

THE
NER  **coupler**

No. 185, June 1996



A Publication of the Northeastern Region, National Model Railroad Association



*Amtrak Loco #701 leads a southbound train near Chelsea, New York
March 1996. Photo by NER Member Pat LeCaroz*

Messages from Tower A

In my last column I wrote of new happenings on my layout, a major scenic improvement, and of the need to "do it right". As you may remember, I was concerned that the use of flat and easy terrain would degrade the end result. Well, I followed my advice with an important side shot. You might also remember, the primary shift in technology was to use sheet foam to advantage. I really enjoyed working with it, cutting in the cellar terraces rather than pouring plaster around built-up areas. As it turned out, it was less work than expected to use terrain that better fit the prototype. I did have to get a little innovative with switch machine placement. During the no-brainer tasks, however, I got to look at the fringes of the scene. I really began to look with jaundiced eye at what had previously seemed only a minor imperfection.

One place in particular, I had an incomplete scene that was going to detract

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CHANGES OF ADDRESS

should be sent to the Office Manager (see under Working Crew in left column)

CONTRIBUTIONS

from NER and NMRA members are most welcome. The Editor reserves the right to accept, reject or edit copy as received. Articles accepted for publication will be included in *The NER Coupler* in a timely fashion.

The newsletter is composed on a Macintosh Performa using Claris Works. Since copy must be edited and adapted to issue format, it is welcome in any readable form including computer diskette.

Photographs intended for individual publication or as part of an article are invited. If you wish us to return your photos, please include a sufficiently large envelope and adequate postage. Color photos of good color balance and contrast are acceptable.

Letters to the Editor of a constructive and professional nature will also be considered for publication.

**Deadline for next issue is
1 August 1996
CONVENTION INFO**

NER Membership is open to any NMRA member at \$6 per year. Look for the application blank in most issues.

NER 50th Anniversary Meeting Takes Shape

Here's the latest news, hot off the wire from Tom Scrivani, PR Chairman at the Kingston Model Railroad Club.

Spring has sprung, and the 50th Anniversary of the N.E.R. gets closer. As the convention weekend approaches, plans for the celebration on October 25th through the 27th are coming together nicely. While everything is not finalized, here are some things I can share with you.

Friday night (25th) and Sunday afternoon (27th) are set aside for layout tours in the area. The HO and N scale setups of the Hudson Valley Railroad Club are in the restored Hyde Park railroad station. The HO layout of the West Shore Model Railroad Club, and the O scale of the Kingston Model Railroad Club are both located in the area. On Sunday, the Hudson Valley Railroad Society will sponsor a very big train show at the Civic Center in Poughkeepsie, just 25 minutes from Kingston. Whatever scale you model, whatever equipment or accessories you're looking for, you'll likely find it at this 25th annual show. Proceeds from the show will go to the maintenance of the beautifully restored New York Central Station at Hyde Park.

Saturday is Meat & Potatoes (Literally)

Saturday (26th) is the meat and potatoes of the Convention. Headquarters is the Ramada Inn in Kingston, right off Exit 19 of the New York State Thruway (I-87). While some of the clinics are in the planning stage, I can tell you about one I'm looking forward to. The Hopewell Junction Model Railroad Club and their railroad, the Hudson Northern, will show attendees how to construct a modular layout. Also at the Ramada will be the hospitality room and a video-show room for your relaxation.

Dig These Railfan Trips!

The scheduled railfan trips all will leave from the Ramada. We are planning to visit the Trolley Museum of New York, the Catskill Mountain Railroad, the Empire State Railway Museum's restored former Ulster & Delaware station at Phoenicia, New York, and the railroad. Bus schedules for each trip will be posted.

Information regarding non-rail activities will be available at the hotel. The Kingston area has many attractions for those who might not want to spend every moment at the convention. The Vanderbilt and the Franklin D. Roosevelt mansions are a short drive away in Hyde Park. That town is home to the Culinary Institute of America, which trains some of the world's greatest chefs. The school boasts a fine restaurant where you may sample student work. There is a catch, however: the long lead-time for reservations. Here are some phone numbers for early use: 914-452-9600, or 914-471-6608.

