

THE  
**NER** Coupler

No. 186, August 1996  
50th Anniversary Issue



*A Publication of the Northeastern Region, National Model Railroad Association*



*Amtrak's FL9, #491 at the historic Poughkeepsie station built by the New York Central RR. It serves Amtrak and Metro North's Hudson Line. NER Prize-winning photo by Pat Lecaroz.*

## Go for the Gold !

Celebrate NER's 50th Anniversary in Kingston, New York, 25-27 October 1996.

This is a fall convention that has it all! More information (see also issues 184 and 185) in the centerfold of this issue. Fill in the reservation forms and return them as soon as possible to avoid disappointment. If you haven't attended an NER meeting lately, don't miss this one.

*INSIDE: Messages from Tower A, Down at the Roundhouse, In the Eye of the Beholder (pt. 3), News from the Outback, and more.*

# NER BRASS

## OFFICERS

**Brian C. Whiton, President** 203-623-8512, BCWHITON@aol.com  
94 & 96 Spring Street, Windsor Locks, CT 06096  
**Glenn Glasstetter, Vice -President**, 802-434-3316  
RFD #1, Box 385, Richmond, VT 05477  
**James Heidt, Past President & NMRA Trustee** 315-697-6227  
PO Box 25, Clockville, NY 13043-0025  
**Diane Salvatore, Secretary** 609-769-3065 / FAX 769-4704  
33 Elm Street, Woodstown, NJ 08098  
**James Truax, Treasurer** 802-860-7372  
32 University Terrace, Burlington, VT 05401

## DEPARTMENT CHAIRPERSONS

**Paul Allard, Achievement Program** 802-893-2228  
53 Rollin Irish Road, Milton, VT 05468  
**Kenneth H. May, Convention Chairman**, 203-872-3441  
71 Buff Cap Road, Tolland, CT 06084  
**Don Howd, Model Contest Chair**, 508-689-9102  
48 Arrow Wood Street, Methuen, MA 01844  
**Frank A. Dietz, Photo Contest Chair**, 518-562-8058  
38 Sandra Avenue, Plattsburgh, NY 12901  
**Diane Salvatore, Non-rail & Crafts Advisor**, 609-769-3065  
33 Elm Street, Woodstown, NJ 08098  
**Position unfilled, Crafts Contest Chair**

## DIRECTORS

**Denis Fortier, Canada**, 418-665-4284, capaile@netrovercom  
1 rue Duchesne, Cap à l'Aigle, Quebec, PQ G0T-1B0  
**Kenneth H. May, Connecticut, Rhode Island** 203-872-3441  
71 Buff Cap Road, Tolland, CT 06084  
**Ludwig Riemenschneider, Long Island, NYC** 516-781-3534  
4039 Wicks Avenue, Seaford, NY 11783  
**Don Howd, Massachusetts**, 508-689-9102  
48 Arrow Wood Street, Methuen, MA 01844  
**Richard C. Laube, New Jersey**, 609-882-7341  
6 Worthington Drive, Trenton, NJ 08638  
**Frank A. Dietz, New York State** 518-562-8058  
38 Sandra Avenue, Plattsburgh, NY 12901  
**David Collinge, Northern New England** 603-335-4356 &  
FAX 3 Durham Lane, Gonic, NH 03839-5411

## WORKING CREW

**Joseph T. Popecki, Editor** 802-863-4121  
33 Woodridge Drive, Burlington, VT 05401 2741  
**Michael G. Saunders, Distr., NER Coupler** 802-524-4428  
msaunders@together.net, 84 Aldis St. St. Albans, VT 05478-1913  
**Charles & Pat Bettinger, Convention Registrars**, 860-643-5925  
FAX 860-533-1590 29 Foster Drive, Vernon, CT 06066  
**Ronald J. Bergeron, Office Manager, 207-490-1743**  
11 Alpine Drive, Sanford, ME 04073-2446

**#186, August 1996**

This newsletter is the official publication of the Northeastern Region, National Model Railroad Association (NMRA) Inc. and is published four times a year.

**Joseph T. Popecki, Editor**  
33 Woodridge Drive  
Burlington, VT 05401 2741  
802-863-4121

## 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.

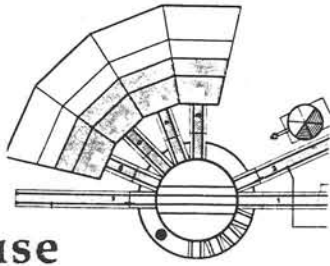
**Letters to the Editor** of a constructive and professional nature will also be considered for publication.

**Deadline for next issue is  
15 November 1996  
CONVENTION WRAPUP**

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



## Glenn Glasstetter Down at the Roundhouse



# What is Wrong with the NMRA?

What is wrong with the NMRA? A lot! Membership is continuing to decline. The dues are too high or the services are too limited for the price of membership. It's run by a clique. The Headquarters Staff can't provide member services in a timely manner. The *Bulletin* is a slick magazine full of advertisements and the same information that's in the news stand magazines. The officers are out of touch with the membership, etc. Have I got your attention?

