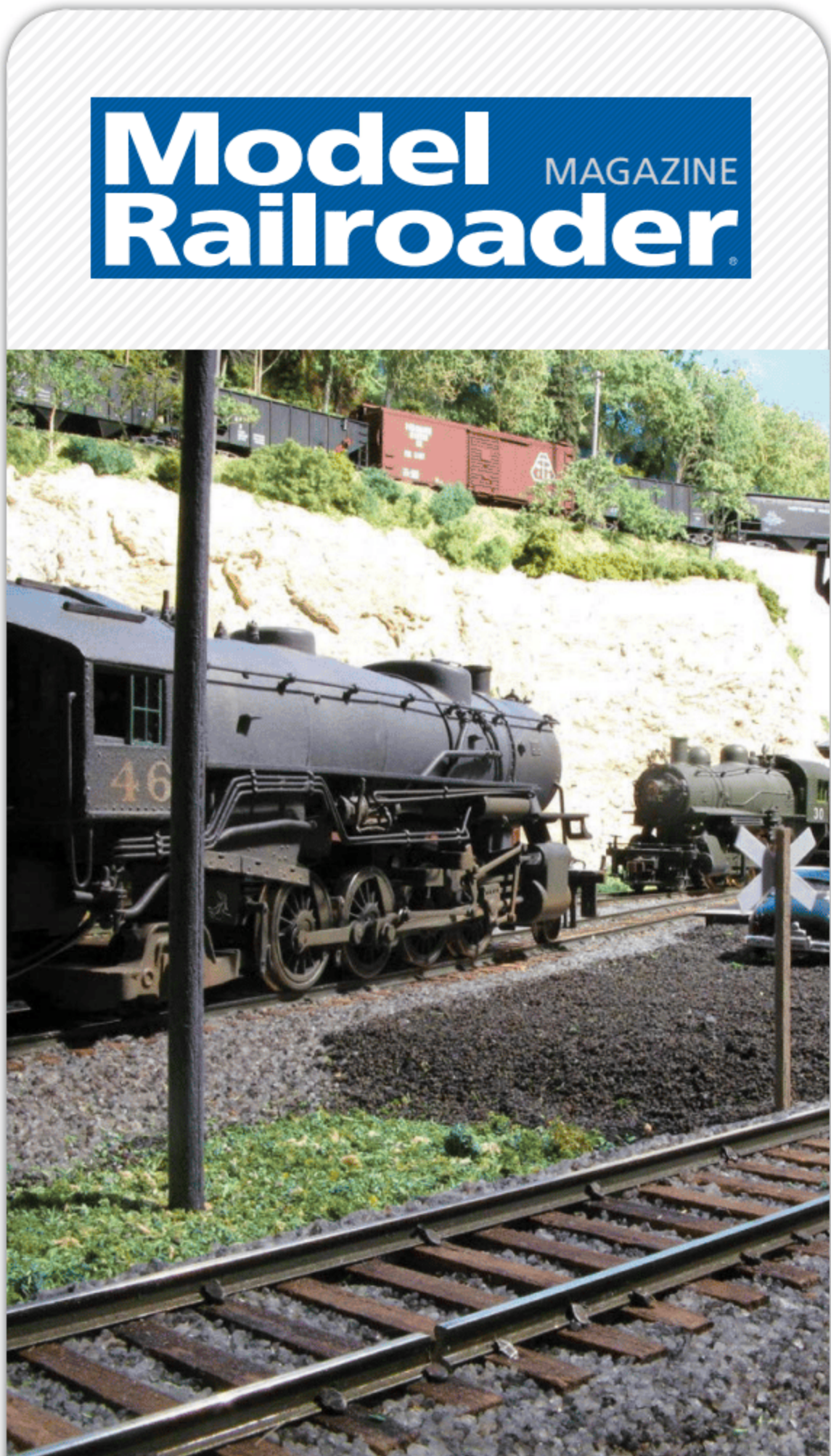
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Forty years of Trains of Thought



Somewhere on a continuously (but gradually) climbing multideck “nolix” layout is the perfect viewing height for everyone, as here on the upper deck between Metcalf and Oakland, Ill., on Tony’s HO Nickel Plate Road. Everywhere else is a compromise. Tony Koester photo

The first edition of *Trains of Thought* appeared in November 1985 MR. But its roots date back to the early 1970s when I was editing *Railroad Model Craftsman*. Publisher Hal Carstens was busy running a growing company and had quickly turned over the reins to me following my joining the staff in January 1969, but he retained the title of editor and wrote a monthly editorial called Notes on an Old Timetable.

As I got comfortable running the magazine, I discovered there were many anecdotes and other odds and ends I felt were worthy of sharing with readers, but there was no place to do that. So I launched Editor’s Notebook and drew some line art featuring a camera, notebook, and tape measure for a logo.

By 1981, after a dozen very successful and enjoyable years editing RMC, divergent views on what the company needed to do to remain successful made it clear it was time to move on. I was offered a position at Bell Laboratories and spent the next 20-plus years there and with successor companies producing technical documents, managing a documentation group, launching and editing a prize-winning science magazine, anchoring the corporate TV network, and managing internal employee communications via a newspaper and an internet portal.

But something was missing. I still had ties to all of the knowledgeable modeling friends I had made during my tenure at RMC, and I was still hearing these great stories

and joining with several of them in some wonderful adventures. They were well worth sharing, but how?

Two score and one year ago, I had a train of thought. Would then MR Editor Russ Larson be interested in a regular column from someone who knew the model railroad hobby and its main players well and had written about it for a decade? I typed up eight or 10 samples and made a drawing for the logo of a column I titled Trains of Thought and mailed everything to Russ.

I sent so many samples not only to show the variety of topics I would be covering but also to assure Russ that he wouldn’t be sitting anxiously by the mailbox hoping the next column’s copy would arrive by the deadline. Instead, I’d supply a year or more of commentaries in advance. That would also allow him to choose which one he wanted to run right away or to move one to a side track if it didn’t appeal to him.

I must tell you that two people whose opinions I respected most — my wife, Judy, and my good friend Allen McClelland — liked the idea but didn’t think Russ would hop on board. But he did.

November 2025 marks the 40th anniversary of the launch of the column, but not 40 years of Trains of Thought. As I recall, in the early years, it was bumped twice by a late-arriving full-page ad. So technically, the January 2026 issue is probably the one that

marks $40 \times 12 = 480$ issues featuring my commentaries.

You might logically conclude that I would have run out of topics by now, or at least struggle to find new ones. Let me put it this way: Have you ever seen two identical model railroads, even if they both depict the same division of the same railroad? Neither have I. How they differ and why they differ engenders a whole host of questions, each of which could form the theme for a column. Columnists see topics to write about literally everywhere. We can’t wait to get back to our keyboards to put into words what we just experienced so you can share the moment with us.

The roughly four years between leaving RMC and kicking off Trains of Thought were almost painful. Ideas here, ideas there, but no way to share them. Thanks to Russ Larson, who thought my proposal had merit, and the several editors who came after him and continued to provide both encouragement and a page to share my anecdotes, Trains of Thought has called *Model Railroader* home for four decades. Neither the column nor I will be around for four more, but I’ve certainly enjoyed the first four.

Feedback suggests most of you have too, although there’s one guy from California who

took exception to something I wrote — I never did figure out what it was — and a modeler from Long Island who didn’t like my strong views favoring staging.

You, or at least I, can’t win ’em all. I now return you to your regularly scheduled programming. **MR**





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