Speaking of food, I am personally looking forward to the banquet on Saturday night. It will be held at one of our area's premier restaurants, the Hillside Manor. The price has not yet been set, but it will be announced in the next issue of the *NER Coupler*. The banquet will feature several speakers on the model railroading hobby; the keynote speaker will be Hal Carstens, president of Carstens Publications, best known for the journal, *Railroad Model Craftsman*. Hal will speak on what the hobby was like in 1946, as contrasted with the current scene.

Registration forms (convention and hotel), the convention program, tour and clinic information, and local maps will appear in the next issue of the *Coupler*. Maps for layout tours will be available at the hotel. A room rate of \$50 for up to four people per room has been set by the Ramada. Don't forget that the Train Show will have many modular layouts and many dealers. Don't miss this very special convention celebrating NER's 50th anniversary. **-TOM SCRIVANI**

Take Note

The last issue (184) of the *NER Coupler* presented the proposed new text of the NER Constitution. I started it off rather badly by referring to the "Northwest Region", a Freudian slip connected with the name my local model club.

In the same issue, I managed to screw up Glenn Glasstetter's "Down at the Roundhouse" column by interpreting "bi-annual" (semi-annual) as "biennial" (every two years). Everybody knows we convene twice a year. JTP

New Members

02/01/96 to 04/30/96

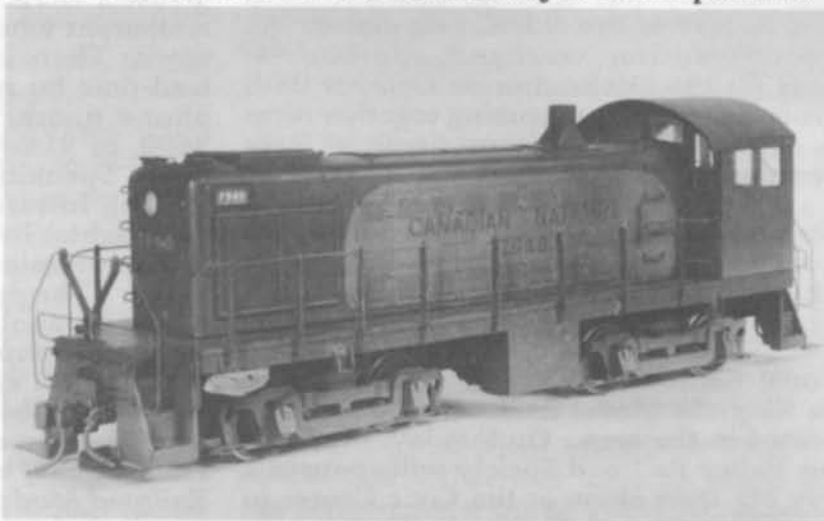
Massachusetts: John Cuddy (Lawrence); Robert Taylor (Fall River); David Abrames (Hyannis); Ken Harstine (Holyoke); Jeffrey Tufts (Easton); Robert Huebscher (Lexington); John Willey (Sudbury). **Michigan:** Lionel Bigda (Chesterfield). **New Jersey:** Joel Caesar (Morganville). **New York:** Mark Stevenson (Bayside); Joseph Bux (College Point); Mike Ryan (Centereach); John Hall (East Farmingdale); John Haynes (Syracuse); Jim Domser (Utica); Steven Wade (Bohemia); John Beirne (Elmhurst); Mike Flannery (Monroe). **Rhode Island:** Stephen Erickson (Middletown); Francis Perry, Jr. (Coventry). **Vermont:** Tony Parisi (Essex Junction); David Camber (South Wheelock).
Information from Office Manager Ron Bergeron.

News from the Outback

David Collinge, president of the Seacoast Division and editor of the *Switch Tower* was back in the hospital with a recurrence of the heart disease. Ron Palmquist edited the last issue during David's recuperation. Fred Voelcker, author of the article on Private Road Name SIGs in this issue, is a candidate for VP of the Mid-Eastern Region. NER's Sunrise Trail Division will soon celebrate its 30th birthday according to the last issue of *The Canon Ball*. The Division will host the 1997 fall convention of NER. The Central New York Division of NER will host a Funtrak N-scale module operation at 2PM on 21 July, at Mohawk Valley Community College, Utica. The Rocky Mountain Region has 18 active Divisions with 14 of them scheduling regular monthly meetings according to *The Call-board*. HUB hosted a Cape Cod Dinner Train Outing June 8.