Is the glass half empty or half full? Membership is indeed continuing to decline. That is a fact. The rest of the statements in the preceding paragraph and more either have been heard or spoken by just about everyone in the NMRA, but they are opinions. Depending on your perspective, you may agree with some of them. You may feel some have an element of truth to them but are too dogmatic. Some you may disagree with. However, there are a lot of good things that can be said about the NMRA, not the least of which is that there is an NMRA.

An editorial in the February 1996 issue of the *Coupler* brought up some of the aforementioned problems and exhorted members with opinions on these issues to contact our NER Trustee, Jim Heidt. One member, Charlie Reynolds of Medford, Massachusetts, did just that and his letter was included in the June 1996 *Coupler*. I spoke with Charlie regarding his opinions and what he thought the NMRA could do to resolve some of the problems he mentioned. His reply, like those of several others I've spoken to, was one of frustration at not being able to give a definitive answer that would make the organization more attractive to recruit people and, more importantly, retain them. Charlie was, however, adamant that the NMRA should make more of an effort to attract teenagers to build for the future.

### Services

The NMRA does provide many services to its members; however, what may be a beneficial service to one member may not appeal to another.

Two services that I see continually underutilized are the Library and the Modelers Aid Service. I have seen both of these touted as one of the best reasons for belonging to the NMRA by their respective champions. If they are so great, why are they underutilized? My impression is that the general membership does not consider either of them to be a service they need or want to use.



### Cliques

You hear about cliques in any organization. Natural friendships form among people who enjoy or are involved in the same things. This includes running an organization. My experience with the NMRA is that, whether on the national, regional or divisional level, there are more jobs than there are volunteers to fill them. These volunteers are donating their time and, in many cases, money to fulfill the obligations of their jobs. We are always looking for people who are willing to offer whatever they can to help maintain and run the organization. Remember, we are a volunteer organization! If there are no volunteers, the jobs will not get done and everyone will lose.

### Headquarters Staff

That the Headquarters Staff has a difficult time accomplishing its duties in a timely manner is obvious, if only for the fact that Bob Charles devoted his May '96 column in the *Bulletin* to the matter of a detailed report of their monthly routine. The fact that there are only three people doing the work that five did last year and that they have a totally antiquated computer system that does not meet their needs are the two primary reasons for their difficulties. It would seem that the priorities of the membership have not been well served if the basic membership services provided by the home office cannot be delivered in a timely and accurate fashion.

It was with great fanfare that Peter Jehrio, our Executive Director, was presented to us last year. "Peter is a bright guy," Bob Charles said, "he has a lot of great ideas and I think we're going to see great things of him." Less than a year later he was gone and there was a large turnover in office staff! Yet we are told nothing as to the reasons, and the service has gotten worse. Is there a plan to hire another executive director? Are they going to increase the office staff? Will they provide the staff with an adequate computer system? Does the BOD have a plan, or do we limp along the way we have been?

Continued on p. 4>>

### Bulletin

The *Bulletin* is a slick paper magazine and it includes advertisements. It does have articles that you can find in the news stand magazines, but they are all written by NMRA members. I know that many of the authors use these articles to qualify for the Author Merit Award, so they serve a twofold purpose. The *Bulletin* is also full of information about our organization. Our editor, Terry Bacus, Jr., pointed out in his June '96 column that in messages received on the Internet, he found some people complaining that the NMRA keeps its financial statements secret, at about the same time those statements were being published, (as they are every year). The information in the *Bulletin* is provided by our volunteer contributors and, as such, may sometimes be sporadic. I was disappointed, however, along with Charlie, to find the minutes of the 1995 Annual Board Meeting and the 1996 Mid-Year Board Meeting were summarized to provide a "more reader-friendly report". I feel that it is more important than ever, in light of our current problems, that the full minutes be provided in the bulletin, instead of having to send for them.

Another concern I have is that the series of articles reviewing the results of the member survey abruptly ended in April with a promise of more to come. What happened? There should have been an explanation in one of the four succeeding issues explaining the delay. This is very important information that the members should see in order to understand our current situation and develop their opinions as to how we might improve our organization. We also need to know how our BOD interprets this information and what its plan is to remedy the NMRA's problems.

The survey indicated that the *Bulletin* is our most important member service. This is not surprising since it is the one service that every member receives and it is our link to the rest of the organization. Last year's financial statement reported that publications consumed 39% of our income, of which the *Bulletin* used the majority. This expense is offset by the revenue received for advertising in the *Bulletin* which generated most, if not all, the almost \$50,000 in income. Some may consider it an evil, but it is a necessary evil in order to fund our most important member service.

