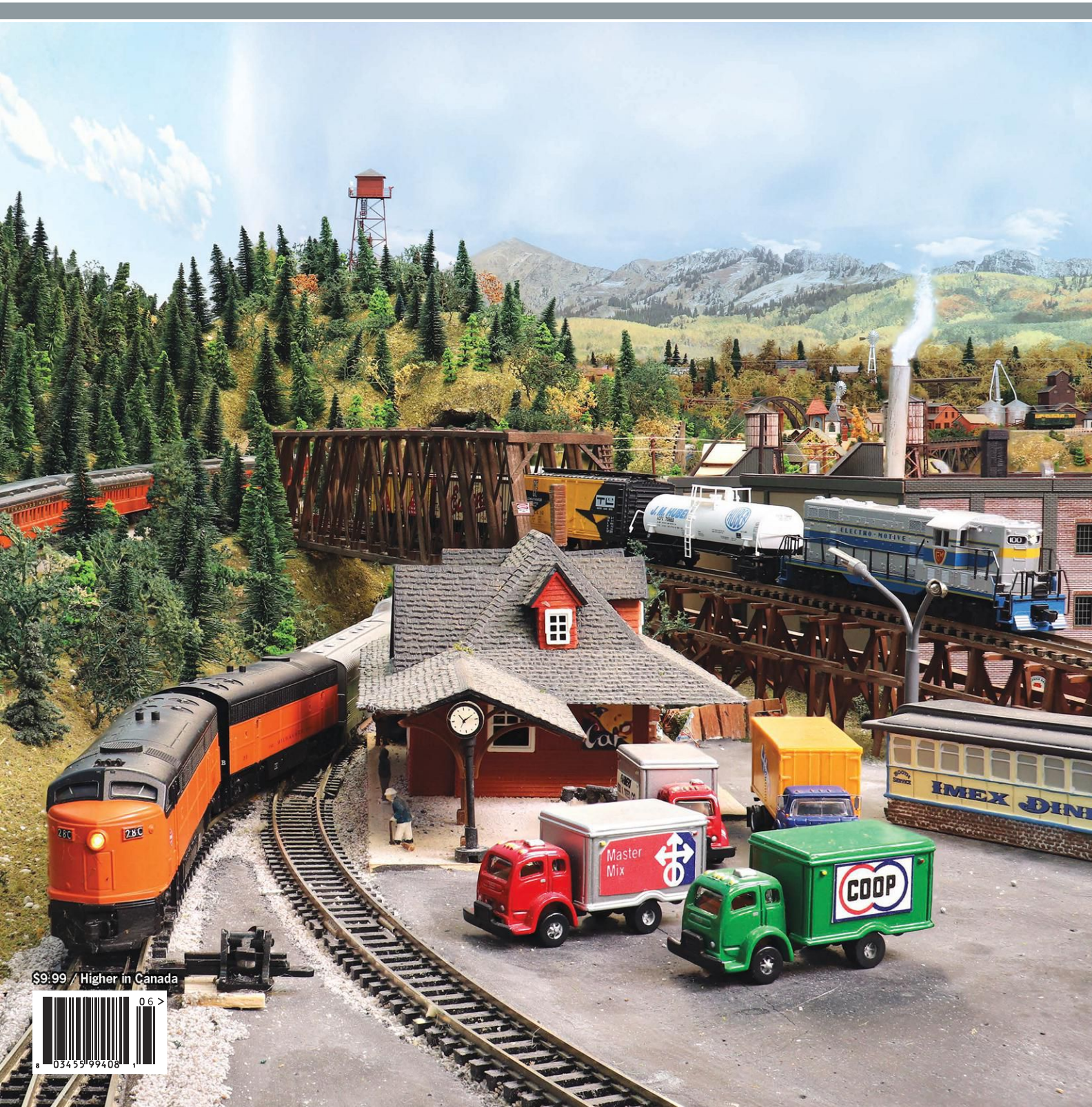
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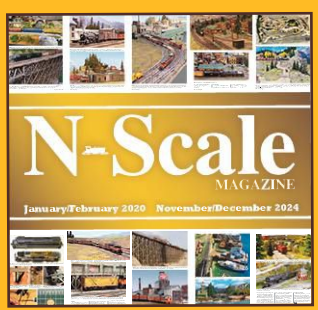
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May/June 2026

N-Scale



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On the cover: Busy... Busy... Busy! Trains coming and going all over the place. On this nice fall afternoon, the small town of Junctionville business is really booming. Lots of commerce, and also still a very healthy passenger business keeps this small town in the middle of nowhere hopping. Oh... Look at the time! I have to run if I'm going to get on that train. Get on board with Part 6 of Dennis Murphy's "Extra Extra! Read All About It," starting on page 14.

Want to know more? Wonder what's coming up? Visit us at: www.nscalemagazine.com or contact us at: info@nscalemagazine.com

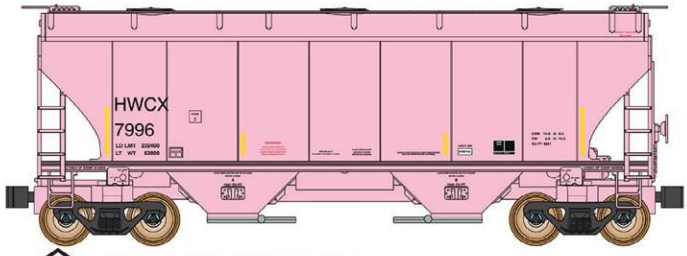
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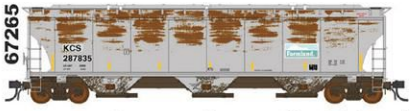






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EDITORIAL

Usually, my editorials are upbeat and I get to share what we are working on in the way of future articles, some of the highlights of the current issue, new products, reviews and more. Today, as I write this, my only thoughts are the memory of two very wonderful people that have done so much for model railroading. It is with a heavy heart and sadness that I share this with you all.

Robert W. Brown – *Narrow Gauge & Short Line Gazette*, founding editor, has passed away at 93 on January 31, 2026. In 1975, he launched the *Narrow Gauge & Short Line Gazette* with the very first issue – March/April 1975. He served as the editor for more than 51 years. Even in his final days, he was planning his final "Robert's Ramblings," scheduled for the upcoming May/June 2026 issue and had secured Kevin EuDaly with White River Productions as the new publisher, with Chris Lane as the next editor. Bob was so thankful to all of his readers for their decades of support. Thank you Bob for your lifelong legacy. We will cherish all the issues you published over the years, as we sift through the pages of your wonderful magazine.

We will miss you.

Loren Perry passed away on January 16, 2026. He was a board member of *N-Scale Magazine* since 1997, long before I became the publisher. I attended the board meetings and knew Loren from those early days and he was a friend. In 2006, when I purchased the magazine, I asked if he would continue on. He agreed, and has supported me as a mentor ever since, sharing his thoughts and ideas, his layout, how-to articles, advertised his products – Gold Medal Models, that he launched in 1985. He has been a longtime friend. Loren greeted everyone with a smile and always had a great story to tell. He always showed up to the board meeting with enthusiasm, offering support, and was so thankful to be a part of our organization, always thanking me for what I did. I always saw it the other way around though. It was I who was so thankful for him and everything he has done for me over the years as a mentor, a friend, an advertiser, and author – submitting many, many articles over the years.

I wanted to share Loren's layout and his amazing modeling with all of you that didn't get the chance to know him and see his work. I chose one of his previous articles to share in this issue – *Build a Small Town for Your Railroad* that was featured in the January/February 2015 issue. This was just one of the many articles featuring his steam-friendly Hollywood layout. His attention to detail was outstanding and his modeling was exceptional. Many of you probably know Loren Perry as the owner of Gold Medal Models, and hopefully, you have been fortunate enough to purchase some of the excellent photo-etched brass products he produced over the years. Loren shared that he had modeled since he was a young boy and how he learned to pay attention to detail. Wow, and how he did, accomplishing that goal tenfold.

On January 9th, on a sunny Friday afternoon, he called to talk and tell me the news about his health. I spoke with him and we laughed and had a wonderful conservation and said we would talk again soon, but he passed that next Friday. Loren had a voice and a smile that is unforgettable. His kindness and sincerity were so genuine and true. Loren, we will all dearly miss you and I will always remember you my friend.

Pamela

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LETTERS *to the* EDITOR

Hello Dennis: In the March/April issue of *N-Scale Magazine*, you recommend the use of "handy-helper" weights. I agree they would help a lot. The question is, where to get them? I have looked online and at Hobby Lobby and Home Depot, but can't find the weights.

John Layman, Longmont, CO

Response from Dennis Murphy: Oh YA! "Handy Helpers"... I just love them! I have a wide array of weights from all over the place. I have a bunch of foreign coins that are worth practically nothing, but are round and very heavy. I have found odd-shaped weights from any number of obsolete home items that were on the way to the landfill. Some of my favorite weights came from a dead kitchen faucet that had a pull-out handle.

And the round ones you see from time to time in my photos came from an obsolete life raft that was headed for the dump! (How fun is that!) If you are discarding some items, take it apart and see if anything inside is heavy and possibly an odd shape. And when you find something that will work, there you have it. And, don't forget the organic option. I have a number of really heavy small rocks I have found over the years that also work just fine. Oh yes, and I have a few small bits of scrap-steel that I have found on my walks. Keep looking down, and there is no telling what you might find. Have fun with this. (Oh yes... another hobby!)

Hello Pamela: I am currently a few years behind in reading *N-Scale Magazine*. Recently, I have been able to read Cover to Cover an issue every three weeks, which is assisting in closing the gap.

In the July/August 2023 issue, a Letter to the Editor mentioned Z scale articles. As a long time subscriber, who has also purchased a collection decades ago of *N-Scale Magazine* early issues, I believe that I have every issue published. As you had mentioned, there is an excellent publication Ztrack for the Z scale community, which I have a few issues. There is also *Marklin Magazine*, which includes articles about Z scale. Years ago, Marklin Club had another publication, which had articles on Z scale; not sure if that is still being published.

I very Strongly Oppose adding Z scale coverage to *N-Scale Magazine* beyond what Tom Knapp is doing. I am also a Z scale modeler of European prototype and have a number of issues of the excellent publication *Marklin Magazine*. Z scale is nice and already has multiple publications for various content.

Track plans, Scenery, Scratch building, Electronics, … articles cross the scale lines; thus Z scale modelers can learn from *N-Scale Magazine*. I have taken information and inspiration from HO and O scale articles in other publications for use in N scale.

Additional item – I was a many decades long customer of MB Klein. After MB Klien's sale of business, I have been ordering items from other various sources and have let them know that the Only Publication that I subscribe to is *N-Scale Magazine*. At the moment, my sources for future acquisitions appears to be Lombard Hobbies; Tony's Train Exchange; Hogz Trains and Walther's. If and when I get into the modern electronics, I may add a supplier or two to the mix.

One reason for being behind is time spent on 1:1 trains in September 2023.

Ronald Powell

Response from Pamela: Ronald, thank you for your recent letter. I am happy to hear you are still reading and catching up on the magazine. Rest assured, we will not be adding Z scale articles in *N-Scale Magazine*. This was a question that was posed to us years ago. I appreciate your support and response. We love to hear from our readers. Thank you.

Dear N-Scale, I love your magazine, which I've subscribed to for the last three years or so, having decided to try a tiny N-scale layout after decades of modeling HO gauge. At 88 years of age, my eyes ain't what they used to be, and probably I should be modeling O or even G gauge, but my manual dexterity is still fine, so I soldier on.

I'm having a devil of a time figuring out how to wire a few Tortoise switch machines to turnouts plus LED indicator lights on a control panel to tell me how turnouts under a mountain are set. I've tried Circuitry, the maker of Tortoises, without success, as well as the one hobby shop in my area; still I haven't got things right.

I attached an image of the way I have wired things, and while the DPTD toggle— on-on on—correctly moves the Tortoise, BOTH the red and the green LEDs are always on. That's the problem. Obviously, I want only the green to light if the turnout is set for the mainline, and the red if set for the diverging route. Can you offer any ADVICE or HELP?

I also built a a model by Mudd Creek Models early on for my little layout, sitting on an inlet of a river or ocean, called "Dave's Bait and Boats" shop. The review of Mudd Creek Models by Dennis Murphy in the latest issue of your magazine was great, and I'd echo the kudos he gives to Mudd Creek Models. I've also built a couple kits from Fine Scale Miniatures, which are equally well designed and packed with details.

Thanks, keep up the good work!

Joe Corn

Hello N-Scale: Do you have someone in your club or know of someone who can execute DC to DCC & Sound conversions on N scale Kato engines? (Rio Grande - UP1989 - Kato AC4400CW equipped with an ESU LokSound V5 Micro Sound Decoder 58741.)

Jonathan Dively, Owasso, OK

Response from Pamela: If you are able to help Jonathan, please reach out to us at *info@nscalemagazine.com* and we will share your information with Jonathan.

We look forward to hearing your comments. Please submit them to: N-Scale Magazine • 5811 75th Avenue NE • Marysville, WA 98270
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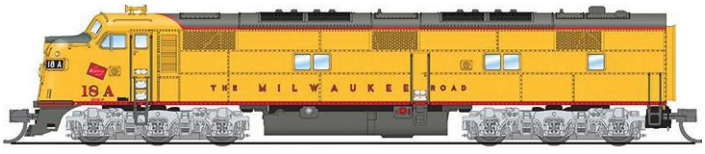
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Items #10232 (Paragon4 A-Unit), #10234 (Stealth A-Unit)

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Items #10228 (Paragon4 A&B Set), #10230 (Stealth A&B Set)

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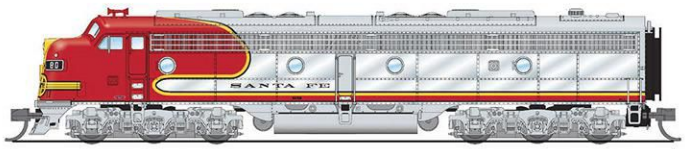
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Side A *Side B*



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Side A



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Side A



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Extra Extra! Read All About It!

Part 6: Some Finishing Touches

by **Dennis Murphy**

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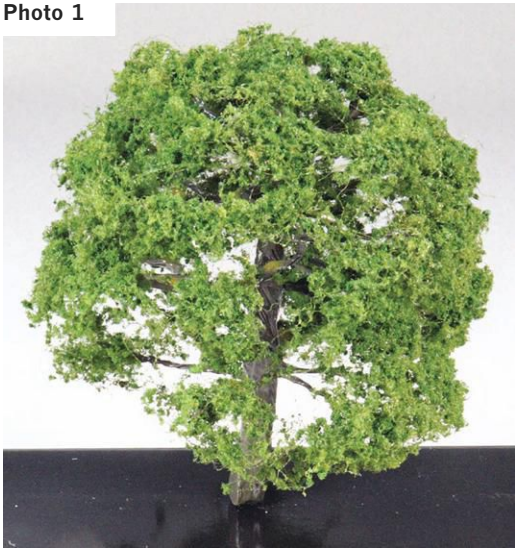


Photo 2



Photo 1: Where do we go from here? We have accomplished so much, but the layout just doesn't look finished enough for my likes. I know, let's try adding more trees. Granted, the trees we have already added look OK. But let's be honest, those trees that we made are just not the most realistic I have ever seen.

Just by chance, I happen to have on-hand something that will really fill the bill for better trees. Actually, way better trees. Let's take a moment and have a look at the Woodland Scenics product line simply called Premium Trees. In this case, let's have a look at the oak trees pack (Item #TR 1606).

Wow, look at those trees. I can certainly see how they can get away with naming them Premium Trees. Look at that detail. (Remember, this is N scale, and these trees are really small.)

This might well be the perfect time to take a moment and talk a bit about planning. If I had won that recent two billion dollar Lotto prize, I would have placed an order with Woodland Scenics for 100 (or more) of these trees sets. They really are that good.

What exactly am I getting at here? These premium trees come at a premium price. So, what's a guy like me to do who is on a bit of a restricted budget? Get creative, of course. The way I can have some really good trees without breaking the bank is simple. I install the second-string trees in the back where they aren't very easy to see and I place the really good trees right up front for all to see. Not close enough where those little child fingers can reach them, but almost. Ah, that looks better.

Photo 3



Photo 2: Those oak trees came out great. Why not add some diversity to our scene? How about also adding some paper birch trees (Item #TR1605)? These paper birch trees are every bit as good as the oak trees are. Life is good.

Photo 3: To add a bit more real life to our scene, how about even more bio-diversity? In this case, let's also add more of those Premium Tree series? How about their locust trees this time (Item #TR1607)?

If you look closely at these three different types of trees, you will find they are completely different from one to another. With most trees I have purchased over the years, the company changes a little bit of this or that and calls it some different type of tree. Boring. Not so with these Woodland Scenics trees. Look at the leaves, look at the trunks, look at the branches. Now, I call that detail.

Ah yes, have a look at what you have accomplished. Wow, this has been fun, and talk about a time filler. I know... I know. I have also been doing other stuff along the way, but all the while I have been thinking about the Great Layout Project. (I am so easily entertained.) Life Is GOOD!



Photo 4: Here you see a bit of planning in the works. Let's see. I only have a limited number of these first-rate trees on hand, so how might I get the best bang-for-my buck? Ah yes, these trees can go there... Then possibly, those trees can go over there. You get the idea. Spend a bit of time playing about at this before you drag out your adhesive.



Photo 5: All right, it must be time to get ready to plant our fancy trees. Of course, you will need an adhesive for the job. Personally, I like to use good old-fashioned white household glue (Elmer's in this case). I find it plenty strong for the job, dries (mostly) clear, gives you plenty of time to work with it, you can find it almost anywhere for purchase, and my favorite is it's cheap. What's not to like?



Photo 6: You will need to have some sort of tool for tree planting. In this case, I took an old small screwdriver and ground the end to a sharp point. Just like that, I had the perfect tool for the job.
For you folks out there that used plywood for your base, you might well need to actually drill a hole for tree planting, but that's easy.

Anyway, let's get down to business. The question of the hour is, so what is left to do on the layout? Well, let's see... We need more trees and other items (LOTS of them). We need to finish up the "Power to the People" project. We have about a zillion bits and pieces to add... And... you get the idea. We have work to do.

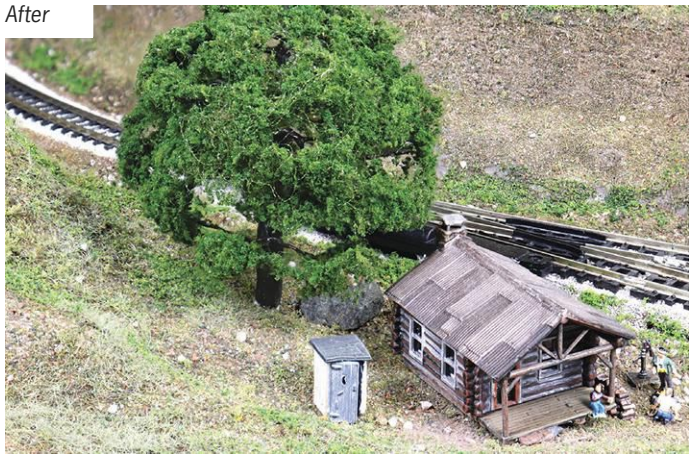
Don't forget to run some trains along the way. I don't know about you, but I get a real kick out of enjoying a liquid libation of my choice and watching the trains go round-and-round. Now, that's good fun (If you ask me, anyway.)