A.P. Chairman Allard Gives Simon Parent Merit Award for S4

Simon Parent was an unhappy modeler after the Windsor Locks Convention. Having taken first place for Locomotives in the New Modeler category, Simon failed to earn the Merit Award certificate for his Canadian National S4 Diesel Loco. He fell short by one-half point! Si-



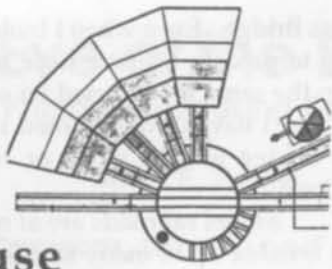
mon reworked the scratchbuilt CN S4 (an old Miller kit) by relocating the exhaust stack and by extensive weathering. The photo was taken by Canadian Director Denis Fortier, using a Nikon with stock 50mm lens. The background is a simple white piece of paper and the lighting was supplied by three 500 watt tungsten bulbs. The film was Fujicolor (ASA100-tungsten) exposed for one second.

Golden Spike, French Version

Paul Allard also announces a first in the NMRA Achievement Program. The requirements and application form for the Golden Spike Award have been translated into the French language for the convenience and encouragement of our NER Quebec members. Director Denis Fortier did the translation. How to distribute the 5 pages most inexpensively has yet to be decided. In the meantime, if you need a copy, contact Denis at 1 rue Duchesne, Cap à l'Aigle, Quebec G0T 1B0; phone 418-665-4284. Director Denis Fortier's E-Mail address is capaile@netrover.com. If you wish to contact AP Chairman Paul Allard, his address is 53 Rollin Irish Road, Milton, VT 05468 (USA); he can be reached by phone at 802-893-2228, or E-Mail CNMikade@aol.com.

In the same vein, NER Quebec members will receive a one-page digest of each *NER Coupler* issue in French. The service is provided by Coupler distributor Mike Saunders and translator Denis Fortier.

Glenn Glasstetter Down at the Roundhouse



EVOLUTION OF A SCENE

In the "Messages from Tower A" column in the last issue of the *Coupler*, Brian Whiton discussed "constructing model scenes that are what you want, not what you will settle for." In this column, I will discuss a scene that I am constructing on my layout, which has been evolving over several years.

The overall scene is defined by a small river that appears from behind a ridge, tumbles through a gorge and then flows to the front edge of the layout. Approximately thirteen inches back from the edge of the layout is the first track of a double track main line that crosses the river on a deck truss bridge. This bridge was kitbashed from a number of Atlas 65' Deck Truss Bridge kits to represent a bridge I had seen at Deerfield, Massachusetts. Behind the main line, to the right of the bridge, is a small branch line yard. The branch line leaves the yard to the left and also crosses the river before entering a tunnel. Between the main line and the branch line, another track bridges the river that connects the yard to the main line.

The width of the river was defined by a Campbell's wooden Howe Truss Bridge that I had built many years before I designed my layout, or even knew I would model the C&O. The deck truss bridge previously mentioned, was then built to span the river and installed. The Howe Truss Bridge never was installed, since when I started studying the C&O Railroad, I found none of these bridges still existed into the late forties and early fifties. This bridge now resides on Brian's layout! The branch line tunnel portal was modeled from a photo of an unusual tunnel portal on the Winding Gulf Division of the C&O. This tunnel, through soft shale, has a wooden liner surrounded by creosoted wooden pegs used to prevent the shale from caving in. The portal itself has no face on it, making the wooden liner arch and the pegs visible. Above, and set back from the portal, is a platform supported on wooden posts upon which are more pegs that further support the shale

above this "false" portal. Although this tunnel portal probably took almost as many hours to build as the original, it is something I have never seen on another layout and it is a signature element of the Winding Gulf Division that would be recognizable to many other students of the C&O. By the way, if you're thinking that a tunnel portal like this would not make it into the Twentieth Century, there is a lashup of three Geeps coming out of the tunnel in the photo!