Are the officers out of touch with the general membership?

### Out of Touch?

I believe in many cases our officers are out of touch, as well as those of us who have the time, money and energy to participate extensively in our organization. In its quest to become all things

to all people, the NMRA has become a huge organization with many underutilized services that cost money. Now, with dwindling membership, we have a negative cash flow (over \$145,000 in the last two years) and find we cannot support what we have built. In Bob Charles's column in the April '96 *Bulletin*, he discusses his "Vision for the NMRA." He says the Library's "research and archival capabilities have yet to be plumbed." He goes on to say that "we need to pay off the costs of developing the facility and begin to expand the use and size of the collection." He then states that "it only takes money, time and, most of all, dedication." His vision also includes "50,000 or more model railroaders dedicated to improving the hobby through the NMRA." This is his vision. Where is the plan? Please don't misunderstand me. I know that Bob has, and is spending more time and personal money travelling to Chattanooga than most of us would ever imagine. I am not questioning Bob's dedication. The fact of the matter is we are losing more members than we are signing up, and the two main reasons, according to the recent survey, is MONEY. "Financial reasons, self" and "limited benefits for \$ spent", were by far the two main reasons members have dropped out.

Frank Dietz, our NER Membership Chairman, has told me that he has tried recruiting people by explaining the services. Frank says most people think this sounds good until they find out it costs \$30 per year. Now, understand that Frank lives in Plattsburgh, New York, which recently lost its largest employer, the Air Force Base. Unfortunately, there are many areas of the country undergoing similar problems. This is one reason why the largest percentage of the people in the survey indicated the reason for leaving was "financial reasons, self". It is hard to convince someone relatively new to the hobby, or someone with limited time or funds to devote to the hobby, that their \$30 will benefit them and everyone else in the hobby by promoting industry standards, even if it is true. To those who spend a lot of time and/or money on our hobby, \$30 may not seem unreasonable. For those whose only perceived benefit may be the *Bulletin*, \$30 may be too much. Remember, the majority of members in the NMRA attend few or no conventions. Those who join are not renewing.

Semi-active members too must realize that those of us who are very involved in the NMRA have formed friendships (cliques?) and are busy with the operation of the organization. Charlie Reynolds said that at the Boston National Convention he "felt like a stranger among strangers..." This is not unique to the NMRA and should not be blamed on the organization. Just because someone has been a semi-active member of an organization for many years does not mean he will

Continued on p. 5>>

## p. 4>> Down at the Roundhouse

automatically be asked to be included in all the groups. If you are interested in joining in, step up and introduce yourself. If we, on the other hand, see someone we don't know, who seems interested in what's going on, make a point to bring that person into the group.

### Synopsis

The average NMRA member is getting older. The demographics are not in our favor. The younger generation has many more interests competing for its spare time and money, and many of them have not been exposed to trains, either in prototype or model form, as much as some of us older people. We can't afford what we have built with our current and projected membership. Costs and services have been cut, but we still haven't turned the corner.

### Hard Choices

Where's my magic wand? I know it's around here somewhere. Seriously, we will have hard choices to make and we must be painfully honest. These problems did not appear overnight, but are the result of many years of growth and efforts to improve the NMRA. With a declining membership, we must now quickly deal with these problems. We are still in a position of relative strength, but that strength is eroding. We will have to analyze all our options including, (are you ready for this?) our current dues and whether we can afford to maintain our headquarters and library as we know it. That was not easy to say, but they are options. Certainly they are not our only options, but from my perspective, they are the crux of our problems.

I believe we can work through our problems and continue to enjoy a strong and active organization. I'm counting on it -- I just completed my payments for NMRA Life Membership.

## News from the Outback

NMRA's Kalmbach Library announces the reprint edition of the **1953 Official Railway Equipment Register (ORER)**, with an introduction by freight car historian Tony Thompson. It contains a "selection" of photos of prominent cars of the era. Available now only in paper binding, it will cost members \$44.95. Send your order to NMRA, Region ORER, 4121 Cromwell Road, Chattanooga, TN 37421.

The **Kingston (New York) Model**

**Railroad Club** will hold its annual open houses on the weekends of November 2/3, 9/10, 16/17, 23/24, and 30/December 1, from 1-6 PM. The Club is located at the end of Susan Street, off Pine Grove Avenue. Admission is \$3 for adults, \$1 for children under 12. More info from J&J Hobbies, 37 North Front Street, Kingston, NY 12401 (914-338-7174) or from PR guy, Tom Scrivani, 206 Shady Drive/Station Road, Hurley, NY 12443 (914-331-4218).

The **NER/NMRA HUB Division's** annual **fall show** will be on Sunday 17 October 1996 at the Marlborough High School Field House, Route 85, Bolton Street, Marlborough, Massachusetts from 10 AM to 4 PM. Donation: \$4 for adults, \$3 for seniors, and \$1 for children 6-12. The site is handicapped accessible. Contact Bill Goldthwait, 30 Baker Street, Lexington, MA 02173 (617-862-8078).