So, let's get to it. There's work to be done.

Before



After

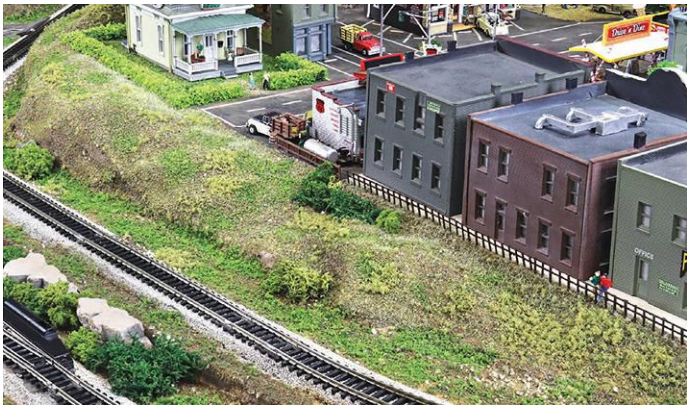












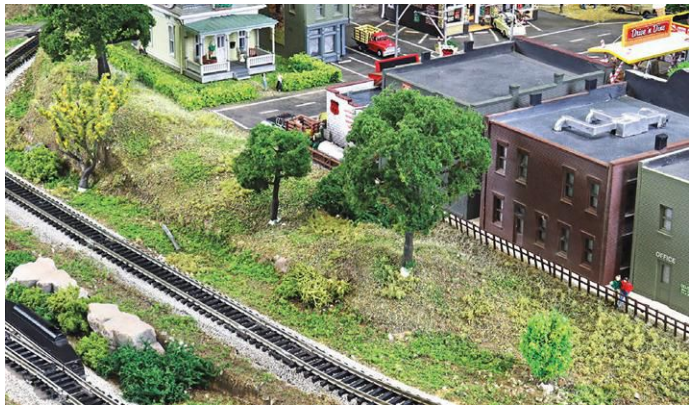


Photo 7: Have a look at these before and after photos of planting trees. I always find it amazing how one little thing (like a tree) really changes the entire feel of a scene. What do you think? Do you like the original look, or the new one with the trees in place?
Play around with planting your trees. If you don't exactly like how the scene is turning out, who cares. (It's a hobby after all.) Just pluck the tree out, and plant it some place different. Easy Peezy.



Photo 8: What do you think about our train world at night? If you are going to light up your life, then you need to have a power source to feed your town. (No one likes to live in the dark.) And I have just the things for you.



Photo 9: First off, you will need a power distribution sub-station. You know how the power comes into a sub-station, and the transformer knocks the voltage down to a usable level. Then the local power lines go out from there. Where might you find a perfect power distribution substation for your scene? Well, Woodland Scenics Company to the rescue, again. (I just love those guys.) In this case, we are talking Item #US2253.



Photo 10: Now, let's see. I think the power sub-station should go here. My train buddy thinks it should go over there. Since this layout kit we are building did not plan where to add this substation, I guess we need to figure it out on our own. (Come on Johnny. it can't possibly go there. but then again...) Hummm...





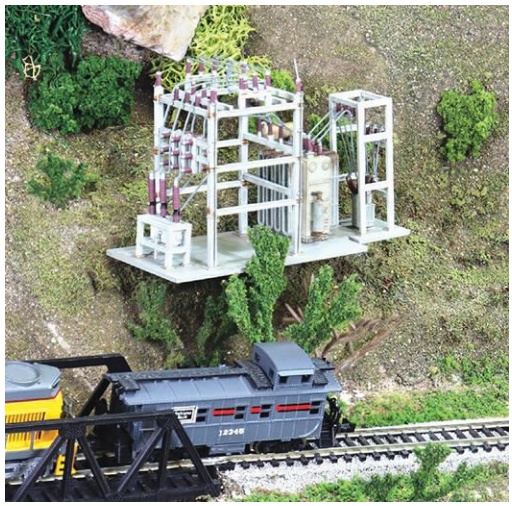




Photo 11: Have a look at some of the spots we were considering. Here you see four of the possible locations we came up with. All these locations could work, but which one will work best? What do you think?



Photo 12: And the winner is... We came to a consensus on the location in the (almost) center of the layout. It was the only easy road access of the different locations. The only problem was it had a small hill at that location. Of course, you can't have a substation teetering on top of a small hill. Just think of the liability. The area needs to be nice and flat.



Photo 13: I had to start off by removing the small hill that was in the chosen site. Oh NO. Didn't I just build that darn thing? Yup... To make an omelet, you need to break some eggs. Cut... Cut... Cut.
I had completely forgotten there is only a (very) thin covering of plaster cloth over a bunch of balled up newspapers. If you make changes like this, be gentle. Don't get carried away in the beginning of cutting. (There it is again, that ugly head of experience.)



Photo 14: Next came the process of turning a small hill into a nice level gravel pad. I used a bit of cardboard I had left over from building the city sidewalks. After it was glued into place, I added the (very) fine gravel for the work yard.





Photo 15 (*Left*): One of the things I have never liked about some modelers layout is empty power poles. Have a look around outside your house. How often do you see empty power poles?
I have tried many different things for actual wires on my poles with, at best, mixed results. I did finally discover a product that actually does the job just fine called EZ Line. This is some type of plastic (nylon?) stuff that is really strong, and is really stretchy. It can get pulled at least twice its normal length, and still not break. GREAT stuff. (Give it a try.)

Photo 16: The gravel pad is down and the glue is dry, so, we are moving along nicely. What now? If we are going to have power to our train town, then it has to come from someplace, doesn't it? What's a guy to do? Well, what I did was, go fishing. Off to my treasure chest (mostly junk, with a few jewels mixed in for good measure) to see what I might have on-hand. What I found were some leftover high-tension power poles from who knows where? (I never throw anything away.) From there, I had to do some serious alteration to these poles to cut them down for my needs. I also had to fit them to the hillside and make them look natural enough. (Now that took way longer than I thought it should.) Ah... That looks OK.



Photo 17: OK, we needed a high-tension power feed for the electricity (That worked out well.) Of course, we need some fencing around the substation to keep the riffraff out. So, it was back to my treasure chest to see what I already had on-hand.
Will you look at that. I had just the right amount of some leftover fencing from, once again, who knows where, but it was perfect.



Photo 19: To start off, I needed to figure out (about) how far apart the poles should be placed, and how I can fit them into the scene. Remember that poles are NOT always exactly the same spacing. The Woodland Scenics folks suggest spacing the poles at between four and eight inches apart. I figured that a bit closer was better than a bit farther apart. Your choice.



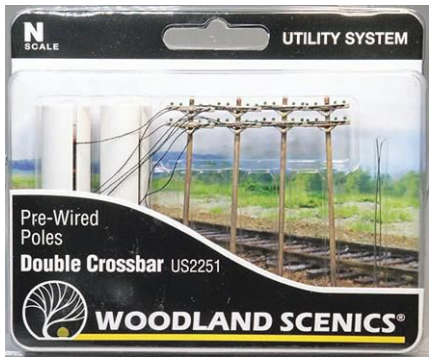


Photo 18: All right, now that we have our substation and power installed, it must be time to move on to installing the power poles. I have used a rather wide assortment of manufactured power poles over the years, but they never look very good. I have also built my own from time to time, which look much better than those plastic things, but that is sooo much work.
There must be a better way. Thanks (again) to my friends at the Woodland Scenics, there is a much better way (Thanks guys). Have a look at these pre-wired poles (WHAT??). Yes, not only are these poles nicely scaled for our use, but they have the wires already in place. All I can say is WOW.
These pre-wired poles come in two styles. You have the Single Crossbar (Item #US 2250) and the Double Crossbar (Item #US2251), depending on your needs. You might spend some time thinking about what will you will be wanting, and where. Of course, if you end up with a few too many poles, you can always use them on another project.



Photo 20: Have a look at these Structure Feed Lines (Item #US2252) that I have at my disposal. This is for the wires running from the pole to the house or business. These are items for those maxi-detail folks out there.
At this point, I'm not sure if I will get real carried away using these last bits, or not. Only time will tell. Who knows? It might happen. (Probably not.)



Photo 21



Photo 22



Photo 23



Photo 24

Photo 21: Enter the pre-wired poles. Let's see. How do I make these silly things work? The actual planting of the poles was easy after I figured out where they should be placed. Just keep in mind the height of the poles you want, and make sure your trains will clear the wires with ease. Don't forget about those tall loads. The lines took a bit of playing about to get correct. If you pull too hard on the wires, you will find it is easy to bend over the poles that come before. If you are not tight enough, the wires are all saggy, and just don't look correct. Once you get one wire as tight as you like, then you must really take your time stringing the other ones. If you make a later wire too tight, you can easily cause all the other wires you have completed to look too loose.
As for adhesive, after I had the wires just as I wanted, I put a very small dab of AC adhesive on every place the wire goes through the crossbars. That way, if you happen to break one (heaven forbid), you won't damage the others or loosen the wire.



Photo 25

Photo 22: Of course, you need to attach the wires to the sub-station. This was not nearly as easy as I figured it should have been. The single crossbar poles have four wires, and the double crossbar poles have about eight or ten wires. (I can't remember.) So, where do all those wires attach to the sub-station?
My point here? It doesn't matter at all. Just attach them looking as natural as you can, and move along. If anyone ever questions you, then I'll really be surprised if they do. Not one person so far has asked about it on my layout project. (So far.)

Photos 23 & 24: Power To The People. Here are a couple of nice shots, including the new sub-station and the power poles. These power poles really came out great. What do you think? I have never liked power poles with no wires on them, and this was a rather easy solution. Granted, these power poles ended up more work than I had originally thought.

Remember that this is a hobby and not a job. You really don't need to ever be in a hurry with any of these things you are working on.

Photo 25: My, will you have a look at that. Just think of all the things we have done, and all the fun we have had along the way. For all practical purposes, we are finished. (Of course, hopefully anyway, it will never be completely finished.) But, hold on just a minute. Something still looks a bit lacking. What could possibly be missing?



Photo 26



Photo 27

Photo 28



Photo 30



Photo 29

Photo 26: Hummm... What possibly could be needed after all we have already done? Wait a moment... I know... I know... We need a backdrop. I just happen to have one on-hand that should work just fine. (Imagine that.) I have this wonderful backdrop that I received from the nice folks at the SceniKing Roll Outs company (A Canadian company). These high-quality backdrops are mostly designed to be used with stationary applications (like your basement). Remember, this entire layout we have built will be dragged around to train shows all over the country, so I needed something that would hold up under pressure on the road.

What I ended up doing was going to my friendly local PostNet Store, and had them scan and print this backdrop onto ridged foam-core stock (one single piece). This stuff is very light, and very strong. Other than one little problem with the printing, it came out well. (Even if it was a bit spendy.) Now, how am I going to get this silly thing to stand up on its own?

Photo 27: Since this layout will be dragged around to train shows, I decided to make the backdrop very portable by having the idea of a free-standing affair (NOT actually attached to the layout). I built two legs using wood doweling. The base of these legs was built out of some scrap bits of plywood. For the leg reciprocals, I purchased some PVC plastic water pipe of the correct size to accommodate the doweling.

Photo 28: The foam-core board the backdrop was printed on was a bit too flimsy for my likes, so I decided to stiffen it up a bit. I had on-hand some 1×1 wood to use as stiffeners for the back. To attach these strips of wood, it was back to my old friend, the hot-glue gun. (I never knew they could do so much.)

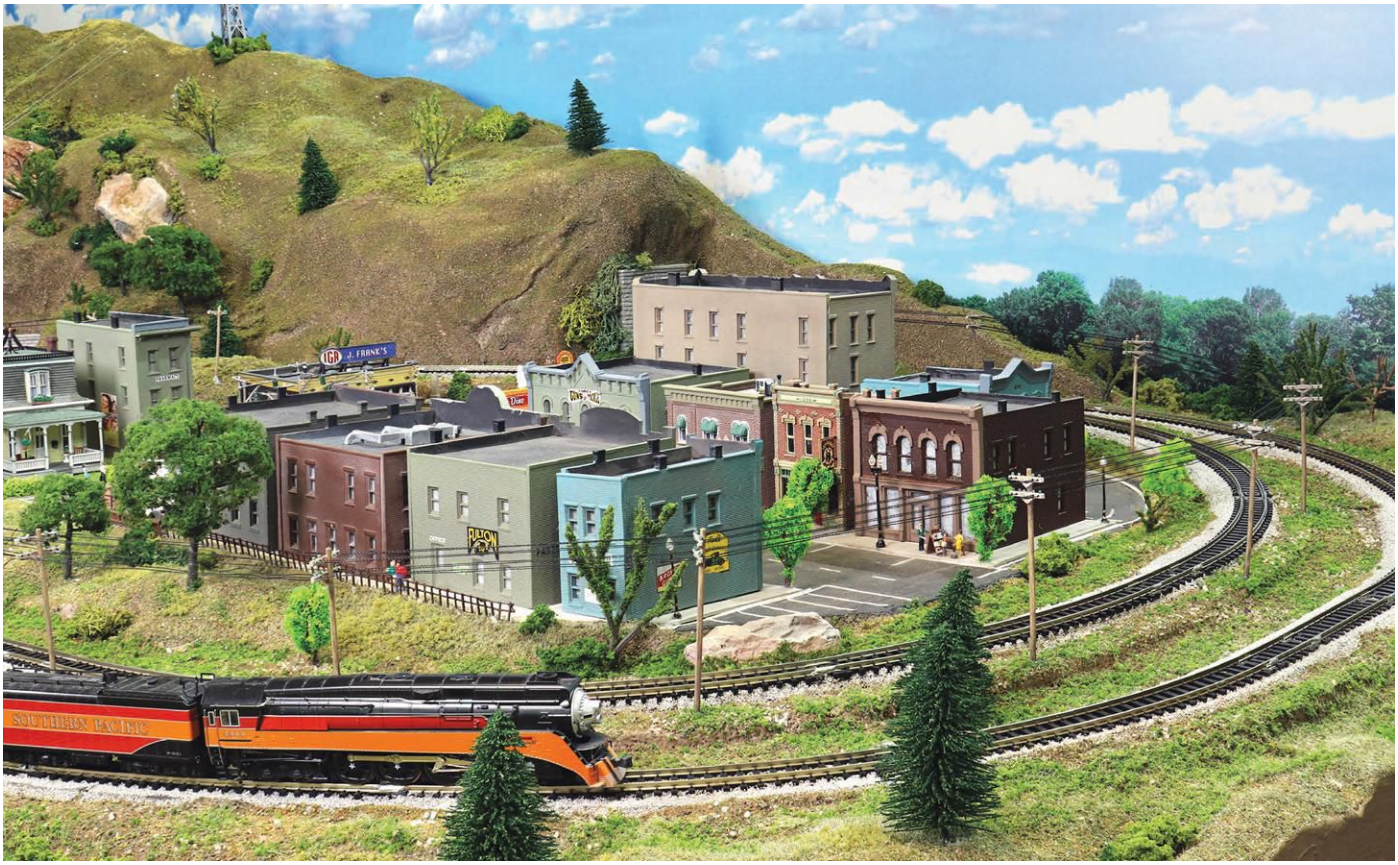
Of course, I had to work out some way to attach the PVC pipe to the backdrop. I was a bit concerned that the volume of hot glue that was needed might damage the foam-core board. But, sometimes you just need to take a chance. I know, that sounds a bit cavalier, but I did take some caution and tried a big glob from the glue-gun on a little spot out of sight before I got carried away.

The hot glue gun worked just fine attaching the pipe, but it used a bunch of glue sticks. Now, will it hold up being used over-and-over at train shows... And on-the-road? Only time will tell.

Photo 29: Well... What do you think? Easy on – Easy off. It looks like it will work just fine. But, it looks like you had best be very careful and NOT trip over it. This was never built for heavy duty, but rather for light duty at the shows. I believe it will work just fine. Once again, only time will tell.

Photo 30: Where might you find a backdrop for your own Train World? Go have a look around their website. They have about a hundred different backdrops in different scales that can connect together for who knows how long of a backdrop. Or, if you wish, each of these backdrop sections would work just fine all by themselves.





Photos 31 & 32: Here you have some nice shots of the completed layout. What good fun. Wow, have we ever accomplished tons, while having so much fun? For those of you who have been working along with me, thank you for joining in on the fun.



Photo 33



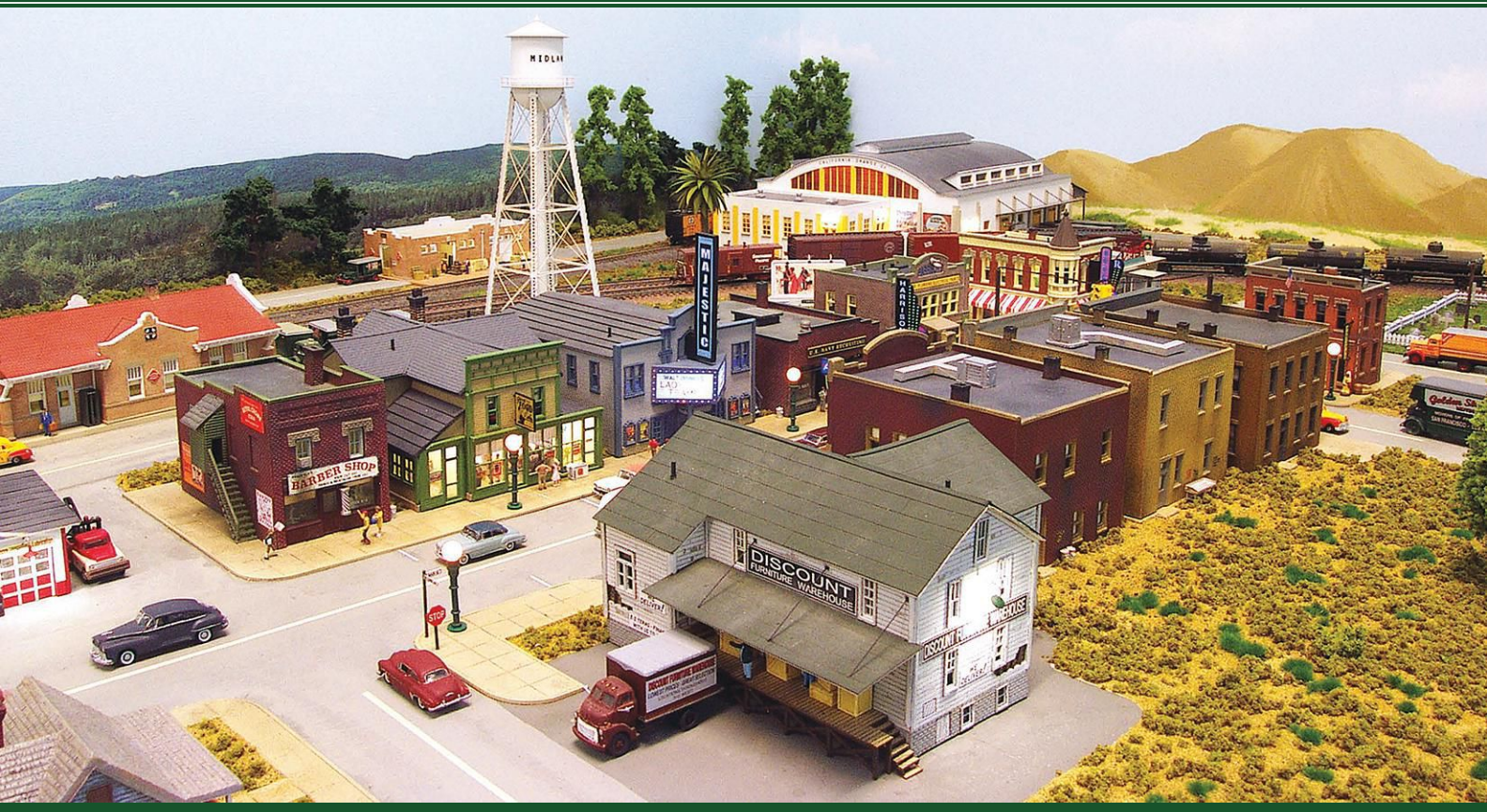


Photo 34

Photo 33: Here you see a combo shot without the backdrop, and with the backdrop. What do you think? My, what one little photo can accomplish in mere moments. I like that. And there you have it. That's just about everything I can think of at the moment that we can add to our layout project. Will there be other projects on this layout to work on along the way? I should hope so. Will I end up tearing out areas on this layout and change them? Most certainly. Will I need to partake in some fine tuning? You bet ya. Remember, this is a hobby and not a Job. Keep it fun and easy. And forever moving along.
Ok then... What's next? At this moment, I have no idea, but whatever it ends up being... I'll bet it will be FUN. Don't forget to send in some of your photos along the way of building your very own Great Layout Project to info@nscalemagazine.com I really would like to see them.
Now, get out there and have some fun, and build something.