Since I needed a longer passing track than I could fit in the yard, there will be two tracks crossing the river, switching down to one track before entering the tunnel. The second bridge I was planning to build here to carry both tracks across the river was going to be a three arch, scratch-built model of a cast concrete bridge based on a C&O bridge located at Cabin Creek Junction, West Virginia. At least I hadn't quite gotten around to building this bridge before it evolved to something else. The bridge for this location will now use two spans each of deck plate bridges to carry these tracks across the river. However, the abutments at either end and center pier will be cast in plaster and carved to represent a stone pier and abutments that previously supported a single-track deck truss bridge, but were later modified with concrete to support two deck plate bridges. Since the older deck truss bridge had a greater vertical cross section than the newer plate girder bridges, the bridge pedes-

There are many examples of this method of bridge rebuilding technique visible in northern Vermont.

tal supports on the stone pier and abutments widened with poured concrete, the material of choice in later years. Although I don't recall seeing any photos of this bridge rebuilding technique in any C&O photos, there are many examples of this here in Vermont.

The reason for using the bridges with a narrower cross section is to more easily view a small hydroelectric dam that I am building in the gorge behind the bridges. You see, I had been planning to build the foundation ruins of an old mill along the river between the main line and the edge of the layout. But, one day when I was out photographing railroad bridges in Vermont, I

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happened to find a neat, small dam and generating station located in a gorge between two of the bridges. After finding that and taking quite a few photos from many angles, I thought it might be just the thing to build into my scene. One small problem - although the power house just below the dam was quite small, I didn't have any room at all in the scene for it. Since there are quite a few hydroelectric generating stations in this neck of the woods, with camera in hand, I spent several days seeking them out and photographing their features. You would be amazed at the many different modelgenic hydroelectric stations in this area of the country. I came across everything from an abandoned wooden power house built in the 1890s in Johnson to a thoroughly modern facility built in the 1990s in Winooski, complete with fish elevator and an inflatable rubber bladder at the top of the dam used to regulate the head of water behind the dam!

I am basing my generating station on a composite of three that I found and photographed. The dam will be based on one in Moretown, Vermont. This dam is also located in a gorge and has an unique little wooden structure, perched on concrete legs extending about fourteen feet above the top of the dam, which houses the controls that actuate the flood gates at the base of the dam. The dam is being constructed from several pieces of foam board insulation covered with Scale Crete simulated concrete, Flash boards, which are still used on older dams to raise the head will be installed along the top of the dam. One other feature I found at all of these dams, a small crane used to remove debris that collects at the grates where the water flows into the penstocks, will be modeled. The power house will be selectively compressed from the power house located in Essex Junction, Vermont. This will be located in the thirteen inch space between the main line and the edge of the layout. There will be two penstocks, or large pipes, that conduct the water from the dam to the turbines in the power house. This feature is based on several generating stations in the area, but most notably an abandoned one in Montpelier that has two five-foot diameter, riveted steel pipes that snake along the river's edge for about a quarter mile.

The final bridge in this scene, that carries the track connecting the yard to the main line, will be a shortened, skewed Central Valley Pratt

Truss Bridge. Even when I build a stock kit bridge, I try to modify it just a little to make it different from the same model used on other layouts. I just realized I haven't determined if the abutments for this bridge will be stone or concrete. So many choices!

Model railroads are at once one large scene that is made up of many smaller scenes. By taking the time to make these smaller scenes highly detailed and believable, we can make our layouts seem much larger than they actually are.

The Scene Must Draw the Viewer Into It

These scenes will draw the viewer in and keep him looking at the scene longer than they would a scene which is not well thought out. One of your best modeling tools is observation of the real world, both the natural and the man-made, in person or in photographs, to get the feel for what is believable and how to model it. Just as our ideas and preferences of the railroad we would like to model evolve over time, so too can our ideas for specific scenes. A scene not yet built on your layout might evolve over time in your mind, or it might be a completed scene on your layout that you can improve upon based on new information that you've seen or heard about. You may even develop an interest in furthering your knowledge and understanding about something, just as this has led me to study the construction and operation of hydroelectric generating stations.

Like the Howe Truss Bridge that never made it into the layout, there are a number of other structures I have built over the years that don't fit my representation of the C&O. Just as my ideas of what my layout should represent have evolved, these models have helped my model building skill and techniques evolve.