The **NER/NMRA Nutmeg Division's Model Railroad Show** is scheduled for Sunday, 20 October 1996, from 10 AM to 3 PM. The location is the Best Western Colonial Inn, exit 45 off I-91. Donation: \$3 for adults, \$2 for children and seniors, \$6 families. More info from Joe Sokol, 88 West Street, Apt 3R, Vernon, CT 06066 (860-872-2240).

The **Sugarbush Vermont Express** has started its second summer season. Operating over Vermont Railway tracks from Burlington to Middlebury, it runs Wednesday through Sunday through Labor Day and weekends until mid-September (3 trips per day). Info from Vermont Railway Excursions, PO Box 243, Middlebury, VT 05753 (800-707-3530). There are plans for year-round operation.





# RAMADA INN

Room Registration for NMRA's Northeast Region  
 50th Anniversary Convention, 25-27 October  
*Return as soon as possible to the RAMADA INN  
 Route 28, Kingston, NY 12401 or call 914-339-3900*

**DATE:** \_\_\_\_\_

Arrival Date & Time \_\_\_\_\_ Departure Date \_\_\_\_\_

Number of persons in party \_\_\_\_\_ Number of Rooms needed \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Beds per room \_\_\_\_\_ [ ] Smoking [ ] Non-smoking

Reservation made by: NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY, STATE, ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

**Special Convention Rate: \$50 per night, + 7.75% tax, for up to four people per room. CHECK ENCLOSED FOR \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Charge my credit card (circle one): AMEX MASTERCARD VISA**

Credit Card Number \_\_\_\_\_ Expires \_\_\_\_\_

## NER/NMRA Convention Activities Registration for 50th Anniversary meeting, Kingston, New York, 25-27 October 1996. *Return ASAP to: Pat & Charlie Bettinger, NER Convention Registrations, 29 Foster Drive, Vernon, CT 06066.*

Number	Price ea.	Total	For
_____	@ \$13=	\$ _____	Convention Registration
_____	@ \$8=	\$ _____	Saturday Breakfast
_____	@ \$9=	\$ _____	Saturday Lunch
_____	@ \$8=	\$ _____	Sunday Breakfast
_____	@ \$25=	\$ _____	Banquet

Make checks  
 Payable to:  
 NER  
 Conventions

Specify number of [ ] Prime Rib au jus [ ] Chicken Francese

Fan Trips	Price ea.	Total	For
_____	@ \$15=	\$ _____	Catskill Mountain RR/Trolley Museum
_____	@ \$15=	\$ _____	Delaware & Ulster
_____	@ \$8=	\$ _____	Convention souvenir Hats
<b>Total Enclosed</b>		<b>\$ _____</b>	<b>DATE: _____</b>

List others in  
 party below on  
 form margin

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

# RAMADA INN

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 50th Anniversary Convention, 25-27 October  
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 Route 28, Kingston, NY 12401 or call 914-339-3900*

**DATE:** \_\_\_\_\_

Arrival Date & Time \_\_\_\_\_ Departure Date \_\_\_\_\_

Number of persons in party \_\_\_\_\_ Number of Rooms needed \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Beds per room \_\_\_\_\_ [ ] Smoking [ ] Non-smoking

Reservation made by: NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY, STATE, ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

**Special Convention Rate: \$50 per night, + 7.75% tax, for up to four people per room. CHECK ENCLOSED FOR \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Charge my credit card (circle one): AMEX MASTERCARD VISA**

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**Make checks  
 Payable to:  
 NER  
 Conventions**

Specify number of [ ] Prime Rib au jus [ ] Chicken Francese

**Fan Trips**

\_\_\_\_\_ @ \$15= \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Catskill Mountain RR/Trolley Museum

\_\_\_\_\_ @ \$15= \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Delaware & Ulster

\_\_\_\_\_ @ \$8= \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Convention souvenir Hats

**Total Enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_**

**List others in  
 party below on  
 form margin**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

# NER 50th Anniversary Fall Convention

Kingston, New York, 25-27  
October 1996

*This is a summary of previously published and new information you need to know to avoid missing what should be a most memorable meeting. Please refer also to The NER Coupler, issues no. 184, 185.*

**Where?** The Ramada Inn, located just off Exit 19 of the New York State Thruway (I-87). Kingston is 30 miles north of Newburgh (I-84) and 50 miles south of Albany (I-90). From the east, you can cross the Hudson on NY Route 199.

**Registration Deadlines** (see forms on opposite page): October 18th for the Convention and its activities; October 13th for accommodations at the Ramada (note the special \$50 rate). Also note that this goes directly to the motel.