Photo 34: A Bad Day on the rails. Sometimes, these things just happen. Call out the wrecker crew. Bummer.

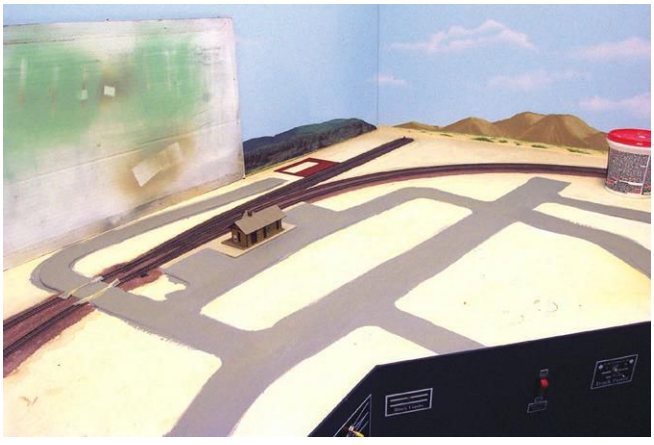
BUILD A SMALL TOWN FOR YOUR RAILROAD



by **Loren Perry**

A nicely detailed small town can add a great deal of human interest to a model railroad. It can also be a source of revenue and provide opportunities for switching cars.

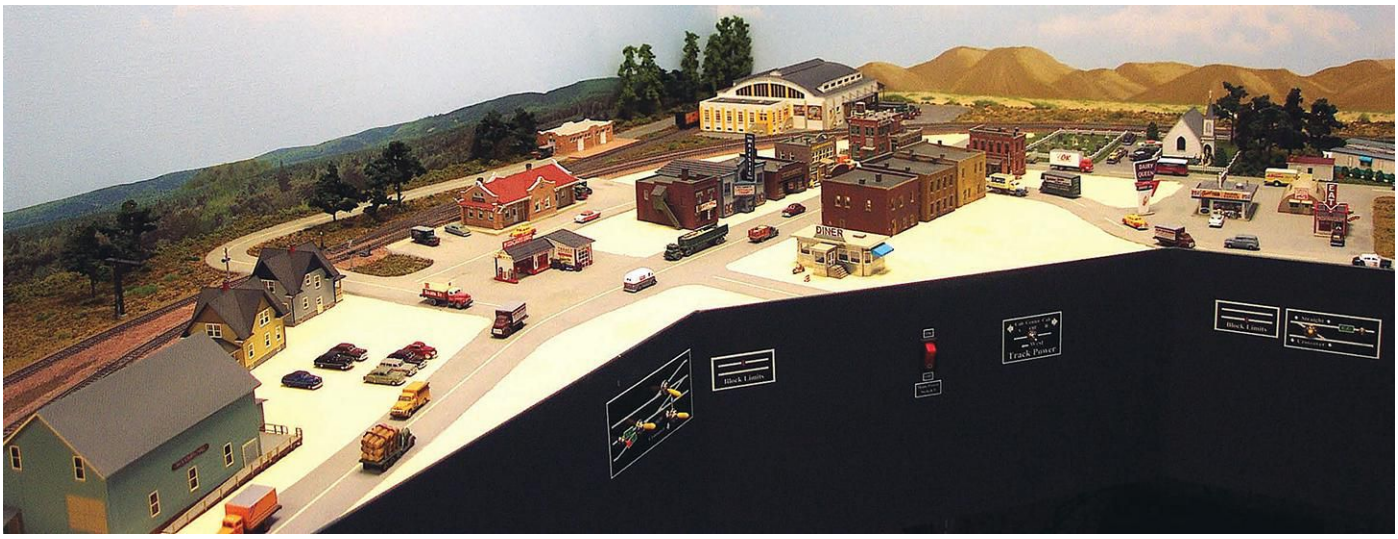
As a model maker, I sometimes find my inspiration in the strangest places. When I was about to start designing and building a small agricultural town for my Steam Friendly Hollywood Railroad, I kept thinking back to a favorite movie of mine, Tim Burton's "Beetlejuice" from 1988. The opening sequence of the film shows a helicopter shot looking down while following a long winding country road. As the scene progresses,



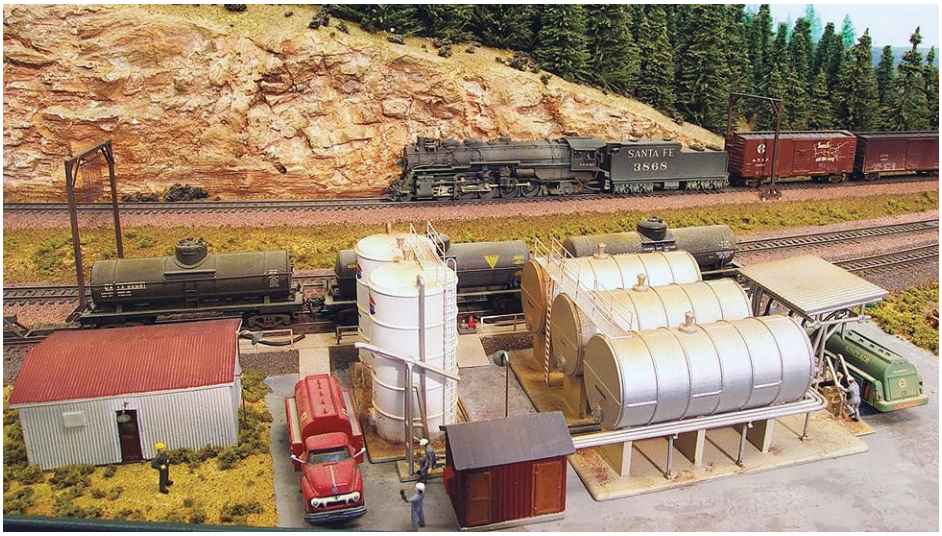
Laying out the road is a first step in constructing a town. I used Woodland Scenics' paving and coloring products throughout.



Before scenery or buildings were added, the roadways were painted after necessary touchups were accomplished using lightweight Spackle.



After the roads had been prepared, assembled buildings were then placed to test for fit. In this view, several of the visible structures are serving as placeholders and were not actually used in the finished town. Others were moved to different locations.



This small fuel dealer marks the westernmost outskirts of my town of Midland. In the background, a 3800-class Santa Fe 2-10-2 begins its uphill climb into mountainous territory. The engine was kitbashed from Kato 2-8-2 chassis components and resin castings made by Jason Smith of Tomball Locomotive Works.



I scratchbuilt this model of the building where my church once held its Sunday meetings. The real structure is over 100 years old and has since been repainted in dark red.

it changes almost seamlessly into a matching view of a beautifully detailed architectural scale model of a town that has been built by one of the lead characters of the story.

I wanted a small town that approached the completeness of the one I saw in the film. Regular readers of this magazine are familiar with my style of modeling where I give plenty of attention to my trains' surroundings. Just as I had almost gone overboard with detailing my previous renditions of Skid Row and Suburbia, I was resolved to match those efforts in my new project.

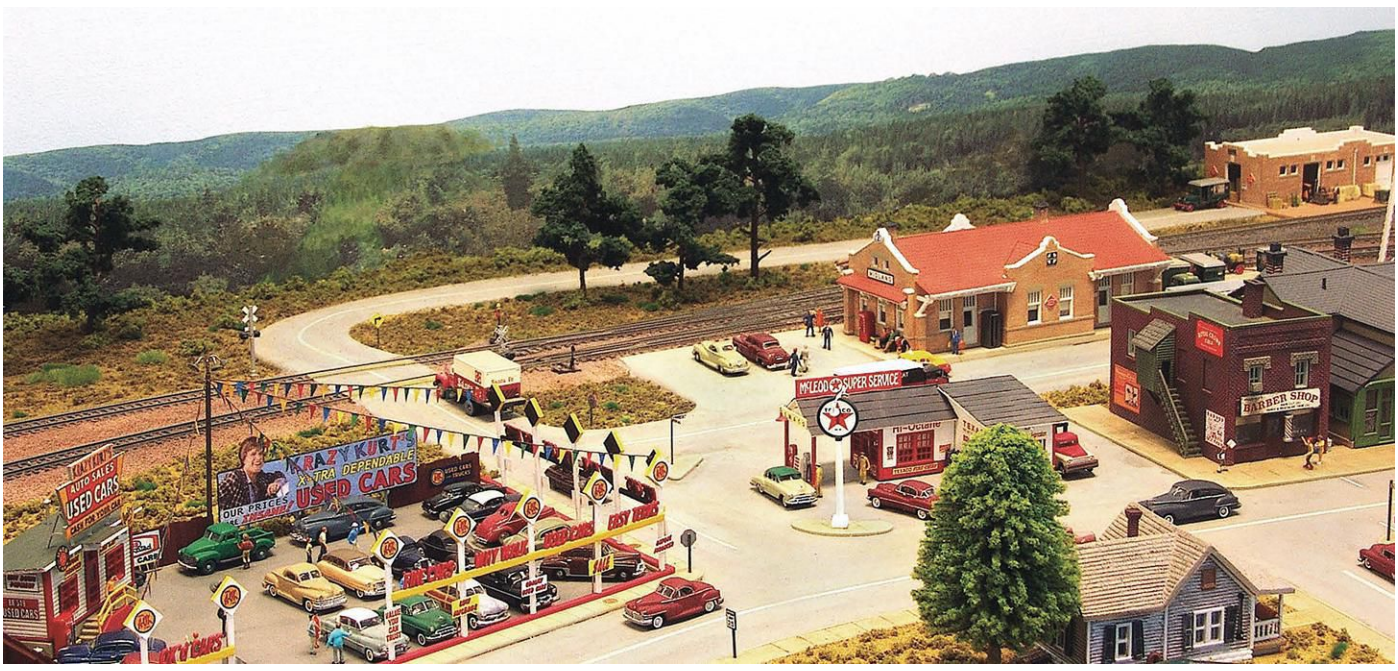
When one builds (as I have) an around-the-walls style of layout, it makes almost everything on the pike virtually a front-of-the-layout display whether one likes it or not. This implies that almost everything should be built to the highest possible standards because the viewer(s) will be right on top of them and any substandard modeling or flaws will be all too evident. Of course, no one has to follow this way of thinking – this is my "problem" and I deal with it as best I can.

PREPARING THE GROUNDWORK

Being basically a flat, tabletop style layout, preparing my town's overall footprint was simple. Roadways were plotted and outlined, and the surrounding areas were pre-painted with latex beige-colored paint. I had already pre-assembled numerous structure kits over the previous few years and used



Blair Lines' excellent A to Z Used Car Lot kit was the starting point for this scene. Being a former car salesman myself, I lavished extra details on it such as distinctive billboards, colorful overhead banners, and plenty of custom painted and superdetailed cars.



The used car lot marks the beginning of the commercial district. A Texaco gas station and the town depot are the focus of this scene.

them as guides to establish proper spacing of the roads and to lay out the sidewalks. Next, I used Woodland Scenics' road paving products (a plaster-like compound called Smooth-It with associated masking tapes and coloring agents) and followed their directions. The result was a slightly elevated series of roads with a realistic surface texture.

I gradually feathered the elevated roads down to tabletop level as they



It's train time as travelers prepare to board Santa Fe's westbound Grand Canyon. Walthers' Santa Fe-style station and freight house (in back) are beautiful kits and add a southwestern atmosphere to this scene.



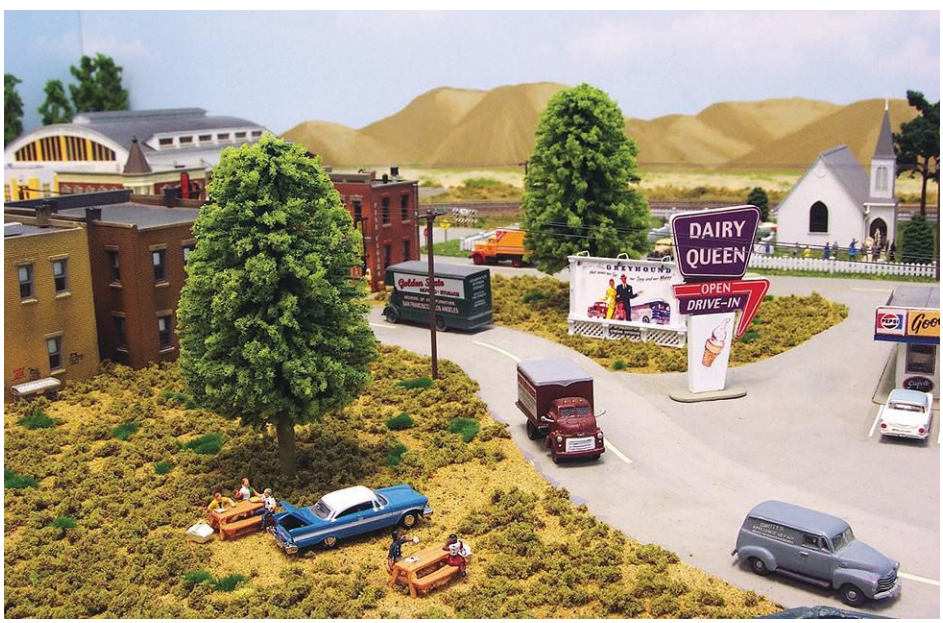
The largest industry in Midland is an orange packinghouse served by rail and trucks. The model is a superb N-Scale Architect kit that has been modified to fit the available space.



Here we see Midland's downtown business district. A combination of plastic and wooden kits was used, along with sidewalks made from Evergreen Plastic styrene sidewalk material. The water tank is a Walthers product.

entered the downtown area. This allowed me to secure the styrene sidewalks directly to the painted plywood surface for a neat joint with the roads. A few small air holes were dealt with by applying water-based lightweight Spackle, and then Woodland Scenics' Top Coat colors were mixed to achieve the medium gray of a weathered asphalt surface. Finally, the colored roads were masked and airbrushed to create white centerlines and oily residue from passing vehicles.

The sidewalks were cut from pre-grooved Evergreen .040" thick styrene sidewalk sheeting. Cutting and fitting this material is extremely easy and went quickly. After I had shaped each section complete with curved corners, I fitted the sidewalks' outer edges with Evergreen .040" by .040" styrene strip to form the curbs. When done, each section was sprayed with Rustoleum textured Sandstone-colored paint, followed by a coat of Testors' Dullcote. This gave a convincing concrete color as well as texture. After this, I laid the rest of the ground cover using Woodland Scenics' and other products.



Moving east out of the business district, we see a small park area with picnickers enjoying the day. Blair Line kits provided all the billboards for this project. The Dairy Queen sign was home made on my computer to fit Blair Line's Dari King kit.

BUILDING THE STRUCTURES

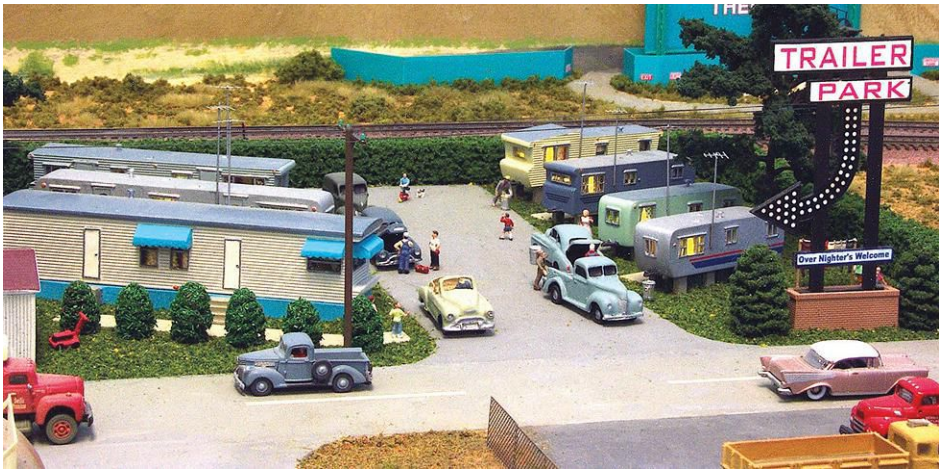
Thanks to an ever-growing wealth of finely detailed commercial kits available to today's N scalers, I was able to easily choose the appropriate structures for my town. A number of plastic and laser-cut wooden kits were selected and a few special structures were planned for scratchbuilding. I especially wanted to try out some wooden kits from smaller firms such as Branchline Trains and Showcase Miniatures. As it turned



Further east are a few small businesses and a church. The eateries are Blair Lines laser-cut wooden kits and the plumbing shop was built from a Rix plastic kit of a Quonset hut.



This church scene is a scratchbuilt replica of an actual 100+ year-old church in my town. Model Power plastic fencing surrounds the grounds and Woodland Scenics tombstones fill the cemetery.



Trailer park life is an important element of many small towns, and NuComp Miniatures resin kits were the starting point for this scene. A Miller Engineering animated neon sign was cut down in height and built into a simulated brick landscape base.

out, I was not disappointed. It seemed no matter whose kit I built; the result was always the same – 100% satisfaction. Our hobby is truly blessed by these master craftsmen who design and manufacture such beautiful model kits.

The most complex kit I tackled was The N Scale Architect's barrel-roofed Cal Fame Packing Plant. I'm compelled to salute this firm's efforts as the kit, involved as it is, built up perfectly. The instructions are thorough and the overall quality lacks for nothing. It has a rather large footprint so I had to modify it to fit the restricted space I had available for it. The changes involved shortening the office section by two windows and then relocating it off-center to the left to clear the curved mainline running in front of it. I was forced to arrange the surrounding grounds in a somewhat unrealistic manner due to severely limited space, but because it's in a far corner of the layout, this isn't a major problem.