*from the collection
of Ken May*



In the Eye of the Beholder

Basic Model Photography Using Outdoor Dioramas

by
John E. Bortle

Part 2: Cameras, Lenses, and Accessories

The construction of a photo-diorama, discussed in the February issue of the *NER Coupler*, employs knowledge and techniques that just about every model railroader already possesses. Model photography, on the other hand, is to many an unfamiliar, shadowy subject. In some cases the extent of our experience may be as limited as a couple of photos of Aunt Mildred and the wife at a cook-out in the backyard. Even those of us with a bit more expertise may be overwhelmed by a sense of bewilderment when faced with the challenge of photographing a 1:87 scale locomotive.

The author is the first to admit that becoming a truly first-rate photographer is an all consuming hobby in itself. But our goal here is to depict model railroad scenes in a believable fashion, not compete with the works of Ansel Adams. To accomplish this goal, it is not necessary to own several thousand dollars worth of camera equipment. Nor is it necessary to have made a detailed study of light, shadow, contrast and composition. Only a very basic knowledge of camera lenses and a few rudimentary photography skills are actually required for our efforts to prove quite successful.

35 mm SLR Cameras

Although a Point & Shoot camera can produce some pretty nice pictures in the right circumstances, it would definitely be an uphill battle to adapt one to dedicated model photography. A 35 mm SLR camera [Single Lens Reflex, which allows the viewing and taking of the picture through the same lens system], on the other hand, can



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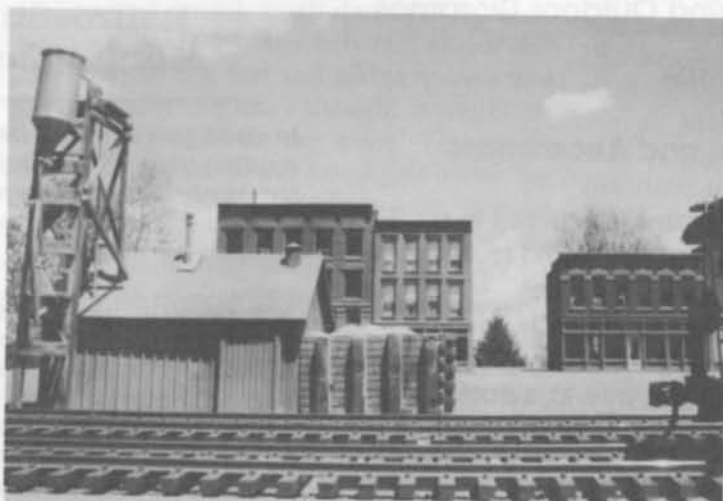
Consider a SIG to Make Model Railroading More Phun!

In case you haven't been reading your NMRA Bulletin lately, Special Interest Groups (SIGs) are encouraged by the National.

I would like to take this opportunity to invite all Model Railroad Clubs and other organizations which now (or are planning to) have Special Run Private Road Name model railroad cars or other equipment to send me publicity information (descriptions) along with photo(s), or any PC compatible graphics file(s) such as ".bmp", ".pcx", ".tif", etc. of the car or cars! This information will be published in the **Interchange**, the newsletter of the Private Road Names SIG. We feel this will help you promote your product as well as aid our members by letting them know what is available or planned direct from you.

I am also developing a clinic, "Private Road Names Modeling is Phun!", and would like to invite all those who practice this aspect of model railroading to submit slides of their locomotives, rolling stock, structures and/or Passes or Timetables and Operating Rules or manuals for possible inclusion. I can use color slides or prints, or any PC compatible graphics image. The first showing of this presentation is scheduled for the NMRA National Convention at Lake Junction '97 in Madison.

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Wisconsin.

The Private Road Names SIG is open to everyone interested in "Railroads that never were...but might have been!" For additional information and an application, send an SSAE to: PRNM SIG, P.O. Box 4003 Timonium, MD 21094-4003. All inquiries will be answered promptly.

PHRED

Fred H. Voelcker, Jr., Dir.

On the Lighter Side of Life

If anyone doubts that the Seacoast Division is alive and well, I took the liberty of lifting this from the last issue of The Switch Tower.