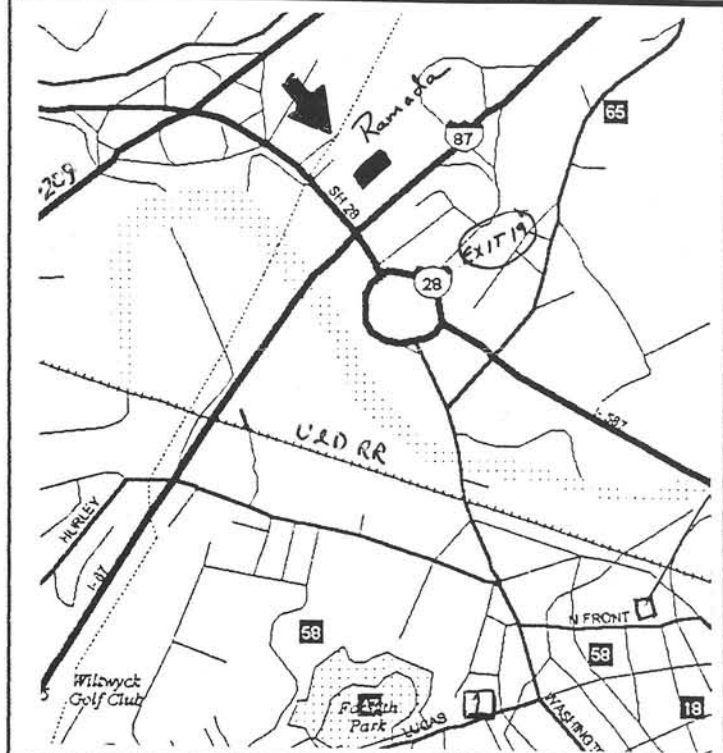
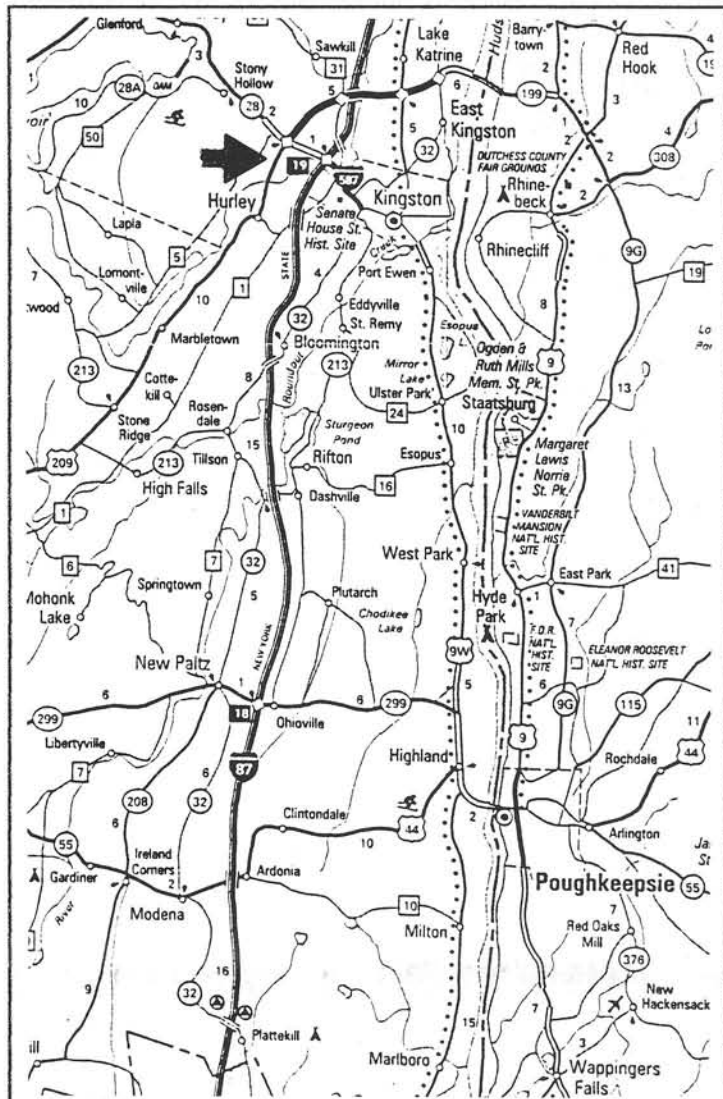
**Clinics.** Traditionally, Clinics aren't firm until the last minute, but some already announced ones are outstanding: Debbie Ames on model railroading and the Internet; Stan Ames on digital command control; Hopewell Jct. Model RR Club on module building; Hal Carstens on historic railroads of the region.

**Railfan Trips.** The Catskill Mountain RR and the Trolley Museum; and the Delaware & Ulster RR. Stay over a day or so and visit Hyde Park (the Roosevelt Museum and the Culinary Institute) or Old Rhinebeck Aerodrome (aircraft of World Wars I and II). All trips leave from the Ramada.