My town's depot was originally going to be a laser-cut wooden kit, but when Walthers released its beautiful plastic kit of a Santa Fe style depot with accompanying freight house, I changed my plans. These models, when properly painted and detailed, convey the atmosphere of the southwestern U.S. like few kits do. My town (and depot) needed a name and because I am essentially freelancing with prototype western railroads, I wanted a generic sounding name that didn't force me to adhere to specific prototypical or geographical features. While perusing some books on the Santa Fe, I found a route map that featured a tiny location near the California/Arizona border called Midland. This would do just fine.

Another recent Walthers kit of a 1940s-50s style water tower was built and lettered for the town of Midland. The kit is so well done that I couldn't better it with all my scratchbuilding skills.

Showcase Miniatures' beautiful laser cut kit of "The Bartlett" supply business was built and re-named Discount Furniture Warehouse to match some of my Showcase white metal vans already decaled for the same company. A few crates from Fine N Scale and figures of workmen helped complete the scene.



Another local industry is Smitty's Diesel and Truck Service, which was built using a Walthers farm supply plastic kit and homemade signs. The large illuminated sign out front is built using home made decals on a Miller Engineering electro-luminescent (EL) panel. It's a great place to display a collection of custom-detailed model trucks and farm equipment.



Here is the eastern edge of the town as it joins up with Route 66, seen on the right.

Almost all of my layout's structures are illuminated for night operations, so some of my structure kits were modified to allow this. For example, the Branchline Trains Majestic movie theater kit had its kit-supplied marquee and sign replaced with Miller Engineering's LED-equipped counterparts which feature animated chase lights and lighted main panels. I also used Miller's EL panels with home made decals to construct a large vertical MAJESTIC sign above the marquee. By the way, with all due respect to Branchline Miniatures, don't judge the quality of Branchline's kits by the photos of built-up samples shown on their website and box tops. These kits are outstanding in every way and build up very nicely.

I included three nods to my personal past with special structures that have meaning to me. The first is a Navy Recruiting office. I served as a U.S. Navy recruiter in the 1970s and 1980s so I had to build one for Midland. A simple plastic kit from a local hobby shop was easily converted using home made signs, and an NJ International Crowd Pleasers sailor was enlisted as a recruiter who is seen interviewing a Woodland Scenics prospect. I scratch-built an A-frame poster holder for the sidewalk out front and photo-reduced some actual Navy recruiting posters to fit in it. Finally, a Classic Metal Works black Dodge sedan was decorated with Navy decals and parked out front.

The second personally significant structure is the used car lot built from

A variety of sources provide illumination for my small town, including Miller Engineering's animated neon signs, LEDs, fiber-optics, EL panels, and a few incandescent bulbs (in the streetlights). The fully functional 4-way traffic light is a Berkshire Junction product.



A close-up of the Berkshire Junction traffic light. Installation is a little tricky, but the final result is more than worth the effort.

a Blair Line kit. This is actually a dual salute – one to my past, and the other to Hollywood as so many of my structures are. A film entitled Used Cars came out in 1980 and starred Kurt Russell, so I found a photo of the actor from that film on the Internet. This was then incorporated into a billboard using my Adobe Illustrator program and printed out in proper scale to match the size of the Blair Line billboard. The business is now named Krazy Kurt's X-tra Dependable Used Cars with the subtext Our Prices Are Insane! Four strings of multi-colored paper banners were fabricated and strung from an overhead lamppost, and a lot full of my best N scale automobiles were detailed and placed on



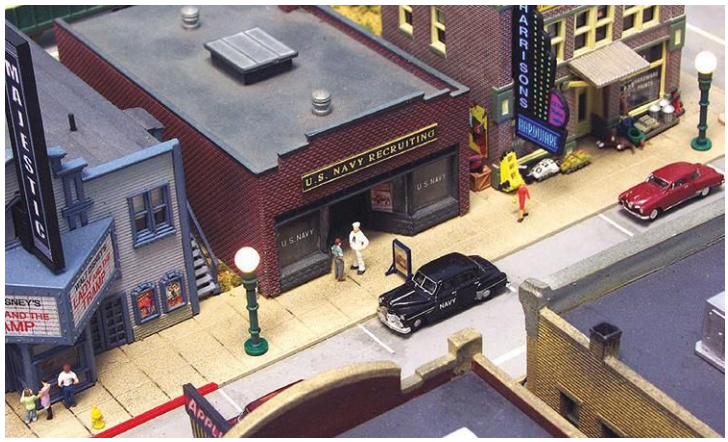
The corner of Main and Second Avenue. An old Con-Cor plastic kit is made up into a barbershop and two excellent laser-cut wooden kits from Brachline Trains are the source for the food emporium and the theater. The latter was modified to accept Miller Engineering's illuminated signs.



Showcase Miniatures' outstanding "The Bartlett" laser-cut building was transformed into Discount Furniture Warehouse with home-made computer generated paper signs and is served by Showcase's equally fine white metal GMC trucks displaying home made decal signs on their sides.



JL Innovative Designs' very popular McLeod Super Service Texaco gas station kit was built out-of-the box and improved with a homemade illuminated street side signpost.



As a nod to my past, I included a Navy Recruiting office with a recruiter talking to a prospect out front. The A-frame sidewalk sign is homemade using photo-reduced copies of actual vintage recruiting posters.



Close-up detail shot of the Dairy Queen restaurant. Adding appropriate figures inside and out really brings life to a scene like this.



A small town is a good place to run small trains such as this Southern Pacific 2-8-0 (Key Imports) about to split the semaphores. I used Century Foundry Metal Works' white metal instrument cases (from Showcase Miniatures) and added scratchbuilt masts and blades to make these non-operating replicas of SP double semaphores.

display. Completing the scene are carefully chosen and positioned figures representing salesmen and customers. For night operations, I added seven micro-LED floodlights built from Ngineering's products to illuminate the entire lot.

The third and final structure of special importance to me is the church. It's a scratchbuilt scale replica of the historical 100+ year-old Center Church here on my home of Lopez Island, Washington. Like the real church, a cemetery is located across the road and a white picket fence surrounds the grounds. The fence also helps to separate the grounds from the railroad tracks that run behind the church. Full interior detail is inside the structure and LEDs provide the proper lighting. A pushbutton on the fascia activates a digitally recorded church bell and a custom painted set of Preiser figures depicts a wedding service reaching its conclusion as the bride and groom are about to be driven to their reception in a borrowed classic car.

SMALL DETAILS

I love to add figures to help tell stories and bring the town to life. My first choice is Preiser unpainted figures that I paint myself. Sometimes, the pre-painted versions are done up in hideous color schemes that no normal person would be caught wearing, certainly not in the conservative 1950s. A few of the better Woodland Scenics figures are also included and all are carefully chosen for their poses and dress styles.

Lots of signs are also a feature of my

modeling style because they help nail down the era, especially for visitors and in close-up photography. This brings up an interesting point - much of my models' detailing isn't readily visible to the casual observer, but it becomes much more apparent in close-up photography as seen in this article. Consequently, when I build something, I keep this in the back of my mind, i.e., will it show up in a photo?

For night operations, or to entertain visitors, everything lights up. This includes gooseneck spotlights on signs, street lamps, and large front windows in shops and restaurants. The theater signage has already been mentioned, but a favorite feature for me is the animated 4-way traffic light at the downtown intersection of Main Street and First Avenue. This is a Berkshire Junction product and it has worked flawlessly from Day One. I had already installed a set of four smaller traffic lights from this firm in my layout's Hollywood area and the newly installed unit matched the others in quality and reliability. Installing it is tricky and it's not easy to maintain a true to scale appearance due to the pre-wired electrical harness, but the sight of a working N scale traffic light seems to negate all this. All my traffic lights are wired to operate whenever the layout is powered up, whether the rest of the lights are on or off.



Close-up detail view of Krazy Kurt's Used Cars with customers and salesmen discussing the finer points of the autos on display. Another example of using figures to help tell a story.

CONCLUSION

It's not always possible to build a complete town on a home layout including their outskirts and numerous intersections. Such a project has to compete for real estate with spectacular scenery and major heavy industries, not to mention the railroad's right-of-way. It's simply a matter of priorities for each modeler. To me, creating a detailed little slice of 1950s America is every bit as rewarding as building and operating the model railroad that serves it.



Ngineering's micro-LEDs were used to illuminate the used car lot for night operations. They are seen in the triple floodlight on the pole at the rear and three more individual floodlights on the backs of the A-OK signs in front. A seventh LED lights the interior of the office.



Visitors are always impressed with a well-illuminated small town on a model railroad. With modern LED and electronic options now available, lighting structures is easy and there is almost no need to ever replace burned out bulbs.

N Scale Railroad Depot

Kalamazoo (MI)

by **Thorsten Hambusch**



Photo 1: Overview from the South. *Left*: North Rose Street shops - *Center*: Depot structure - *Background*: Commercial district.

Introduction

North of downtown Kalamazoo, MI, you can find a hipped roof building, which is red all over and different from all the surrounding flat roof houses: a railroad depot which was built in 1887 by the Michigan Central Railroad Co. (MCRR), about 40 years after the very first railroad depot in Kalamazoo. It was part of the track connecting Detroit and Chicago. This structure still exists, and it already caught my eyes in 1993 when I was taking classes at Western Michigan University. Yet it took me 30 years before I started my diorama. When revisiting the place in 2024, I found a beautifully restored structure with the awesome wooden interior of 1920.

Cyrus W. L. Eidlitz was the architect. He had built a couple of Romanesque train depots along the Michigan Central Railroad tracks in the late 19th century. They all were remarkable, made of red brick, pink sandstone and red roof tiles, showing hipped roofs, big arched windows, and a staircase turret.



Photo 2: Kalamazoo depot (track side), ca. 1887 – 1895

The Kalamazoo depot was one of the biggest, stretching across a whole block.

My approach

I never planned to build up a model railway. I just like dioramas. A limited, but detailed scenery around the train station was my goal, arranged in a showcase that could be placed in our family room. Therefore, I limited the size to 20×27 inches, using 1:160 N scale instead of the popular 1:87 H0 scale. My favorite railroad period is the 19th century when it all began. What might this area have looked like in the 1890s in the flourishing city of Kalamazoo?

Before laying out and modeling, I did some research. A most helpful, almost inexhaustible source of photographs was the Kalamazoo Public Library (KPL).

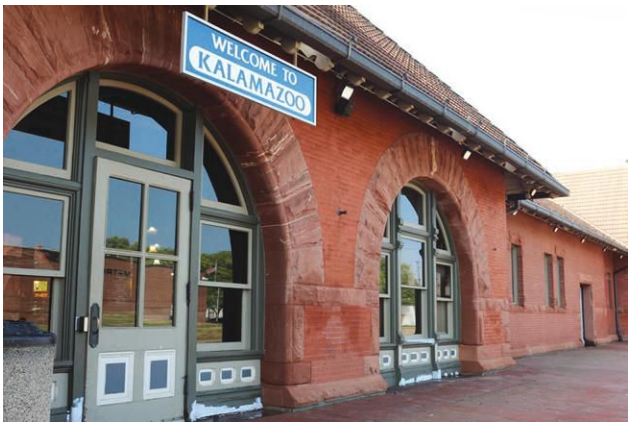


Photo 3: Kalamazoo depot (track side), 2024



Photo 4: Kalamazoo depot (town side), ca. 1887 – 1895



Photo 5: Kalamazoo depot (town side), 2024



Photo 6: Wooden interior of a waiting room (ca. 1920), 2024.



Photo 7: West Main Street, 1879



Photo 8: Main Street, 1880

You can find pictures of the depot in its original state, but also of streets, buildings, traffic, people of that time. KPL provides detailed stories of Kalamazoo corporations, like breweries, foundries, mills and hotels. Famous Gibson Guitar Co. started in this city. Another essential tool for finding a layout were the old Sanborn Maps, containing useful information, which was originally issued for fire insurance companies. And last but not least, I found some historical articles in the Kalamazoo Gazette archive. The authors kept the readers well informed about the building progress of the depot.

Structures and 3D-Printing

After having decided about the basic layout, the question was, which structures to choose. Fortunately, city houses and company buildings of those times were very similar all across the United States, and many of them still exist today. Walthers Cornerstone, Woodland Scenics, Piko, and others provide lots of beautiful construction kits. These can be easily modified in order to match the layout. You can also add home made parts or remains of

FINEST IN THE STATE.

THE NEW MICHIGAN CENTRAL DEPOT BUILDINGS TO BE BUILT HERE.

A Fine Structure of Stone, Brick and Tile--The Buildings to Extend From Rose to Burdick-Sts.--Improvements Amounting to $40,000.

It has long been a standing complaint in Kalamazoo that the Michigan Central railroad buildings were old rookeries and a disgrace to the road and city, and talk about improvements have been considered by the people only as chestnuts, but now comes a turning point. Before next summer season will have past, the company will have completed improvements the cost of which will not be less than $40,000. This is a solid fact. The contract has been let to Bush & Patterson for the completion by August 1 of the

BEAUTIFUL GROUNDS.

The Improvements Around the New M. C. Depot.

The large grounds around the new Michigan Central depot will soon present a handsome appearance. On the south side of the depot there will be cement walks leading from the plank platform to Rose and Burdick-sts., about 280 feet in length. John Roe is the contractor and he is now filling in the foundation with concrete. There will be two driveways for carriages, one inside the arch and the other just outside. On either side will be green lawns with beautiful flower beds. The line along the south side of the company's property will be 25 feet wide. On the north side will be a broad plat completely covered with tracks, the additional tracks furnishing a capacity of 75 cars.

Around the New Depot.

The old buildings will be torn down soon.

The changing of the car tracks is under the supervision of Engineer Torry.

Two new telegraph poles have been erected on Burdick-st. near the depot.

The sidetracks on the north side of the old depot are being put in shape rapidly.

The water supply-tank is being moved to the center of the two main lines for the better convenience of locomotives on both lines.

Ten platform and 12 refrigerator cars made by the Detroit car company were at the M. C. depot Wednesday, enroute for the west.

Contractor McCarthy has the west grass plat from the depot to Rose-st. sodded and it adds greatly toward setting off the building.

The new depot will be lighted with gas jets from the sides and a patent gas burner in the center of both the east and

Photo 9: Kalamazoo Gazette, Sept. 24, 1887. Precise description of the grounds design and of other details.



Photo 10: Sanborn map of Kalamazoo, 1902 (*clipping*). The depot is encircled south of the tracks.

old projects. I colored and weathered all these kits with matte Revell enamel color using just paintbrushes.

The streets sides were fine, but what about the depot building? Because of its special architecture, I simply could not find any kits to be converted. Not even windows that could be used. That was when I came across a public workshop with a lot of different machines to be shared by the hour. First, I tried laser cutting of plastic sheets, but exactly gluing them together was a real mess. Next, I tried out 3D printing. I found out that 3D-Printing

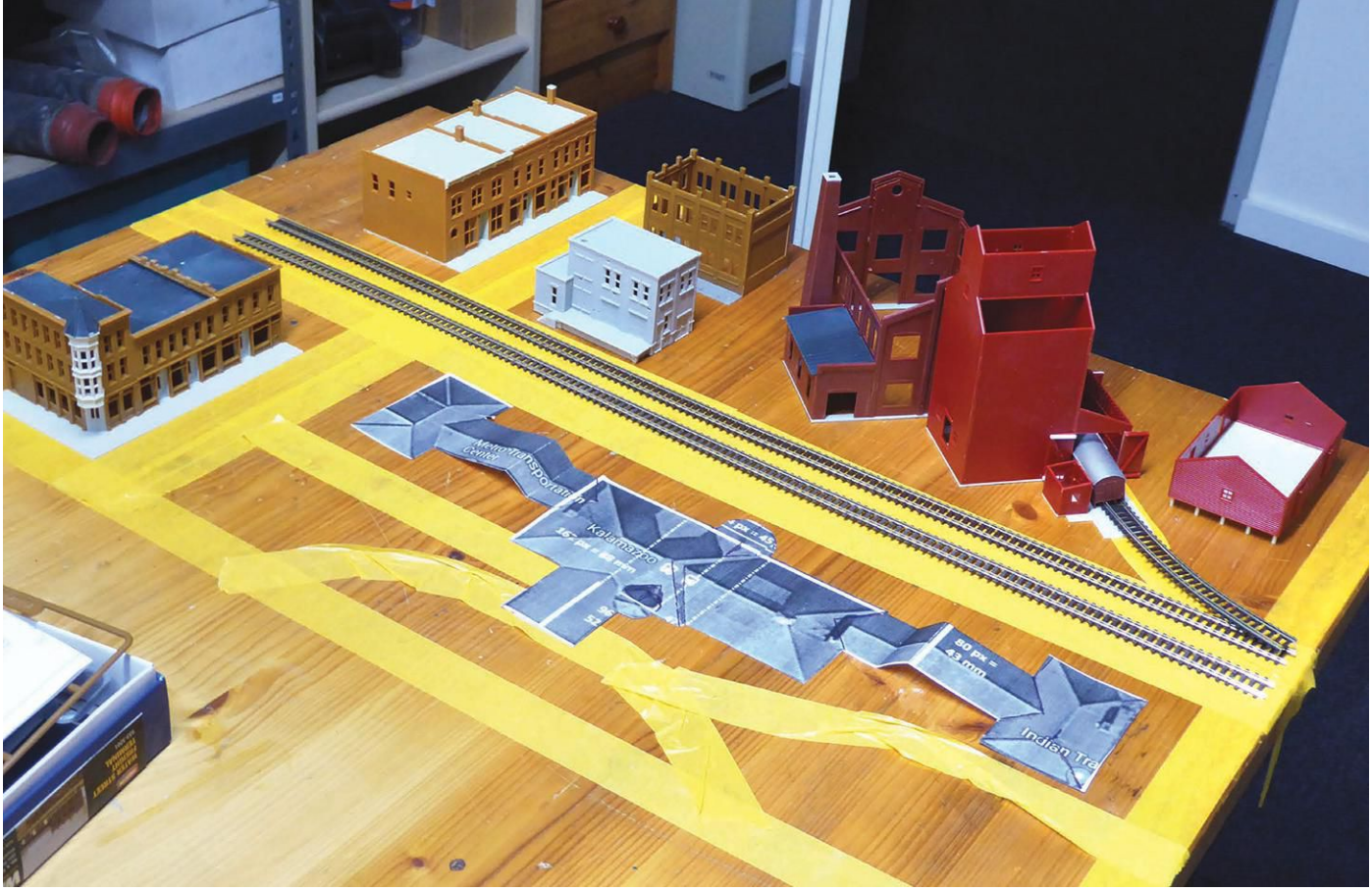


Photo 11: Finding a layout – first steps.