A man was applying for a job as a switchman for the railroad. "Tell me," said the supervisor, "what would you do if you saw two trains coming at each other on the same track?"

"I'd switch one of them right off and unto a siding."

"And what if the switch throw was stuck?"

"I'd run out with a red flag and wave one of them down."

"And what if the engineer didn't see you?"

"I'd call my mother."

"Call your mother! What could she do?"

"Nothing, but she loves to see train wrecks."

Thanks, Guys

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p. 8> In the Eye of the Beholder

produce both excellent and consistent results in the area of diorama photography. SLRs allow precise control over image scale, depth-of-field, and exposure latitude far beyond the range of more simple cameras.

Anyone who has participated in even a few railfan trips at recent NMRA conventions can attest to the fact that the majority of those in our hobby already own SLR cameras - just look at the photo lines for the run-bys! Accepting this as the prevailing situation, and to avoid provoking a needless debate, we won't get involved here in a long discussion of the pros and cons of individual cameras. No matter what brand of SLR you currently own, as long as you are happy with it, it can do journeyman service in diorama photography.

For those who have yet to purchase their first SLR camera, be advised that high priced cameras are not a requirement to accomplish our goals. The author has experimented with some very expensive and fancy Nikon and Minolta units over the years, but his personal favorite for diorama photography is a relatively inexpensive and uncomplicated Pentax K-1000 camera body which today sells for around \$160. [Many point and shoot cameras sell for that much and more.]

Lenses

The key to obtaining the picture you want lies more with employing the proper lens than any other factor. Lenses are classified into three general types: wide-angle, normal, and telephoto. Each has its own unique set of optical characteristics which may, or may not, make the lens suitable for use in photographing a particular model scene. With the recent advent of excellent zoom lenses, the traits of two or even of all three types of lenses may be incorporated into a single unit. However, whether dealing with a fixed focal-length system or a zoom, it is extremely helpful to understand the weak and strong points of each type to get an idea of how their performance may affect your final picture.

[Please refer to the three photos on page 8 as you follow this explanation of lens choice; they show the same scene as taken with a wide-angle, "normal", and telephoto lens.]

Normal lenses. Commonly having a focal-length of 50mm or 55mm, these lenses closely approximate what the human eye sees. They have modest depth-of-field and unless of the Macro or Micro variety, do not focus closer than about 18 to 20 inches from the subject. This can make it difficult or impossible to obtain "close-up" shots without resorting to supplemental lenses or making considerable enlargements later from the negatives. Photos taken with this type of lens, however, tend to produce the most realistic depiction of a scene with the least inherent image distortion.

Wide-Angle Lenses. With focal-lengths in the range of

19-35mm, wide-angle optical systems render a broader view of a given scene than can be taken in by the eye. They will focus much closer to the subject than will a normal lens, with the subject-to-camera spacing in some cases being as little as 12 inches or so. Depth-of-field can be very great when the lens is fully "stopped down", a definite asset in model photography. Image distortion, which increases markedly at progressively shorter focal-lengths, is their biggest drawback. Wide-angle lenses expand the apparent camera-to-subject distance, making background features in the scene seem much more distant. At the same time foreground objects, a locomotive for instance, will appear stretched out or even bent in the middle if angled toward the lens! Vertical elements in a scene, such as telephone poles or the corners of buildings can suffer too, leaning inward or outward in a very unnatural fashion (an effect called Keystoning). In some instances they may appear curved or bowed outward near the edge of the frame (often the sign of cheap optics).

Telephoto Lenses. Usually with focal-lengths of 85mm and greater, telephoto lenses lack the ability of close-in focusing and depth-of-

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field can be quite limited. The field of view is smaller than that of the eye. In many respects the image distortions inherent in a telephoto lens are just the opposite of those seen in a wide-angle. Telephotos compress a scene, causing the background to "loom up" over the main subject in the foreground. If a locomotive is angled toward the lens, it may tend to appear "squashed" front to back.

Although the foregoing would seem to imply that a 50mm or "normal" focal-length lens would be the obvious choice for model photography, a minimal wide-angle lens - say a 35mm f3.5 - will generally prove superior. The latter will have much greater depth-of-field and the capability to focus quite a bit closer to the subject than the normal lens. The same should hold true for a 35-80mm f3.5 or 35-135mm f3.5 zoom lens used at the 35mm WA setting.