**Food.** The Ramada will provide buffets for Saturday breakfast and lunch, as well as Sunday breakfast. There are other eateries closeby. The Banquet will be held at the Hillside Manor nearby on route 32. Keynote speaker will be Hal Carstens, comparing model railroading "then and now". Distinguished guests expected are NMRA President Bob Charles and Betty Eighmey, wife of the late Henry Eighmey, a force behind the founding of NER and of the Kingston Model RR Club. There'll be the usual awards to contest winners and other achievers.

**Layout Tours** are scheduled for Friday night and Sunday afternoon. As noted in the last issue, three of the finest are club layouts located in historically important buildings, all in the Kingston area.

**Annual Meeting.** Members are invited to the Sunday AM Board Meeting. Have questions? You can get answers.





# In the Eye of the Beholder

## Basic Model Photography Using Outdoor Dioramas

by John E. Bortle

### Part 3: Film, Lighting & Composition

Those who have carefully perused the material in the two previous parts of this series should have acquired sufficient knowledge of equipment and props to be just about ready to go out and begin obtaining excellent diorama photographs of their own. It only remains to address a few final aspects. The material following provides recommendations on film choice, proper lighting, and details on how the photographs are actually executed, finishing off with some additional hints and ideas. Then you're on your own.

#### Film

Just as with cameras, there are champions for every type of film on the market. For this reason, I will make only a few rather general remarks, leaving it to those who actually attempt diorama photography to make their own final selection. Try your favorite, but give a fair trial to other films if your personal choice doesn't fit the desirable characteristics outlined below.

Since we are shooting at high f-ratios [i.e., small lens apertures], a film with moderate speed (ASA 200-400) will serve our needs best, keeping the exposure times down to a reasonable minimum. Avoid very slow films as exposures longer than a couple of seconds can be prone to a number of problems, not the least of which is color shift. Likewise, very high speed (ASA 1000+) films are not without their own pitfalls: poorer color rendition and somewhat grainy images that will not stand up well to considerable enlargement.

In the author's experience, transparency films (slides) give the most consistent results. Foremost, they display a much greater contrast latitude than do prints. Areas that may be lost in shadow on prints will often contain a wealth of subtle detail on similarly exposed transparencies. This means that correct exposure time becomes less critical and

you can count on obtaining a greater number of "acceptable" pictures from each roll of film.

No matter what your choice of emulsion it should be understood that one must always employ quality film and processing. Nothing is more frustrating than to have a first class shot ruined by either color shift or developer/water spots on the final image. Make your selection of a developing facility as if you were planning to hand over shots of a one-time fan trip photo runby.

#### Lighting

In scale model photography there is simply no substitute for real sunlight. If you check a year's worth of *Trackside Photos* in *Model Railroader*, it is very obvious which were shot in sunlight and which used artificial lighting. Those in the latter category may be very nice, but they are clearly photographs of models. In fact, sunlit photos can sometimes be mistaken for prototype scenes - the ultimate goals of our endeavors!

Shooting in natural light is hardly a new concept. Our hobby's all-time grand master snapshot artist was certainly William Clouser, whose traction photos appeared in *Model Railroader* during the late 1950s and early 60s (see especially the August 1959 issue). Like us, he usually took his photos outdoors on small, relatively simple dioramas. Many of his shots were absolutely indistinguishable from images of the prototype and this was not simply because of Clouser's outstanding modeling abilities. A good part of his success stemmed from the fact that the shots were taken under exactly the same lighting conditions their prototypes would have been: bright sunlight.

Admittedly, direct sunlight will produce rather harsh, dark shadows. One might think that this could be counteracted by shooting on an overcast day, but in truth the resulting photos tend to lack the desired "snap" because of their reduced contrast. The best conditions for diorama photography are partly cloudy skies or full sun, while the most suitable time of day is between the hours of 10 AM and 3 PM. Avoid shooting very early or

Continued on p. 9 >>

## p. 8>> In the Eye of the Beholder

late in the day unless you are trying for some special effect. Shots made at such times will require decidedly longer exposures and there can also be a color shift in the images toward the red.

### Set-up

In preparing for a shoot, place your diorama on a level, stable and elevated base, like a card or picnic table, located in full sunlight. The diorama needs to be at least 30 inches above the ground if you want to work comfortably.

Whenever possible, select a location where nothing in the real-world back background that might show in the picture is closer than 50 to 100 yards from the camera lens. This will avoid the accidental inclusion of unwanted elements like "giant" bushes, buildings, or telephone poles in the final picture.