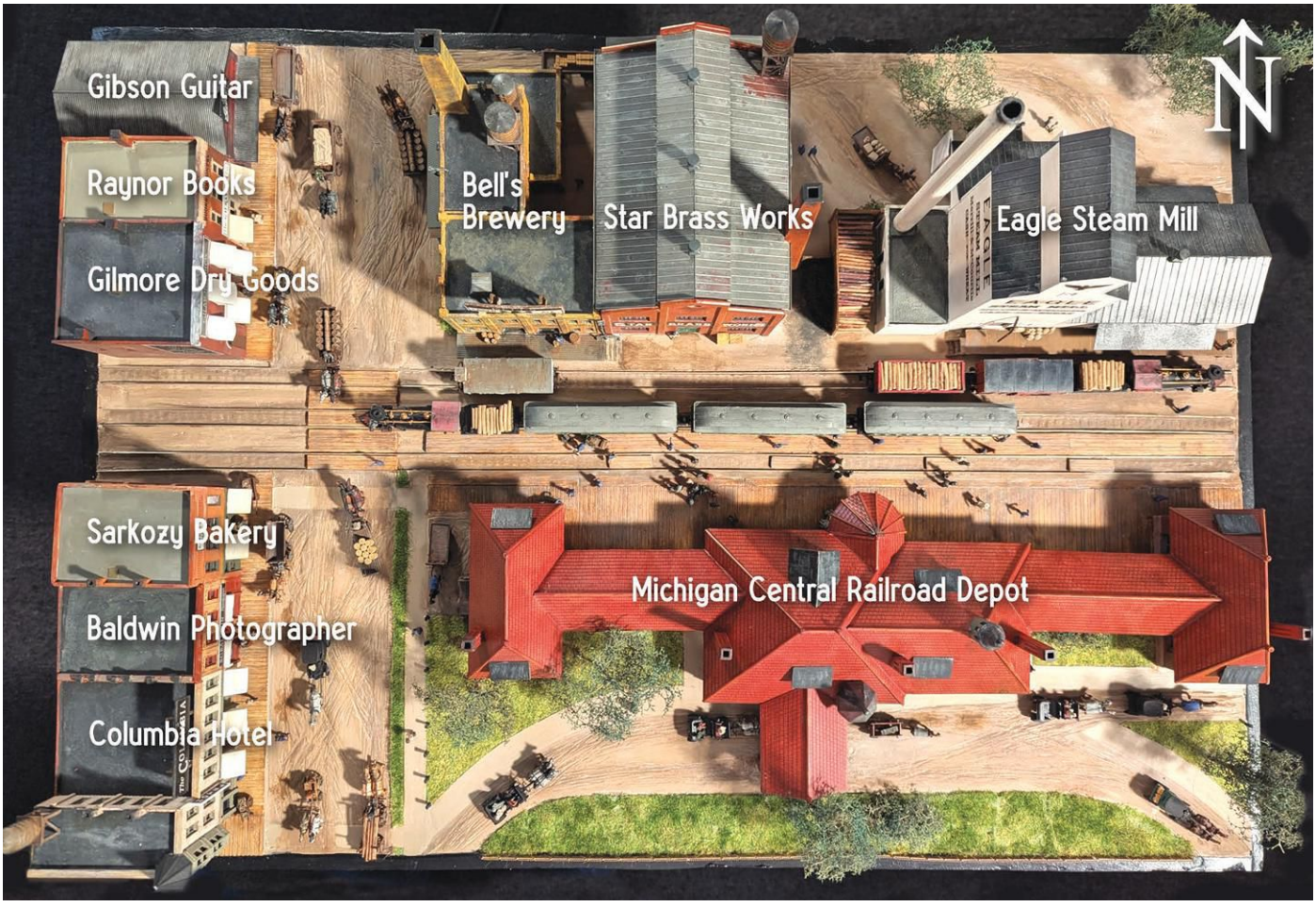


Photo 12: Final Result.







Photo 13: Eagle steam mill (front and back sides), based on a grain elevator by Walthers Cornerstone.







Photo 14: North Rose Street shops, made of Merchants' Row by Walthers Cornerstone, and Warwick Gitarrenfabrik by PIKO.

using PLA material was exactly what I needed, and after some tests, I even bought a used printer of my own – an Ultimaker 2. Still there was some work to be done before achieving a satisfying result. You have to design every single detail using a CAD program. The data must be converted in printing tracks by a slicing software. CURA is strongly recommended for this purpose. Because of the limited build plate size, but also in order to avoid unnecessary support structures, the building must be split up in several parts closely arranged on the plate. Mind that a print of a full build plate takes about one night or longer.

For filament, I chose Ultimaker PLA because you can start printing without making a fuss about the printing parameters. CURA provides them all. PLA (Polylactid Acid) is a material that is easy to print. After cooling down, it is pretty hard. For shaping or sanding it, you need a multi-tool. Parts can be glued together with superglue. Revell enamel colors are fine for painting and weathering.

Once you have become familiar with 3D printing, it is easy to design and print parts that you cannot buy, e.g. big chimneys, roof-top water tanks, and all the sun shades that you see



Photo 15: Back side of brass foundry and brewery. Made of Vulcan Manufacturing and Freight Terminal by Walthers Cornerstone plus Sicken Tire by Woodland Scenics. The goods shed of the freight terminal was used for the steam mill above.



Photo 16: Laying out different parts on the building plate of the 3D printer.

in the old-time pictures. My printer allows for an accuracy of .1 mm so that I could even print spoke wheels, windows, and doors.

Figurines, horse-drawn vehicles, "rolling" stock

Here comes one of the hardest parts of arranging an 1890s scene. It was really hard to find matching figurines and horse carts in N scale. Maybe 3D printing scaled figures would work. Complete failure, even with the finest printer settings. Putting unpainted architectural figures to the diorama? No ambience at all. Andrew C. Stadden saved my project with fine Victorian and Edwardian tin figurines. Women with hats and long wide dresses, men with suits and hats, plus some workers were just what I needed, and affordable as well.

Next, horse-drawn carriages and wagons needed to show up in a large number. Traffic was already heavy in

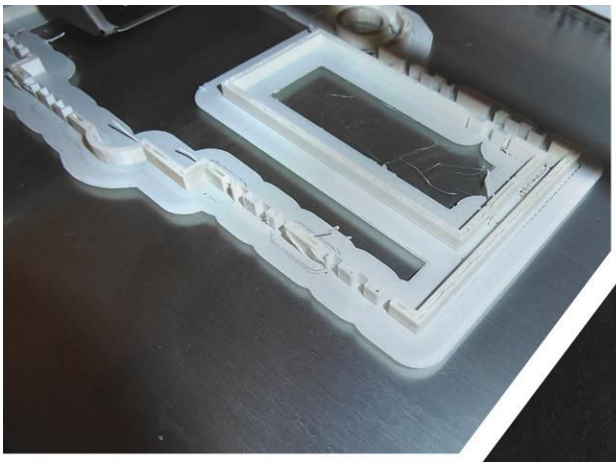




Photo 17 (*Above*): The first rows have been printed. Walls are only partly filled to save material and time. The brim around the walls will later be removed.

Photo 18 (*Right*): Trial and error are part of the game.

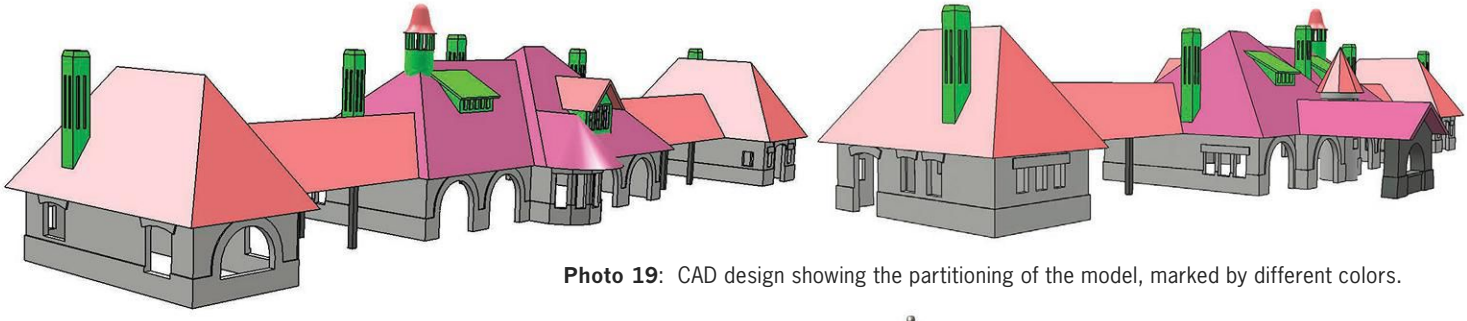
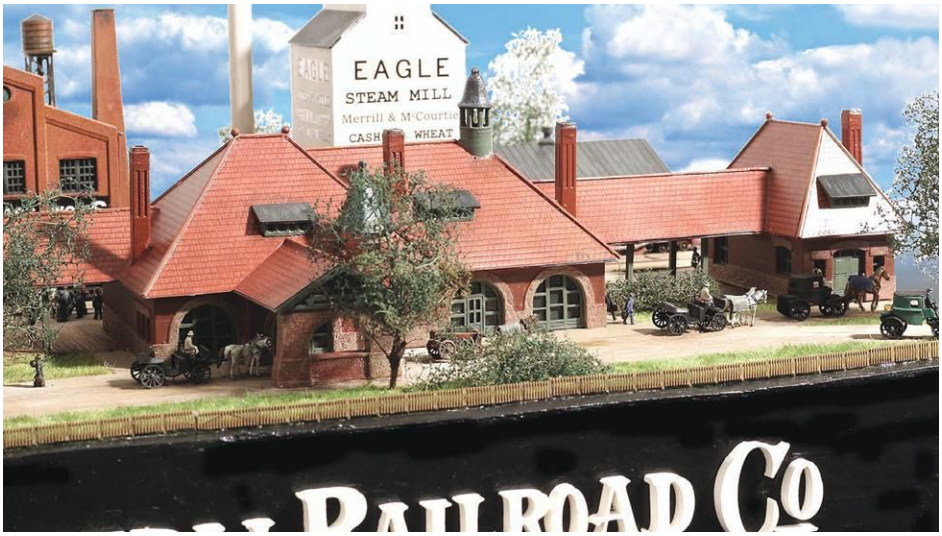


Photo 19: CAD design showing the partitioning of the model, marked by different colors.



Photo 20: With 3D printing, much work is needed for finishing the model. The sandstone parts were structured with a mini drill. The roofs consist of printed and painted cardboard shells. After having finished painting work, I coated everything with matte clear varnish.





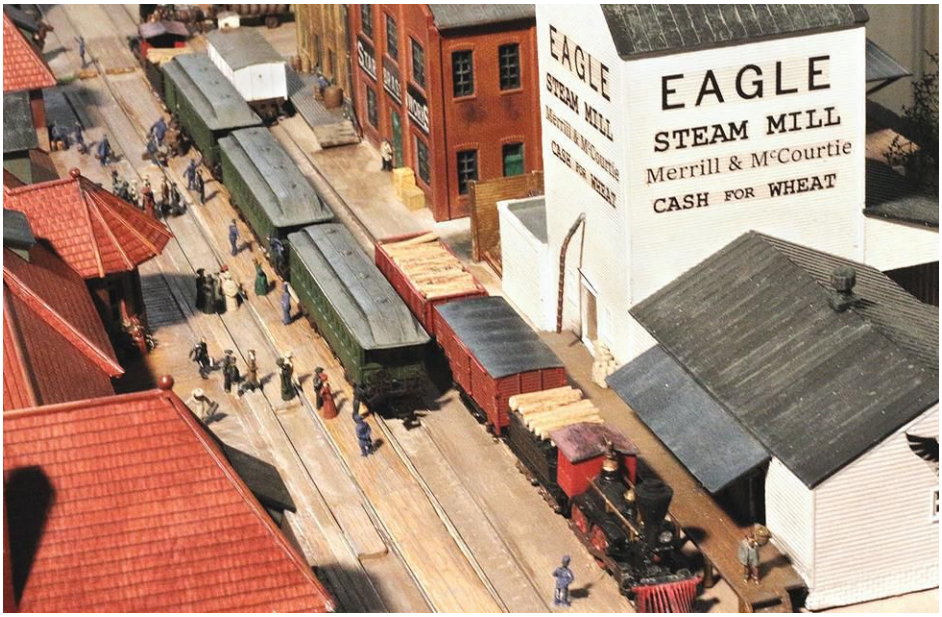


Photo 21 (*Above*): Impression of Rose Street, looking north.

Photo 22 (*Left*): The town side of the station. There is a porch across the driveway in front of the main entrance. To the right, there is a cab waiting area.

Photo 23 (*Bottom Left*): Passengers coming from Detroit or traveling to Chicago have to cross the tracks. In the background, a refrigerator car is waiting for beer. In the foreground, an open wagon is delivering wood, and a closed one is loading flour sacks. The 4-4-0 was used for both passenger and freight traffic.

those days, according to the original pictures. I started with used Preiser beer wagons and marriage carriages. Luckily, I found fine and affordable buggy and wagon kits, made of tin by Langley, to complete the scene.

Finding rolling stock was a little easier because, to be honest, it did not have to roll. The American 4-4-0 steam engine by Del Prado is a beautiful static collector's model, not expensive, and just right for this diorama. I found used red-and-white Pullman passenger cars of Bachmann Europe, which only needed to be painted in an appropriate color. Members of the Kalamazoo Model Railroad Historical Society (KMRHS) recommended to use Pullman green as the most probable color. Did I mention that all pictures of that time are black-and-white? And never trust colorized picture postcards! Three same postcards, three different

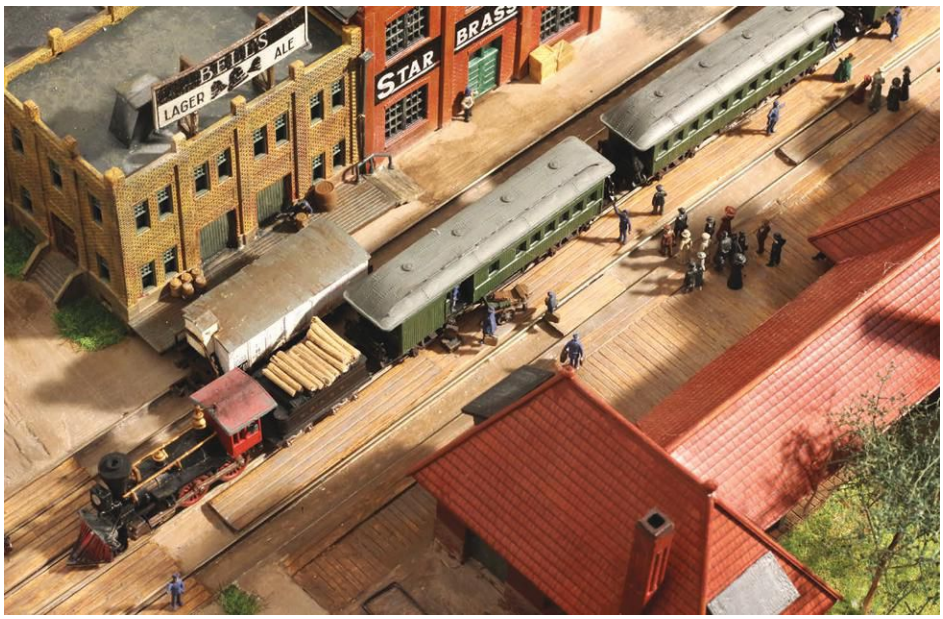
Photo 24 (*Top Right*): Heavy traffic on North Rose Street. Gibson Guitar started as a small business building mandolines. Gilmore Bros. later became a big clothing store.

Photo 25 (*Middle Right*): In the diorama, Rose Street is rather narrow. Usually, there were three driving lanes in the center, plus a row of parking lots and a wide wooden sidewalk on each side. The Sarkozy Bakery (founded in 1978) provided me with good bread in 1993, so they got a shop on Rose Street.

Photo 26 (*Bottom Right*): An American 4-4-0 pulling a combined car and two Pullman passenger cars. In the front building there is the luggage storage. The railroad crossing has no signs or barriers. Instead, a guard is watching. Star Brass Works delivered parts for Gibson mandolines and street cars. I added Bell's Brewery (founded in 1976) because I enjoyed their beer and food in 1993 as well as in 2024.







colorings. Some used German style freight cars completed the scene – they actually look just like the American originals on the photographs.

The realistic touch

I used matte enamel color for all of the diorama – buildings, rolling stock, figures, wooden platforms, streets. They make the scene look realistic because, apart from glass, there were no shiny things in the 19th century that can be recognized in N scale. Besides, I used no dazzling colors, but only subdued ones just like it was those days. Except for steam engines; they were always polished and shiny.

Landscaping was a special task because of the minute scale. For example: why use painted plaster instead of real sand? Just calculate the 1:160 size of a grain of sand or of a pebble. Therefore, no sand, detailed brick walls, no foliage on the trees, no eyebrows in people's faces. Just some brown stains on the streets "caused" by horse droppings. Permanent calculation of "how big would it be in reality" is necessary. When grass fibers are merely 2 mm long, in reality the lawn would be 32 cm (1 foot) high and should soon be mowed. People are just about 10 mm (less than ½ inch) tall. A rain gutter diameter in N scale is about 1 mm, so I decided to better omit those.

To make the whole scene look consistent, you must consider the observer's distance, starting at about two feet, approaching to maybe five inches.

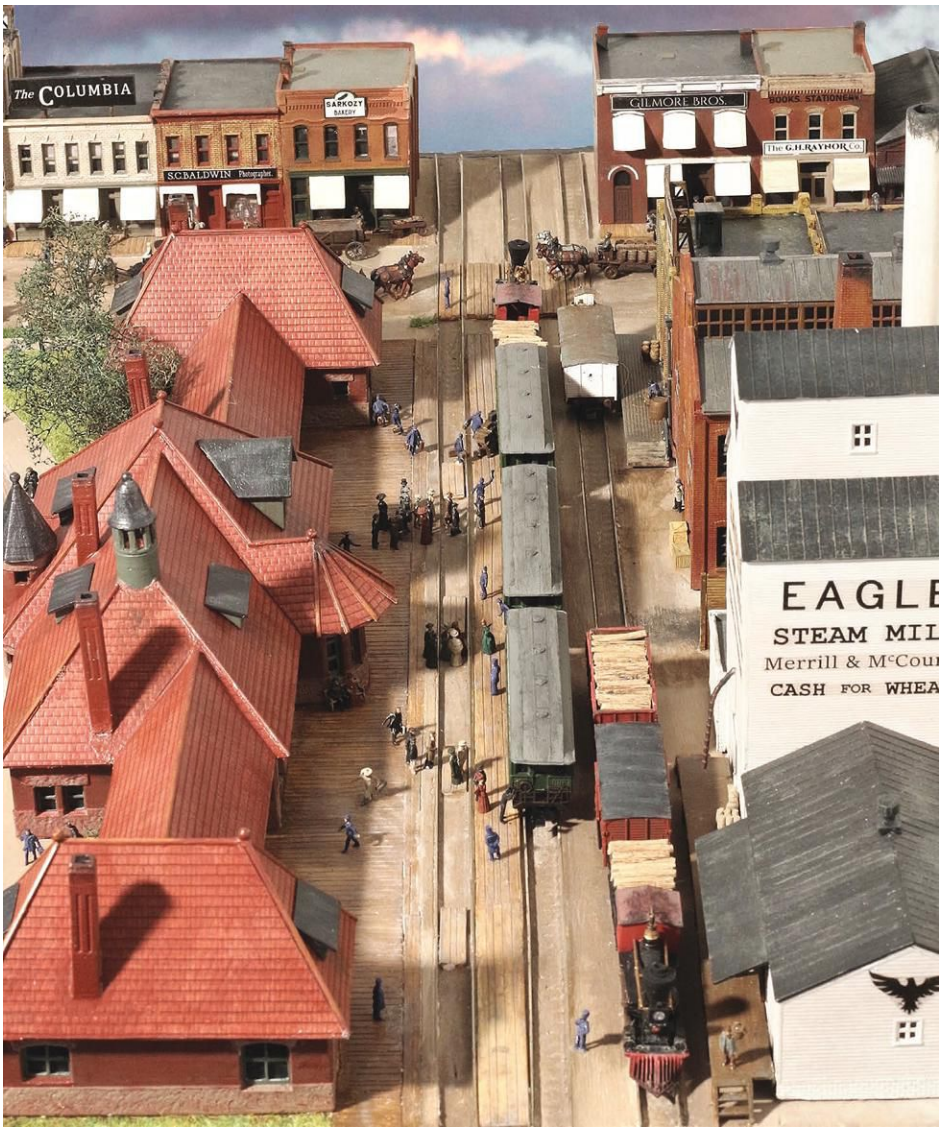


Photo 26: View along the railroad tracks.