In model photography, the best results will always be produced when stopping the lens all the way down to its f22 (smallest) setting. This will give the maximum depth-of-field. For a 35mm wide-angle lens adjusted to just short of minimum focus, everything from about 14 inches in front of the lens out to a couple of yards will be in reasonably sharp focus - a very good latitude for our purpose. Shoot a few test rolls with your equipment to determine its specific characteristics before embarking on serious work.

Making Good Results Better

If you like what you've already gotten, you'll be pleased to know that even better results can be obtained with the addition of a little, relatively inexpensive accessory called a 2X Teleconverter. This is a Barlow-type auxiliary lens that is inserted between the camera body and the regular lens, and results in a doubling of the system's focal length. For example, a 35mm lens will now produce images like those taken with 70mm lenses.

Of much greater importance from our standpoint as diorama photographers is that



CLOSE-UP ACCESSORIES. Clockwise from the camera are: a 2x converter, a 3 piece set of close-up lenses and a set of extension tubes.

the Teleconverter also doubles the f-ratio of the lens. Thus, an f22 setting becomes f45. With the increased depth-of-field from the higher f-ratio anything from around 10 inches to several tens of yards from the camera will now be in acceptable focus. A further plus is that your subject's image size has doubled and it will no longer be necessary to "crowd in" on the scene to make it fill the frame. In point of fact, your camera has now begun to take on the performance capabilities of a modest pinhole photo system (but with the quality of a true optical system).

Other Accessories

There has to be a down-side to all this, right? Well, yes. At the small f45 lens opening, even exposures made out-of-doors can be rather long. Hand holding the camera is out of the question. A reasonably good camera tripod will remedy the situation, and while you are at the camera store, purchase a cable release. This gadget allows you to trip the shutter without disturbing the camera.

In the final installment, we'll discuss setting up for a "shoot".

One Observation on the NMRA Membership Loss. Why does this Hemorrhage Continue?

Having read "It takes a Worried Man" in the last issue of the *Coupler*, Charlie Reynolds wrote this letter to Trustee Jim Heidt with a copy to us (and permission to print it).

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p. 10> **NMRA: One Member's 45
Year Perspective**

17 March 1996

Dear Jim,

[This] is in reply to the note on NER Coupler , #184, p. 15, "It takes a worried man to sing a worried song" and the request to convey our opinions to you...

I joined NMRA and NER in 1951, in time for the fall NER Convention in New Haven, Ct...The opinions that follow are those that I have developed over almost 45 years. They are a feeling, a flavor, a sense of things that cannot be pinned down...

I was sold on NMRA membership by another model railroader in the first Model RR Club I ever joined. What got me was the setting up of the various standards, pretty well defined by the time I joined. Then later, was the conformance awards given to those who met those standards; and the critiques, given about those who didn't meet them. This, to me was what it was all about, the ability to go out and buy things from many different people and have it all (mostly) run well together, on most anyone's track, club or private.

And then there was the Bulletin, which told us month to month...what was going on in the NMRA, and also with the Regions. Nothing fancy, but informative for those who cared to read it. This was to me a grass roots organization run by a small group of dedicated members for the benefit of the rest of the NMRA, and all other model railroaders outside the NMRA...

Unfortunately, things never stay the same. The loud minority (look at the number who vote vs the total membership) decide that things must change! First we have to hire an office manager. OK. Then we need to hire office space. Well, OK. Then we must provide more and more services to members! Really? Now the Bulletin is no longer adequate, we must have another slick paper model RR magazine with color! Indeed! And now, of course, our own headquarters building. Wow! Just as if we were a world-wide organization)...And of course, we must raise the dues again and again...Years ago, "Blowing off Steam" was a very active, give and take column. Today, nothing; once in awhile a negative letter, so rabid

you automatically discount it. Have the majority of members stopped writing since it appears that most letters (especially dissent) end up in the circular file?

...Today my chief feeling about the Bulletin is adds and articles that I can get in the RR and model RR magazines I buy, plus the never-ending hype to pay off the headquarters building and go to national conventions...