**Fig. 1.** *This photo-diorama is arranged so as to include several real trees about 40 yards from the camera as background elements. They will add considerable realism to the final picture.*

It is desirable to be able to move the camera about somewhat when composing your shots, so exercise care in placing the tripod's legs. One should arrange the camera tripod in a manner that will avoid becoming entangled with the legs of the table holding the diorama. At the same time, make absolutely sure that you can reach the camera's viewfinder to examine the scene without becoming a human pretzel. An hour spent craning one's neck to look through an improperly situated camera is

enough to discourage any would-be photographer. And above all, check carefully that your own shadow, or that of the camera, does not intrude on the scene before making any exposures.



**Fig. 2.** *Watch out for shadows! Here, an otherwise well-exposed shot is ruined by shadows from the photographer's hand and cable release falling on the locomotive.*

The diorama and the models should be arranged and photographed so that they are somewhat at an angle to the sun (i.e., not flat-on) so that shadows are apparent. This will serve to accentuate detail such as rivets, grab irons, brickwork on buildings, and other raised or textured surfaces. A scene always looks more dramatic and realistic when these elements stand out clearly.

The most realistic photographs will usually result from placing the camera right up to the edge of the diorama. Likewise, a "railfan's perspective" shot can be obtained by having the center of the lens situated at or a little above what would be eye-level for a 1:87 scale person (about 3/4 to 1 inch above "ground level"). Although such positioning will cause the immediate foreground to appear a bit soft, the overall result will usually be more pleasing than a "helicopter" shot taken from high above the diorama. Don't be concerned if the bottom of the camera lens is obscured by the edges of the diorama. At f 22 or f 45, only the very center of the lens is rendering the scene.

### Tips and Tricks

You will have a better chance of success by going to the camera with a firm idea of how

Continued on p. 10>>



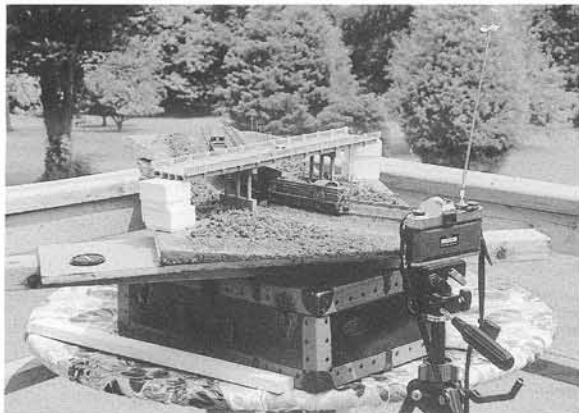
## p. 8>> In the Eye of the Beholder

late in the day unless you are trying for some special effect. Shots made at such times will require decidedly longer exposures and there can also be a color shift in the images toward the red.

### Set-up

In preparing for a shoot, place your diorama on a level, stable and elevated base, like a card or picnic table, located in full sunlight. The diorama needs to be at least 30 inches above the ground if you want to work comfortably.

Whenever possible, select a location where nothing in the real-world back background that might show in the picture is closer than 50 to 100 yards from the camera lens. This will avoid the accidental inclusion of unwanted elements like "giant" bushes, buildings, or telephone poles in the final picture.



**Fig. 1.** *This photo-diorama is arranged so as to include several real trees about 40 yards from the camera as background elements. They will add considerable realism to the final picture.*

It is desirable to be able to move the camera about somewhat when composing your shots, so exercise care in placing the tripod's legs. One should arrange the camera tripod in a manner that will avoid becoming entangled with the legs of the table holding the diorama. At the same time, make absolutely sure that you can reach the camera's viewfinder to examine the scene without becoming a human pretzel. An hour spent craning one's neck to look through an improperly situated camera is

enough to discourage any would-be photographer. And above all, check carefully that your own shadow, or that of the camera, does not intrude on the scene before making any exposures.



**Fig. 2.** *Watch out for shadows! Here, an otherwise well-exposed shot is ruined by shadows from the photographer's hand and cable release falling on the locomotive.*

The diorama and the models should be arranged and photographed so that they are somewhat at an angle to the sun (i.e., not flat-on) so that shadows are apparent. This will serve to accentuate detail such as rivets, grab irons, brickwork on buildings, and other raised or textured surfaces. A scene always looks more dramatic and realistic when these elements stand out clearly.

The most realistic photographs will usually result from placing the camera right up to the edge of the diorama. Likewise, a "railfan's perspective" shot can be obtained by having the center of the lens situated at or a little above what would be eye-level for a 1:87 scale person (about 3/4 to 1 inch above "ground level"). Although such positioning will cause the immediate foreground to appear a bit soft, the overall result will usually be more pleasing than a "helicopter" shot taken from high above the diorama. Don't be concerned if the bottom of the camera lens is obscured by the edges of the diorama. At f 22 or f 45, only the very center of the lens is rendering the scene.