In my opinion, getting closer would make modeling much more difficult without improving the overall impression. Good lighting, with realistic shadows and a backdrop, add a lot to the final look of the diorama.

Conclusion

If you set up a diorama, it must catch the viewer at first glance. Besides there should be hidden details, which you will only find when having a closer look. It is like a frozen scene, like a 3D photograph. But what is so special about an N scale diorama? The challenge is to evoke this impression on a very limited space with many tiny parts that you always need a pair of tweezers for, using a magnifying glass. Of course, you can only work on days when you are not trembling.

What makes this diorama so special to me? First of all, my personal memories, which worked as a starter of the project. Second, plunging into 19th century life in Kalamazoo, exploring lots of different sources, was pure fun. And third, it was really exciting to shape all of my thoughts into a model world and to watch it coming closer and closer to what I was having in mind all the time. Finding out the right methods to do so was another part of the experience. It will surely contribute to my next dioramas.

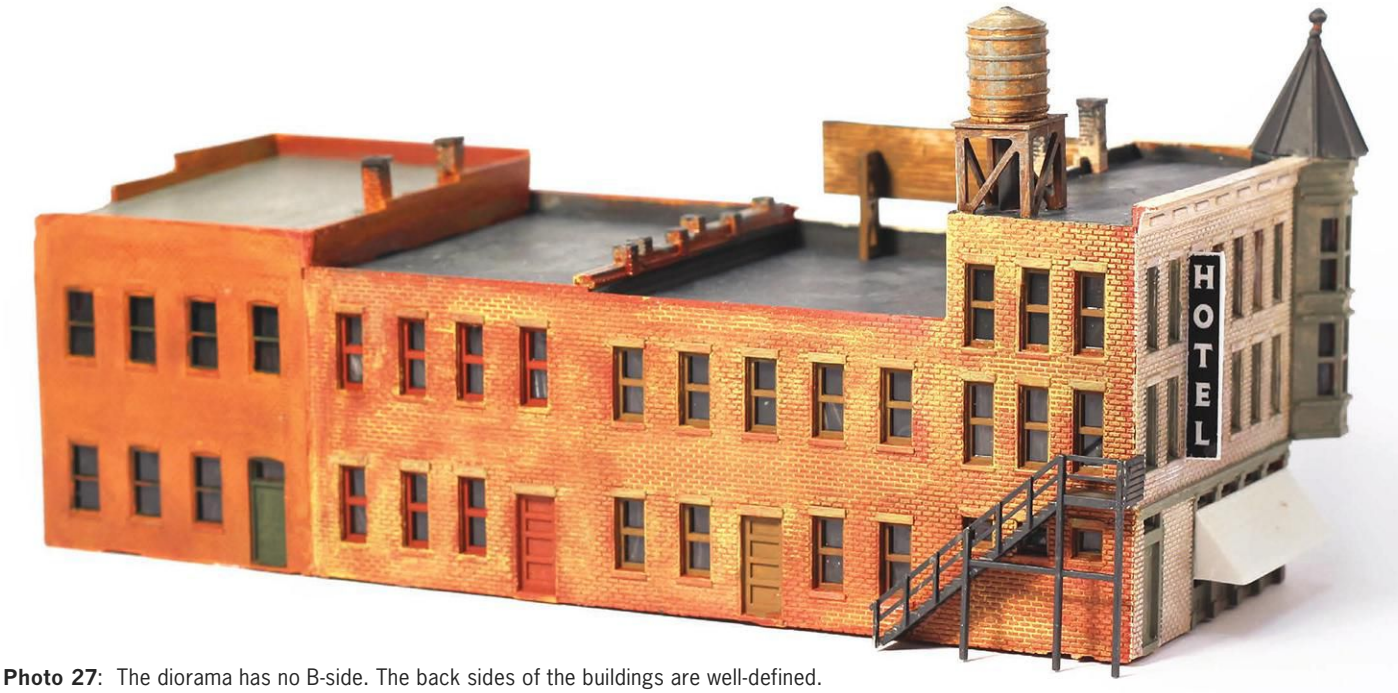


Photo 27: The diorama has no B-side. The back sides of the buildings are well-defined.

It's 1955 on the Katahdin Valley Railway!



Photo 1: Engine yard (Module 1)

by **Peter Marcucci**

Consisting of four modules totaling 85 square feet, principal revenues are logging and fishing, while trying to keep within a northern Maine theme. This proved challenging for me, due to being an amateur level historian of Pacific Northwest logging, and loving Shay locomotives. Unfortunately, Maine's rich logging history did not include Shays, and presented a real dilemma. Finally, after much thought, I simply gave in to a mixed theme.

Module 1 holds the majority of locomotives, consisting mostly of Union Pacific, Southern Pacific and Santa Fe (***Photo 1***).

Module 2: ***Photos 2 & 3*** feature an inlet where coal from Pennsylvania is loaded on a scow for distribution along the New England coastline. It is also a hub for distribution throughout the area, such as the city of Portland (background) and the town of Petersburg. The two spurs shown in the close up, serve a grain mill, a furniture manufacturer, and a fish processing facility with an abandoned building finishing the scene.

Module 3: ***Photo 5*** features the city of Portland in the background, as well as the slum part of the city in the foreground, sort of the "other side of the tracks" with liquor and other stuff. It's also the transition point from city to country. ***Photo 5*** shows farmland, while ***Photo 6*** features the town of Petersburg. It's basically a well-to-do bedroom community that's a 40-mile journey by rail to Portland, and usually served by a three car passenger service by a Southern Pacific

Photo 2: Bay with city in the background (Module 2)

Photo 3: Bay closeup (Module 2)



Photo 4: The sleazy area (the other side of the tracks) (Module 3)

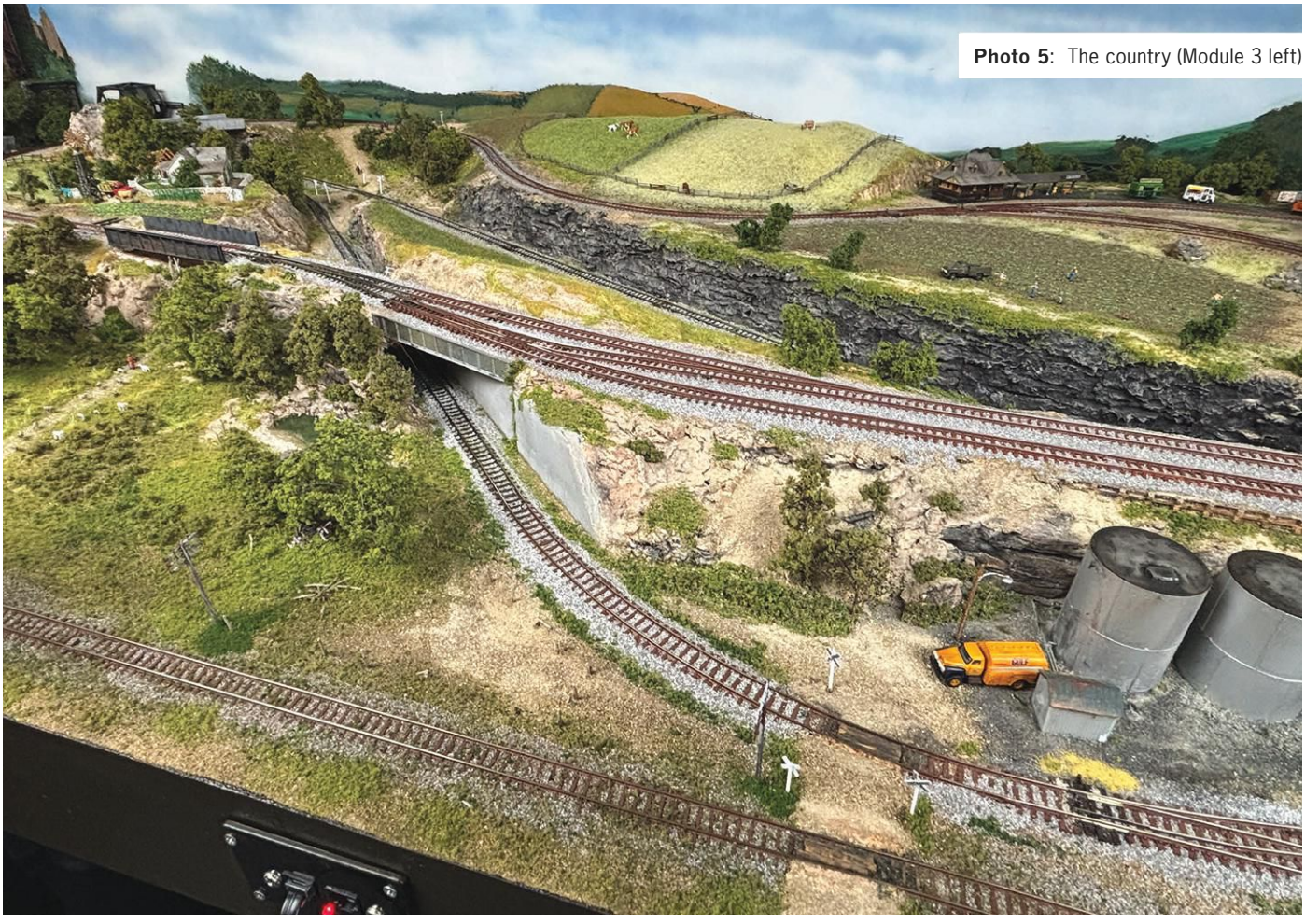


Photo 5: The country (Module 3 left)



Photo 6: The country (Module 3 right)

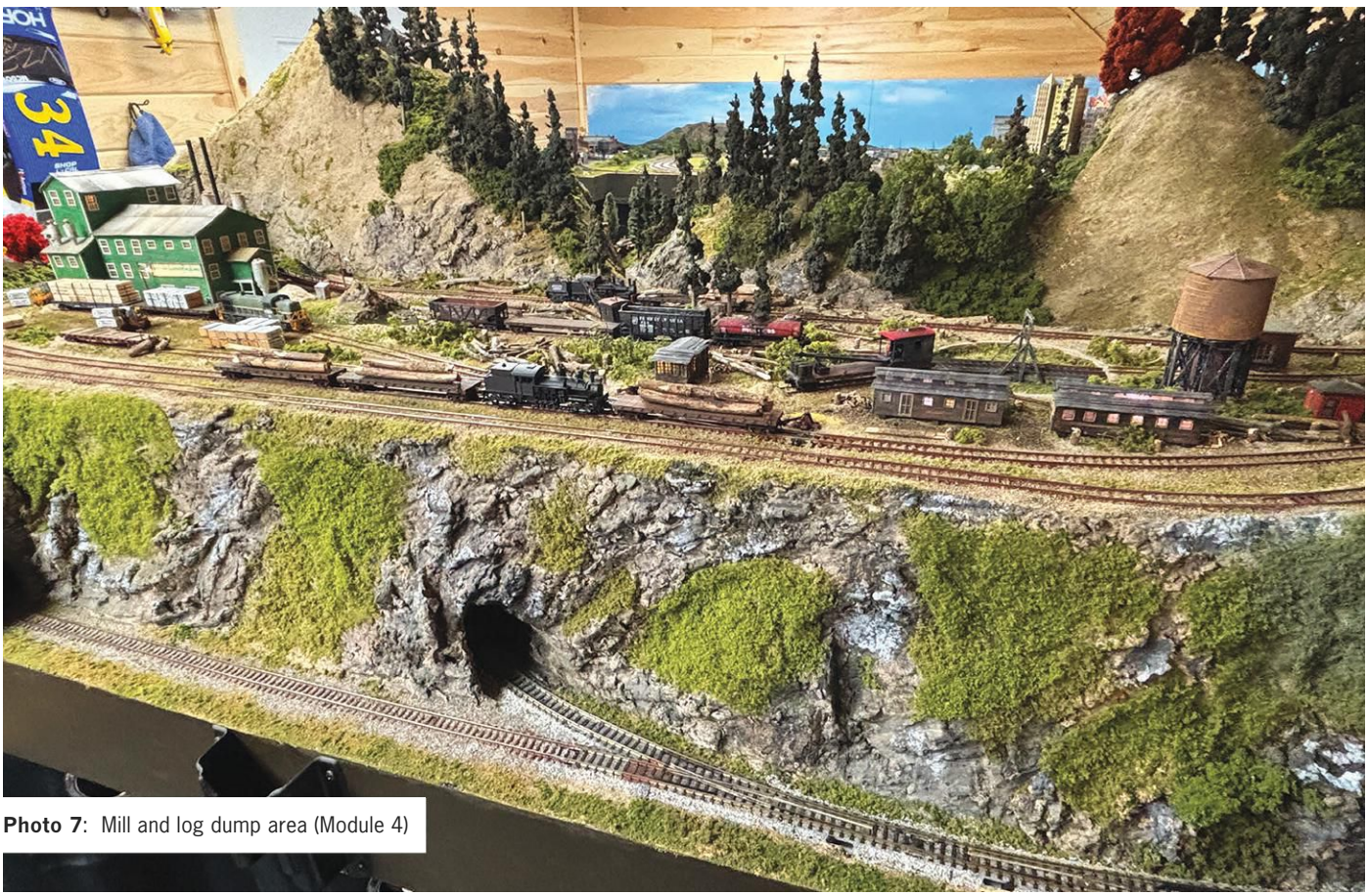


Photo 7: Mill and log dump area (Module 4)



Photo 8: Mountain being logged with fishing boat at bottom of photo (Module 4)

G5 loco. Petersburg is also home of the many loggers who work at the Katahdin Logging Company. Most of these hardy men stay in the bunk house through the week, and return home to Petersburg on the weekends. The work is dangerous, but the meals are gourmet quality with never any complaints. Some actually say the home style cooking is better than their wives! Shhhh!

Module 4: ***Photo 7*** features the Katahdin Logging Company; a small, well run steam and diesel facility, producing soft and hard wood for construction and furniture production, and sometimes pulp for paper. A 2-truck Shay in the foreground waits for its turn at the dump, while a 3-truck shay finishes unloading. The British Columbia RS3 and the Light Pacific are DCC, while the two Shays are DC.

Photo 8 shows the current logging operation. Looking closely, you'll see a five man crew on the mountain cutting a day's worth of timber, while the two man crew at the base loads two cars pulled by a light Pacific.

In closing, I wanted an N scale railroad that could get close to the realism of HO, which is what I grew up modeling during the 50s, 60s and 70s. John Allen, and later, George Sellios were my inspirations during those years, and still held in high esteem to this day. I'm now 74 years old, with eyes, hands and patience that don't work as well as they used to. That said, I couldn't have done the Katahdin Valley Railway without the help of Rasch Studios located in South Pittsburg, Tennessee. Father Albert and son Joseph, gave me a great basic layout, while adhering to most of my specifications and storyline. It was then up to me to add extra buildings, lighting and scenery, as well as locos and rolling stock, while trying my best to weather and super detail everything.

In the beginning, I was committed to keeping everything within the 1955 time period, but couldn't help cheating twice. See if you can spot them.

The Short & Nn3arrow

Modelling the Pacific Coast Railway, Part 28: Exposition Park Raceway; plus the N-Possible Coupler

by **Tom Knapp, MMR #101**

In the previous issue, I brought readers up to date on progress on my sectional Nn3 Pacific Coast Railway layout and continued the description of the construction of the layout sections with the next section of the layout – Hadley – which features the PCRy and Southern Pacific crossing and an oil refinery. Although they were actually separated by some seven miles, I also included a portion of the nationally prominent 1-mile dirt auto racetrack, which was located off South Street just to the east of the PCRy's San Luis Obispo facilities. Crossing and intersecting on this section are two important roads – South Street and Broad Street (***Figure 1***).

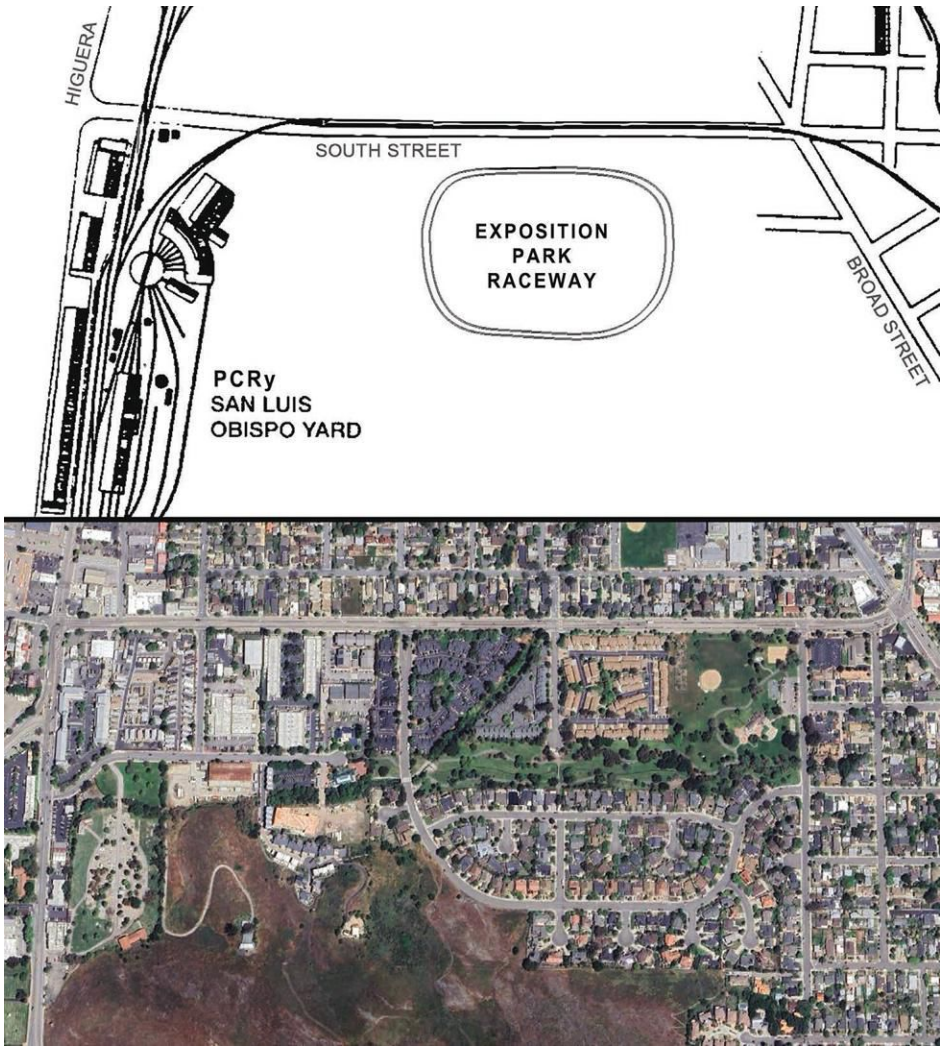


Figure 1: The PCRy in San Luis Obispo, showing the approximate location of the Exposition Park Raceway as well as South Street and Broad Street (*top*). Vestiges of the raceway still exist as Exposition Drive (*bottom*).