As for the National Convention, each year it must get bigger and bigger and, guess what, more expensive. So where does that leave the POM (Plain Ordinary Member)? Skip a few purchases, mortgage the layout, leave the wife and kids home, or just stay home? I went to the Boston National a few years ago...and felt like a stranger among strangers...to be tolerated, but otherwise ignored

...Once or twice in the past, I mounted my soap-box and challenged the powers that be over one or more issues. I should have saved my breath, paper and postage...I really don't have any solutions for the membership problems, but I do have a couple of suggestions. I have no use for "Scientific Surveys" since they tend to find out the desired answer first and then skew the questions to suit. Has anyone considered asking the ex-members why they quit? Don't write, have the Regions find volunteers to phone and ask where possible. If the vocal, voting minority wish to preserve the NMRA, they better find out what the majority membership wants, and soon. It might also be a good idea to push [again] for teen-age membership.

...I have supported NMRA with my dues for 45 years, mostly for what it has done in the past...I've reached an age (66 in May) where I no longer wish to tilt at windmills. I have expressed my opinions; my next move is to vote with my feet, i.e., out the door. This does wonders for my blood pressure, my nervous system and my general disposition ...One thing [this rambling] has done for me is clear up my rather ambivalent feelings about remaining with NMRA/NER. When it comes time to re-enlist, I will have made up my mind and probably retire...If anyone is dumb enough to get in touch with me, I can talk your ear off by the hour...Goodnight and good luck.

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p.1> Messages from Tower A

from the new effort substantially. It was incomplete for three reasons. First, I had built the buildings to the shell stage, but hadn't finished them. Sound familiar? This is a poor approach to modeling and a risk we all take. I think it can be reduced only by focusing energy. I haven't mastered completing a scene before moving on to another, but you might. It will really enhance your layout and increase your enjoyment of the hobby.



Back to the ranch; reason number two was incomplete or crude backdrop. It was a brick wall painted blue. Not very nice. Since the new area had to have a backdrop to disguise a circuit-breaker box, it was logical to extend it through adjacent scenes as much as practical. We can't let stuff like this stop progress. Yes, I wiped out a forest when I dropped the sheet rock, but that and a bit of dust was the extent of the damage. I had put off completing this scene for lack of one afternoon of work (and a bit of foul language). I really recommend that you put some energy into backdrops, lighting and lighting valances even if you risk some damage to the layout in the process. You think your imagination is sufficient to ignore these distractions, but it's not true. I've got a mighty active imagination, and poor backdrops bother me.

Third and Complicated

Reason number three was a bit more complicated. The fringe scene contained three incomplete simple structures, as well as two elaborate structures built on separable bases. The latter were not easy to move, being a nasty one-hand lift at arm's length. They fit poorly into the layout with cracks showing. I had to

have maintenance access through the area they occupy. Of course, if I had used more foam and less plaster in their construction, weight would have been less of an issue. I might have made a lift-out that could be handled from the front of the layout. I might have finished it as a result, and had fewer problems in the scene. Spilt milk! I'm stuck with the existing weight and physical configuration. I must now create a frame to carry the pair of buildings, but allow easy removal. An alternative to removability would be to lift the whole scene straight up as did John Allen at his city of Port. I'll write more about this as it develops. So I'm attacking this part of reason number three. While that was going on, I got two of the five incompletes finished, with progress moving well on the other three. If I stay with the effort, it should be complete this year just in time to catch up to the access remedy.

I wasn't faced with a track change, but you might be. Don't hesitate to change track while the scene is torn apart. A lot of us tend to put up with a less effective track arrangement in a scene rather than make the effort to change it. This could be a facing-point siding that would work better as a trailing-point, or the lack of a run-around where it is needed. It might be too much or too little capacity, or track that just doesn't look prototypical. There are other places on my layout where I could follow this advice.

The moral of this story is simple. If you are going to vastly improve a scene as I'm doing, a major undertaking so to speak, you might want to look at the fringe and improve the worst of the adjacent eyesores, as part of the process, although not necessarily simultaneously. I think the result will be much more beneficial to the layout and your satisfaction. Next time I'll discuss rearranging a high-end kit

- **BRIAN WHITON**