SOUTH ST. AND BROAD ST.

When constructing the San Luis yard section, I was able to obtain a copy of a 1928 street repair and improvement plan for Higuera Street, which runs along the western side of the yard from the San Luis Obispo Engineering Department. This shows Higuera Street as paved, and with concrete curbs and sidewalks along portions of the street. South Street, which defines the northern boundary of the yard, and which extends onto the Hadley section discussed here, shows no such improvements in the drawing and appears in photos as a dirt road (***Photo 1***). Broad Street in the area where South Street ends on the other hand clearly shows as paved in a 1936 Photo provided by the San Luis Obispo Historical Society. Since this layout section is a transition from "town" to "country," I modeled Broad Street as a typical rural paved road of 20' width with four-foot shoulders. The dirt South Street on the San Luis section was extended from the SLO section across the Hadley section paralleling the PCRy tracks using tinted spackle to the point of intersection with Broad Street. Broad Street was also modeled using tinted spackle, and the crossing constructed using stripwood. The tinted spackle was further worked with thinned acrylic paints, and finally with Bragdon weathering chalks (***Photo 2***.) The shoulder is dirt-tinted spackle. As was/is common with rural roads, there is no striping. Telephone poles, barbed wire fencing and bushes are being added as time permits.

EXPOSITION PARK RACEWAY

Exposition Park Raceway in San Luis Obispo, located off South Street just to the east of the PCRy's San Luis Obispo facilities, was a major center for early West Coast motor racing in the 1920s, nationally known for its fast 1-mile dirt track. Between 1923 and 1925, it was hailed as the fastest dirt track in the West, attracting racers like Indy 500 champion Ralph

DePalma who set speed records there. The movie "Sporting Youth" starring Reginald Denny was filmed there in 1924 (***Photo 3***), but I have been unable to find a copy of the movie. (I put a copy of the movie poster on the Pacific Coast Coal Company fence along South Street.)

This YouTube video of a race at the track shows the grandstands, the pits, and general views of the track: *www.youtube.com/watch?v=gBicDo04Uw0* In some of the video, an operating PCRy locomotive is in the background adjacent the car barn (***Photo 4***).

Although accounts published on the internet indicate racing ended there in the mid-twenties – done in by "Cheapskate Hill" where patrons could watch the races from the backside of the straight-away and not have to pay – after which the site was the venue for Ringling Bros and Barnum & Bailey Circus, and Clyde Beatty Shows into the 1950s, some photos appear to show racing – possibly amateur or local – into the 1930s. While I do not want to devote sufficient "real estate" to model the full track, I decided to include grandstands and a small portion of the track on the Hadley Junction section. And although I don't need to justify stretching the time continuum to suit my own version of history, I can always roll out those later photos as an excuse for including the Raceway on my layout.

Working from images of the grandstands - an example being ***Photo 5***, I could tell the structure was large, perhaps 250 feet long, longer than I have space for. Doing some "guesstimating" scaling of the images, I decided to make the primary bays twenty feet in width and to model five bays of the grandstand. Interior and exterior framing details of the stands were captured at various times during the You Tube video, helping in creating a 3D model with the grandstand seating, six roof trusses, the façade columns and arched framing, and the rear columns (***Figure 2***). I was unable to successfully print the full grandstand seating as one piece, so I ended up dividing that into five sections aligned with the façade columns (***Photo 6***). After gluing these parts together on a 1/16" plywood base (***Photo 7***), I airbrushed the

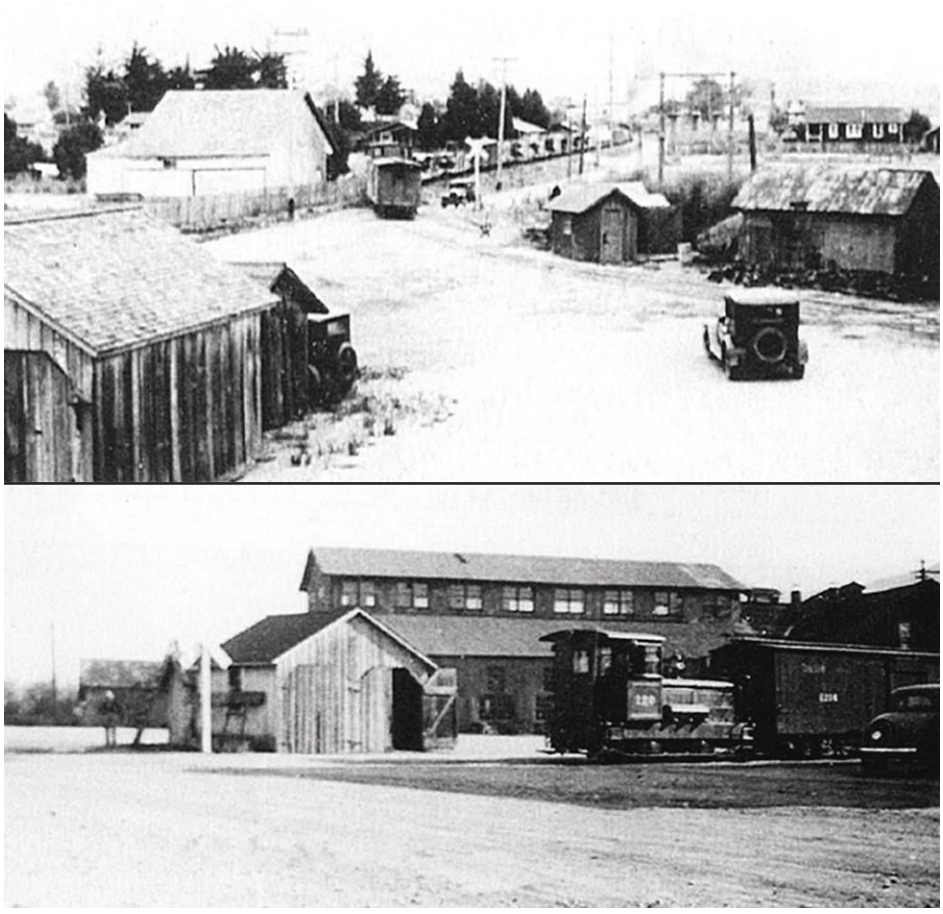


Photo 1: Two views of South Street: *top*: South Street running along the fence line parallel to the PCRy tracks in the center of the photo, probably in the 1920s; *bottom*: at Higuera Street, about 1936; note the heights of the crossing signs at the two locations where South Street crosses the tracks (*courtesy Benchmark Publications*).



Photo 2: Intersection of South and Broad streets and the PCRy railroad crossing on the author's layout.



Photo 4: A fuzzy screenshot from a YouTube video about Exposition Park Raceway captures a Pacific Coast Railway locomotive working in the PCRy's yard at South & Higuera streets in the distance.

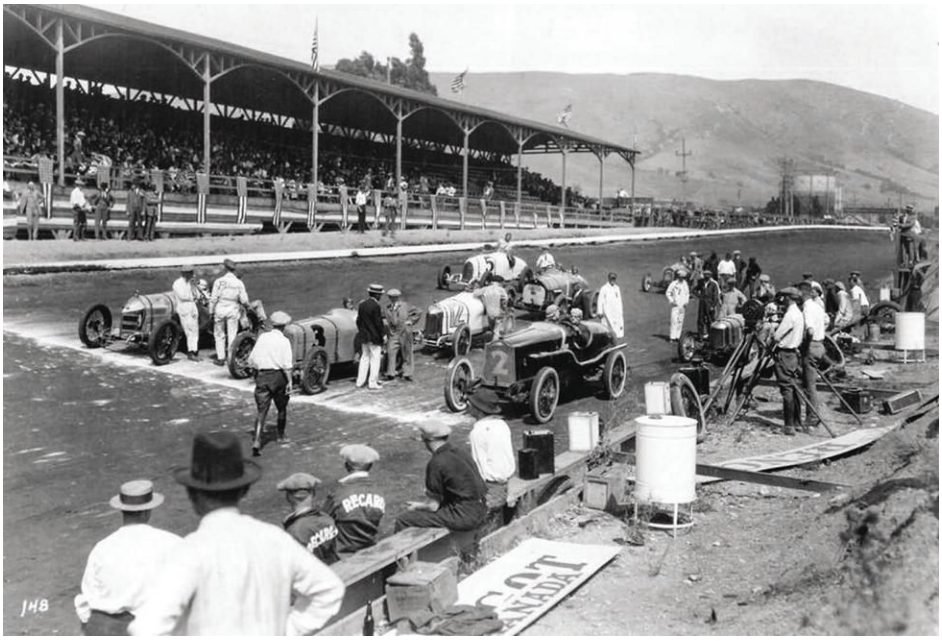


Photo 5: The Raceway grandstands appear to be about 250 feet long. Also, like much of the Pacific Coast Railway's structures, it appears to have been unpainted. This view possibly taken during the filming of the 1924 movie "*Sporting Youth*."

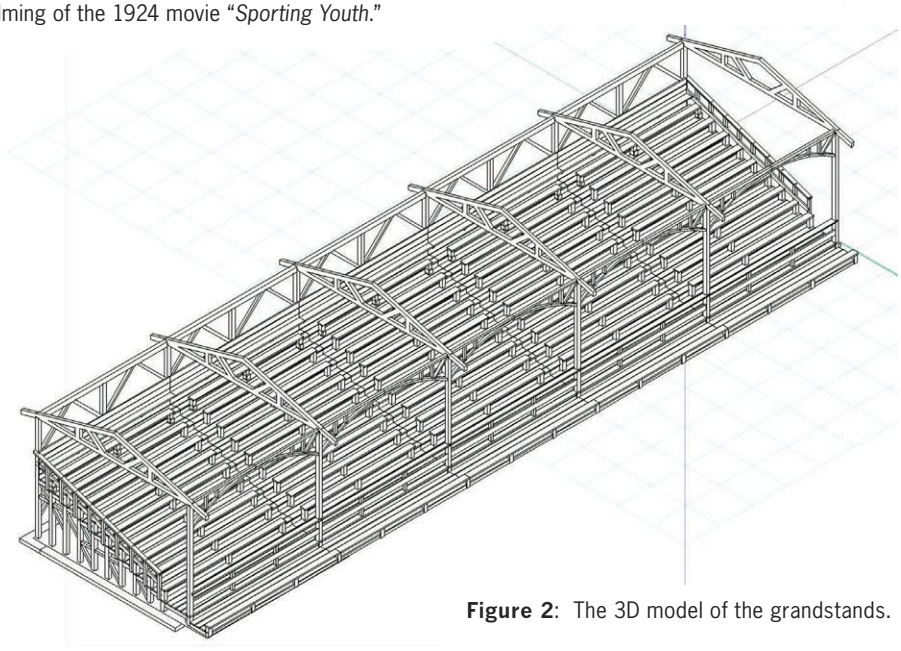


Figure 2: The 3D model of the grandstands.

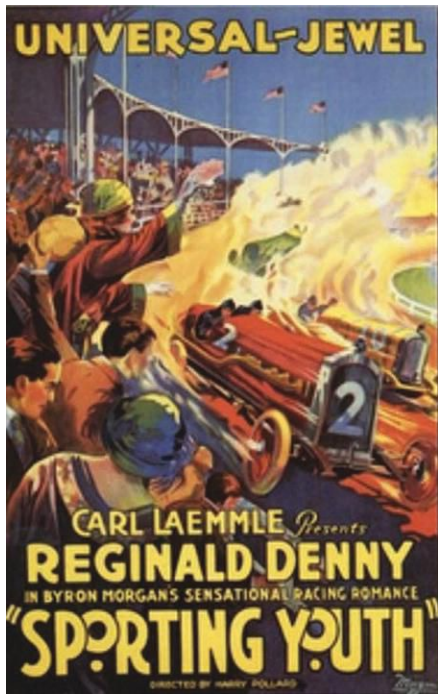


Photo 3: A poster for the 1924 movie "*Sporting Youth*" partly filmed at the Exposition Park Raceway.

assembly, then dry brushed highlights and added some figures before installing a printed cardstock roof (***Photo 8***). The small group of spectators in the grandstand watching the on-track activities (family & friends) are Preiser figures with a thin black wash to bring out detail. As with the other structures on the layout, the grandstand is fixed to the layout surface with screws up through the baseboard after letting it into the spackle "earth."

The corner of the track and short portion of the straightaway was modeled using tinted spackle, including the raised berms on both sides of the track evidenced in the historic photos and video. The "dirt" track surface was subtly colored to represent the buildup of oil from the cars. The white wooden railing was made from laser-cut fence material.

Even though I was only modeling a small portion of the 1-mile oval, I wanted to include details which would speak to the activities the track was intended for and early auto racing history in general. I did not feel that "freezing" an active race would be successful, so I chose to represent a "tuning" day with a few cars, mechanics, and the small group of spectators in a static scene. This would also allow

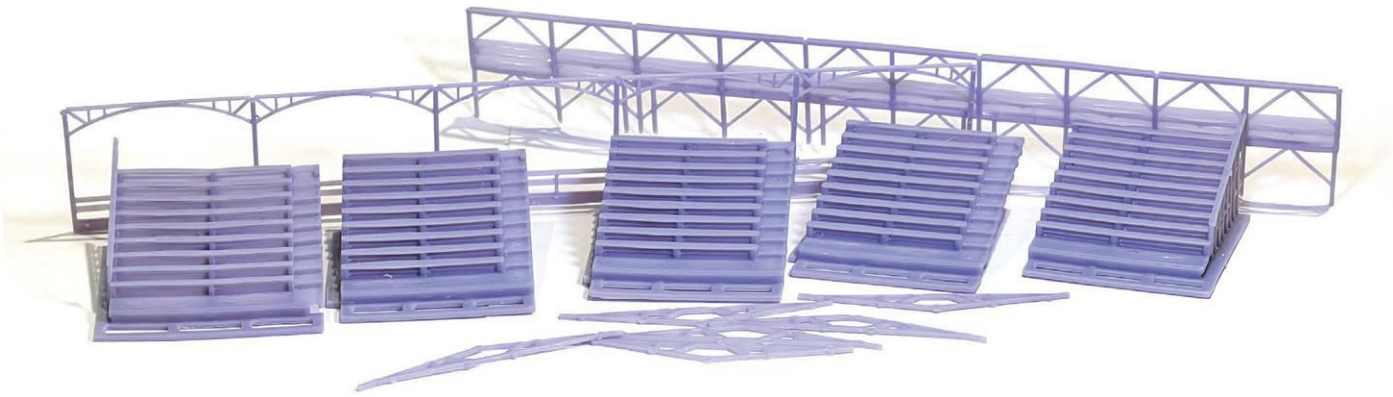


Photo 6: The 3D-printed parts for the grandstands; the bleachers have been divided into five sections for easier printing.

me to display a variety of the cars, which might have raced here in the late 1920s to the mid 1930s. A search of some of the 3D model sites, which allow the downloading of printable computer files (some free, others for a fee) resulted in finding several, from a Stutz Bearcat to Auburn, Bugatti, Bentley, Duesenberg and Alfa Romeo. I had also previously modeled several variations of Model T, which I used in the scene (***Photo 9***).

I don't use a lot of figures on my layout, and where I do use them, I try to pose them in stationary poses (sitting, leaning against a wall, etc.) as I feel having figures frozen in "action" poses a dichotomy with moving trains; I tried to pose the mechanics in the pit lane in accordance with this philosophy, which proved challenging. The modified Preiser figures representing the mechanics and drivers involved in the tuning session have been fitted with .010" brass wire pins, which have been inserted in small holes drilled in the track surface, while the cars are not attached – allowing all to be easily changed if desired. A few "civilian" Model T Fords complete the scene (***Photos 10 & 11***). All I need to add now is a sound card.

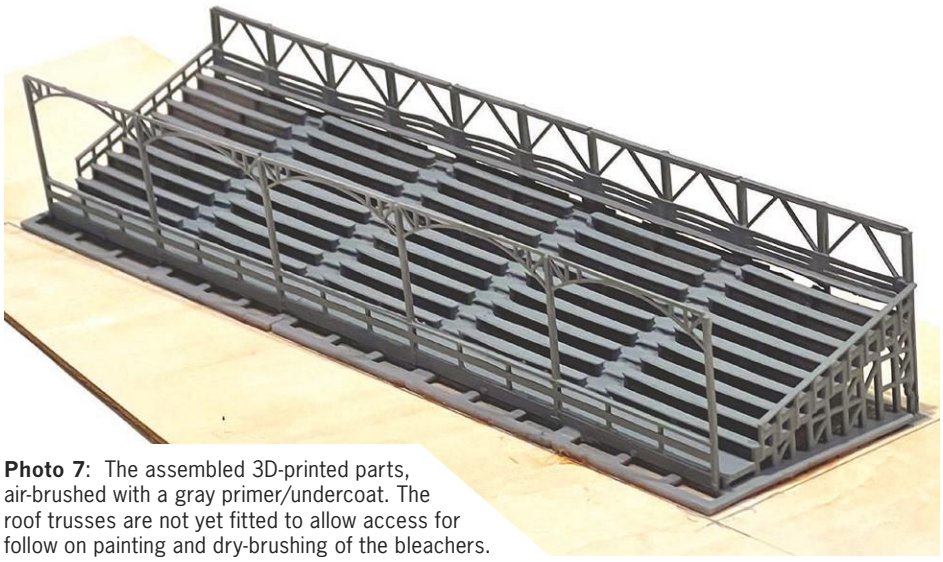


Photo 7: The assembled 3D-printed parts, air-brushed with a gray primer/undercoat. The roof trusses are not yet fitted to allow access for follow on painting and dry-brushing of the bleachers.

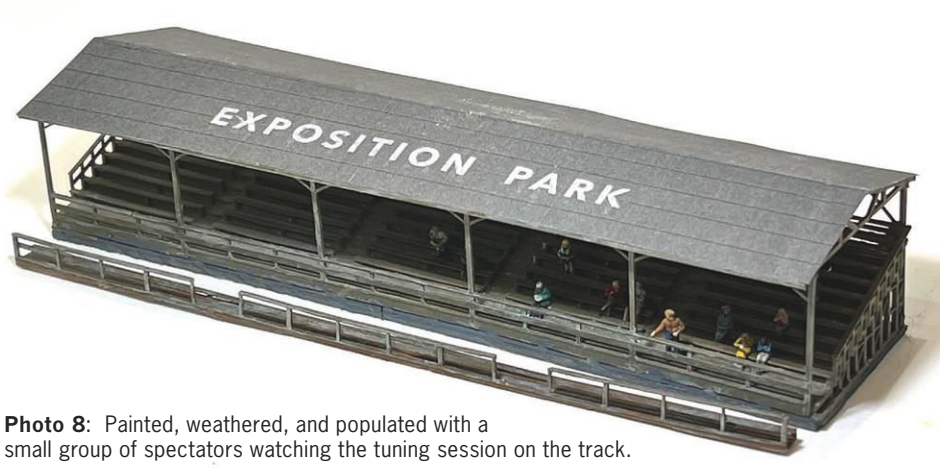


Photo 8: Painted, weathered, and populated with a small group of spectators watching the tuning session on the track.

THE N-POSSIBLE COUPLER

For many decades of the nineteenth century, the dominate coupler for railroad cars in North America was the "link-and-pin" coupler – literally a metal link fixed to adjacent railway cars by a pin, which was manually inserted by a worker standing between the cars (***Photo 12***). This was a dangerous operation, and between 1877 and 1887, approximately 38% of all railroad worker accidents involved coupling. In 1873, Eli Janney patented his "Buckeye" automatic knuckle coupler, which allowed cars to be joined safely. In 1893, the US Congress passed the Safety Appliance Act, mandating the use of automatic knuckle couplers by 1900. The Janney coupler (also called the Master Car Builders Association coupler, then the AAR coupler) was chosen as the North American standard (***Photo 13***). By 1902, coupling accidents had dropped to 4% of worker accidents.

While many standard-gauge railroads interchange equipment, necessitating standardization of couplers and compliance with the Safety Appliance Act (SAA), most narrow-gauge railroads do not interchange with other railroads, and some railroads



Photo 9: A small group of 3D-printed cars (including a Stutz Bearcat – outside the period I am modeling, but I couldn't resist).

(including the one I model) took their time to comply with the SAA. (It is documented that the PCRy incurred fines in 1907 for operating equipment still equipped with link-and-pin couplers at that late date.[1]) On conversion, some narrow-gauge railroads used the same coupler as standard-gauge, while others used a smaller version of the AAR knuckle coupler. (Currently, some historic narrow gauge tourist lines still use link-and-pin couplers.)

When the Arnold Company introduced N-scale in 1962, the models were equipped with their "Rapido" coupler, which continues to be used by many manufacturers and modelers. In 1968, Kadee rolled out their N scale "Magne-Matic" knuckle coupler – a simulation of the AAR coupler – which has become the preferred coupler for standard-gauge N scale models in North America. Early Nn3 modelers, including the author, used this on their Nn3 models as well. In 1988, Kadee introduced a smaller version of their Magne-Matic coupler for Nn3 and Z scale models, later branded as Micro-Trains Line products, and this quickly became the preferred Nn3 coupler (***Photo 14***). When the Kadee/Micro-Trains-Line patents expired, other manufacturers were quick to introduce their own compatible knuckle couplers, such as Atlas' Accumate, Bachmann's E-Z Mate, Athearn's McHenry, Rokuhan's A020, and American Z Line. (If I got this history wrong, don't let me know – ignorance is bliss!)

Now – after what is reported as four years of product development – we have the N-Possible scale knuckle coupler, which reasonably accurately models the prototype AAR Type E freight car coupler, although it does not



Photo 10: The completed scene with South Street and the PCRy mainline running along behind the Exposition Park grandstands, Broad Street and the SP mainline beyond.



Photo 11: A close-up shows the guardrails around the track, a small group of spectators in the stands, race cars pitted for adjustments, mechanics, tires and miscellaneous trackside stuff.

have the magnetic un-coupling capabilities of some of the other couplers mentioned. The coupler is available in two variations – the SBX body-mount version with a draft gear form-factor compatible with the Micro-Trains 1015 body-mount draft gear, and the URS "replacement" version intended to be installed in a model's existing draft gear box – and three shaft lengths. (See these at: *www.n-possible.com*) Appearance and dimensions of the coupler agree with those of prototype AAR Type E couplers (***Figure 4***). The SBX couplers also come with air


SAN LUIS OBISPO
DAILY TELEGRAM
MONDAY, EVENING, SEPTEMBER 3, 1923
EXTRA
Luelling Wins 60-Mile Labor Day Auto Race in Record Time
QUAKE, FIRE, WAVES TAKE HEAVY TOLL
JOHNNY HOLMES BADLY INJURED
DRIVER WILSON AND FIVE OTHERS INJURED IN SPILL

Figure 3: The front page of the September 3, 1923 DAILY TELEGRAM, photo-shopped by the author to include a photo of his N scale version of the raceway (*by permission of the San Luis Obispo Tribune*).



Photo 12: Link-and-pin coupler; some historic tourist/museum railroads still use these.



Photo 13: Janney/AAR knuckle coupler

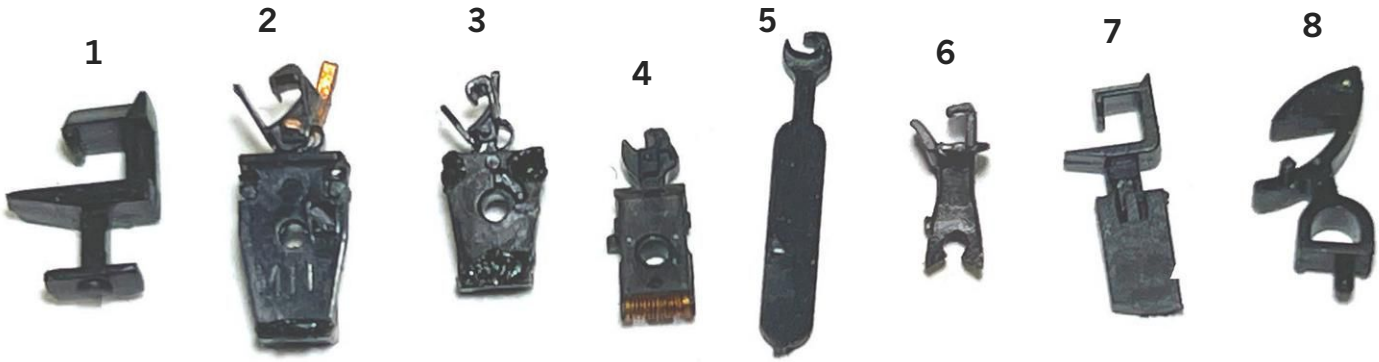


Photo 14: Evolution of couplers used in Nn3 modeling:
1. "Rapido" coupler – N-standard-gauge (for reference)
2. Kadee/Micro Trains Line (MTL) N scale Magne-Matic body-mount (1015) coupler
3. MTL Nn3/Z body-mount knuckle coupler (903/905)
4. N-Possible SBX Short Shank body mount knuckle coupler
5. Nelson Gray scale narrow gauge knuckle coupler
6. Rokuhan MTL-compatible Z scale knuckle coupler
7. Rapido-style Z scale coupler
8. Märklin "lobster claw" Z scale coupler
(Atlas' Accumate, Bachmann's E-Z Mate, Athearn's McHenry, and American Z Line knuckle standard-gauge couplers not shown).

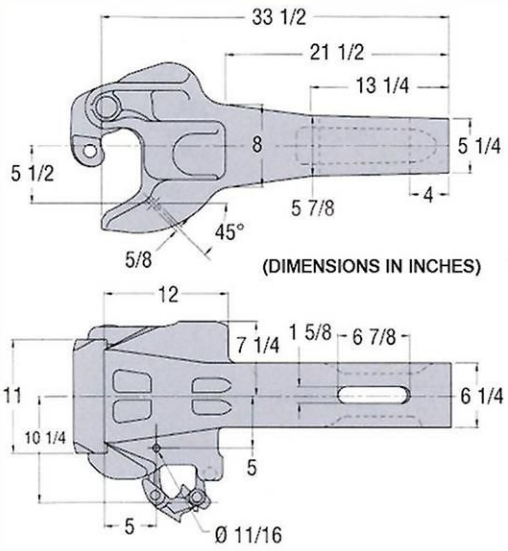


Figure 4: Prototype dimensions of an AAR Type E knuckle coupler for standard-gauge freight cars (*courtesy McConway & Torley*).

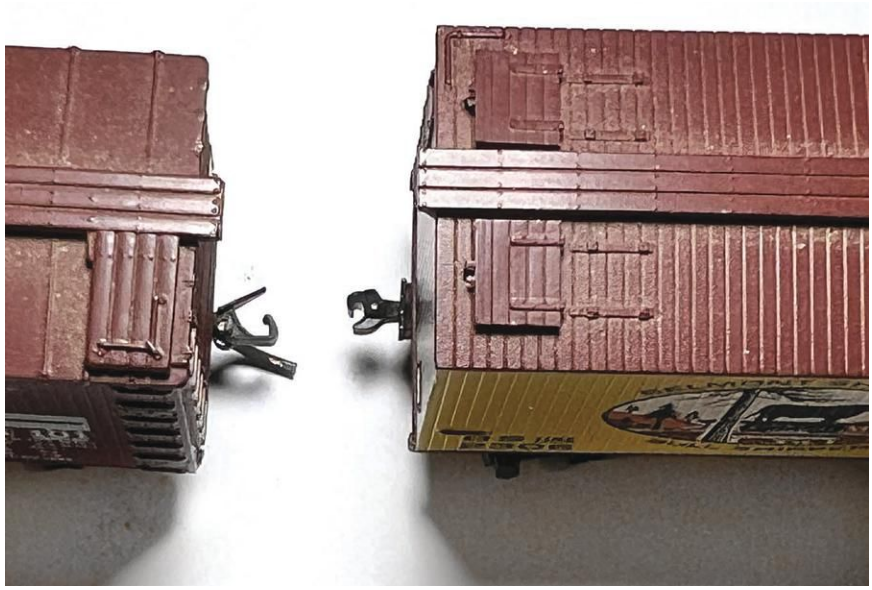


Photo 15: The N-Possible SBX coupler fitted to a Micro Trains N scale freight car (*right*) compared to the standard MTL Magne-Matic coupler (*left*).



Photo 16: The N-Possible SBX coupler kit (*left*) compared to the MTL Nn3/Z 903 coupler kit (*right*).

hoses, which fit in a socket on the side of the draft gear box. The intended primary application of this coupler is for N-standard-gauge, the most popular application being body-mount using the SBX variety according to Andrew, the developer of the coupler (***Photo 15***). The coupler comes as a kit, with "some assembly required." Before tackling assembly, it is important to view the assembly video at: *youtu.be/uf2zLnapeQA*. Although seemingly daunting and admittedly fiddly, after assembling a few, I found it to not be much more difficult than assembling the MTL 00202020 (903) Nn3/Z coupler (***Photo 16***). Note that the 903 is the kit version of the assembled 00202021 (905), which cheap masochistic Nn3 modelers like me have stockpiled.

Although designed primarily with N-standard-gauge applications in mind, I was intrigued by the potential use in N-narrow-gauge. What impressed me about the N-Possible coupler was its scale size, prototypical appearance, and a draft gear box that is for all practical purposes interchangeable with the Kadee/Micro-Trains #903/905 body mount coupler, which has been the staple of Nn3 modeling since its introduction (***Photo 17***). Unlike the Micro-Trains coupler, as mentioned, the N-Possible coupler does not have magnetic uncoupling capability. This didn't concern me much, as – like most Nn3 modelers I have talked to – I do not use that feature and rely on a pick to uncouple the Magne-Matic couplers on my Nn3 equipment.



Photo 17: N-Possible SBX coupler installed on MTL Nn3 box car (left) compared to MTL box car equipped with MTL 905 coupler. Not as dramatic as the comparison to the MTL 1015, but still a significant improvement.

Lack of magnetic uncoupling notwithstanding, I was curious about how easily these would couple, how easy it was to uncouple them, how reliably they stayed coupled in a moving train through a variety of track conditions, and would they stay coupled on very tight radius curves. I equipped two Micro-Trains Nn3 box cars with short-shank 101-SBX-K couplers on one end while retaining the MTL coupler on the other and ran them on my small portable Hawthorne, Nevada exhibition layout at a gathering of the Kauai Model Railroaders in December 2025. This layout is composed of one of the NorCal 1'×4' Nn3 modules, plus return loops at each end connecting to a back-of-house shelf with a passing siding for staging and dispatching trains. The loops are a tight 145mm (5.7") radius, providing an extreme test of the couplers. I also tested the uncoupling and coupling functions. I found the coupler will engage on slow backing of the locomotive. The couplers stayed coupled through tight radius curves and turnouts, both in forward and reverse movements. There is none of the "slinky" effect of the MTL couplers. I also found that the coupler easily disengages using a pick. I shot a short shaky video you can see at *youtu.be/osBBcCqElmI*. (YouTube has several videos on using the N-Possible coupler with N-standard-gauge – most better done than mine.)

Subsequently, back at home, I switched out the couplers on two of the PCRy's long (49 foot) coaches with SBX short-shank couplers and found – not unexpectedly - they were challenged by the 5.7" radius curves on the Hawthorne layout. I removed the short shank couplers on the test mule and installed SBX – long shank units on all ten of my 3D-printed resin PCRy passenger cars, moving the draft gear mounting screw closer to the trucks to maintain visually close coupling. This required grinding away some of the center sill (***Photo 18***). There was still plenty of side-to-side clearance under the sill to allow the cars to negotiate the tight radius. I also converted my 1930s roster of motive power to the N-Possible coupler (***Photo 19***).

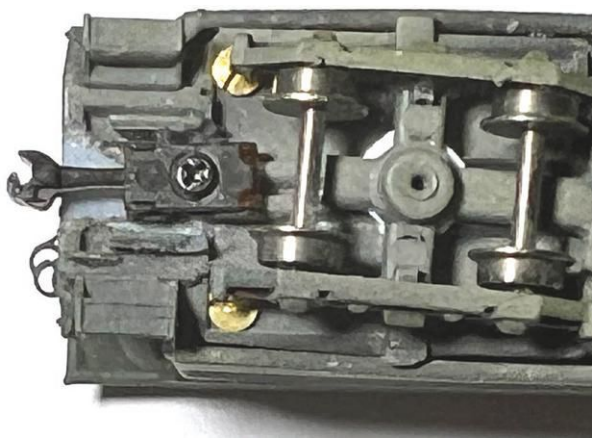


Photo 18: The installation of N-Possible SBX Long Shank couplers on 3D-printed resin passenger cars necessitated removal of some of the center sills to move the draft gear box closer to the truck.

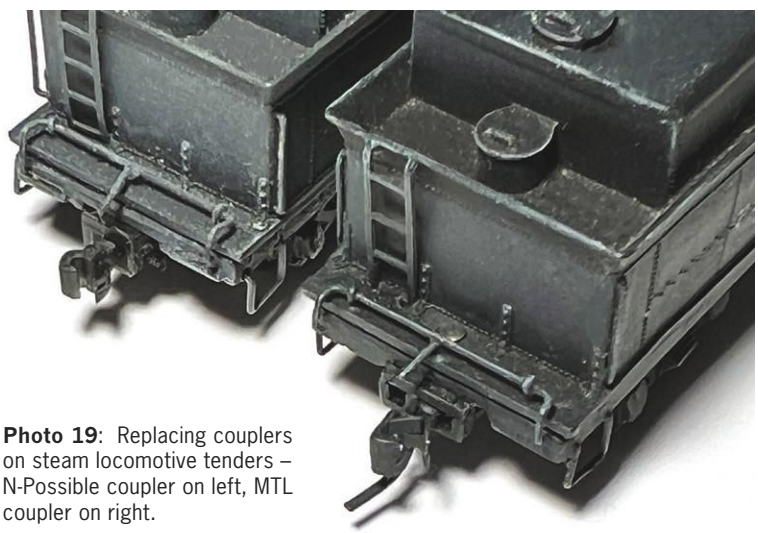


Photo 19: Replacing couplers on steam locomotive tenders – N-Possible coupler on left, MTL coupler on right.



Photo 20: The author uses a "pick" consisting of a needle mounted in a wood dowel applied from the top for uncoupling; he also finds a dental pick with a 90° bend at the and is useful for reaching in from the side.

I found that using a sharply pointed "pick" is best for uncoupling (***Photo 20***). In addition to the one in the photo, I also have a couple of dental picks – including the one with a right-angle bend at the tip seen in the test video, which is useful for reaching cars in some areas of the layout.

A note on converting MTL Ready-to-Run Nn3 freight cars and cabeese: the N-Possible SBX version can be used as a replacement for the Micro-Trains 1015 body-mount coupler on standard-gauge rolling stock and is designed to utilize the same mounting screw location. On standard-gauge cars this is located 3.2 mm inboard of the end sill, while the mounting hole for the #905 draft gear on MTL Nn3 rolling stock is located 2.54 mm in from the end, meaning using this same screw location for the N-possible SBX draft gear on Nn3 rolling stock – as one might do when converting existing equipment – extends the end of the draft gear box 0.66 mm beyond the end sill, as can be seen in ***Photo 15***. I don't find this objectionable.

Changing couplers on all of one's equipment is something not to be taken lightly. However, modeling one narrow gauge railway, the amount of inventory should generally not be insurmountable – in my case consisting of 96 pieces of 3D-printed rolling stock (so far), eight steam locomotives, and a diesel switcher. So far, I have purchased N-Possible couplers from Midwest Model Railroad, PNP Trains, and A&S Trains. They are also available from other retailers listed on the N-Possible website.

BOB BROWN

The narrow-gauge modeling world – and the world in general – lost one of the Great this past winter with the passing of Bob Brown, the creator and editor of the *Narrow Gauge and Shortline Gazette*. He will be missed by many, myself included.

FINALLY

… please e-mail me at *thomasknapp@att.net* with your comments, questions, and ideas for content. I would especially like to see the modeling of other Nn3ers out there that I could share with the readers of this magazine. Each reader out there has their own unique knowledge or skill which can be shared with the rest of us, so put pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard) and share with us. Also, manufacturers who have narrow gauge and shortline products and other products which help model the 19th and early 20th century scene, please let me know.

References:

1 *The Pacific Coast Railway: Central California's Premiere Narrow Gauge*, Johnson & Westcott, Benchmark Publications, ISBN-10: 0961546743, ISBN-13: 9780961546748, *bobhayden.com/index.php?main_page=product_info&cPath=0&products_id=28*

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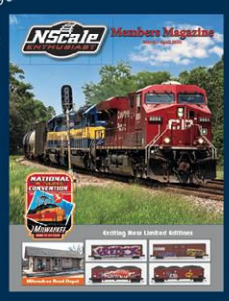
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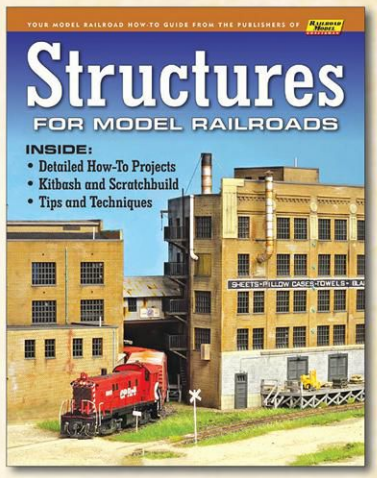
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