### Tips and Tricks

You will have a better chance of success by going to the camera with a firm idea of how

Continued on p. 10>>



## p. 9>> In the Eye of the Beholder

you want the final scene to appear. It's not a bad idea to mock up the scene indoors a day or two before the shoot to see how things go together. Equally important is never to hurry through the shoot. Take the time to move several of the scenic elements around and carefully evaluate how each variation looks through the camera's viewfinder.

Good pictures are no accident. A really smart photographer will purchase a roll of cheap 12-exposure color print film and shoot the diorama scene several different ways. The film can then be taken to a local one-hour film processing center and the results quickly checked. Select the best looking of the scenes from the prints to act as a guide and return to the diorama. Now is the time for you to add those last little embellishments to the scene and take the final bracketed exposures on a roll of high quality film. Always take more exposures than you think are necessary. In the long run, it pays off by virtually guaranteeing at least one "perfect" shot.

Be aware that it is rarely advantageous to shoot your subject precisely broadside. If you'll recall, most prototype locomotive photos are done as 3/4 shots. This should generally be true when photographing your models as well. A broadside or flat-on shot suggests lack of action - nice for "builder's photos", but usually rather dull in most other situations. On the other hand, arranging the locomotive or train so that it is directed diagonally toward the camera automatically imparts a feeling of motion to the picture (See figures 3a and 3 b).

If you are using a wide-angle lens, be sure to have your camera pointing almost level relative to the surface of the diorama, not tilting strongly up or down.. An "ant's-eye view" of a scene can, at first glance, appear quite impressive but may pose some problems. Camera angle, in combination with inherent wide-angle lens distortion, can cause normally vertical lines to appear tilted slightly outward, giving the scene a rather bizarre overall feeling.

When employing a 2x Teleconverter,



*Fig 3a. A "side-on" shot will produce a static scene. Is the train moving or at rest? Who can say?*



*Fig. 3b. The same scene done as a 3/4 shot. The impression now is that the locomotive is rushing headlong toward the camera.*

and thus working at an effective f 45 aperture, all manner of trickery is possible in composing your shots. Just as with photographs made using pinhole "lenses", it should be possible to realistically incorporate actual trees and, sometimes even structures, into the background of your pictures. The most impressive effect of this sort is to include the sky with some real clouds - always a "grabber" at photo contests! (See author's photo on page 86-87 of the May 1996 issue of MR.)

## *Messages from Tower A*

If you have been following my column lately, you are aware that I'm working on a freelance scene that is to contain a concentration of New England mills. It is

Continued on p. 11>>

## p.10>> Messages from Tower A

freelance for several reasons, the most important of which is the lack of any such structures on my prototype. The Addison branch of the Rutland Railroad was strictly agricultural in theme. I had a couple of difficult periods wrestling with how much I wanted to duplicate the prototype, and here is the point of this piece.

I found a totally freelance layout to be lacking realism, so long after catching the Rutland bug, I started converting about a third of my layout to be very conforming to prototype. The effort went well at first. Track and topography were reasonably easy to build conforming. As I began to tackle the structures, I realized that a lot of research would be necessary. Well, stations and line side structures were not too difficult, as these were generally covered by the railfan photographers. Dwellings and industries were more difficult to research. Often, the industries were photographed only from the railroad side. So here I am using some structures that are in character, but not conforming to prototype. This will have to make do for the immediate future until the research yields enough information to build correct prototype replacements.

Now here is when some intelligence needs application. If, for example, you are going to substitute one of the C. C. Crow dwellings, as I did, you need to do it with some feeling for the prototype. I suggest finding a picture or two of a house of similar design, then following its details and the details of the surrounding scene as closely as possible. Of course, if you are modeling 1943, don't use a 1963 photo. If you are using an industry that is not prototypical, it should be of a traffic source logical to the scene, of architecture similar to that of other buildings in the area, and detailed in a manner appropriate to the era and similar industrial scenes. Try and consider the process of the industry too. You want the details to tell a story.

An example of logical detailing can be found in coal yards. There should be a storage structure, ranging from a shed to a silo or bunker, chutes or conveyors for

loading trucks or wagons, a small office, a scale and some trimming bins. Now the scale was seldom under the chutes. It would be nice, since you could get a precise-sized load by filling the truck to the specified amount monitored live on the scale. However, it is not practical.



There is a lot of spillage in loading a truck, and it is little bother to shovel it off the ground, but a lot of bother to shovel it out of the bottom of the scale pit. The office and scale were often adjacent to each other, since most of the paperwork was directly related to the weight shipped. The trimming bins are generally next to the scale to allow a small amount of coal to be shoveled into or out of a truck on the scale to make the desired weight. These were also used to supply those customers who came with a small truck or canvas buckets, and loaded their own coal. Several size bins would be present for each grade of coal. If you have your details arrayed in an illogical manner, the scene will be less believable. Of course, a coal yard really shouts its method of operation, while a creamery might only whisper it.

There are details here too, though. Mostly milk in cans was received in the era I model. You need small doors and platforms on the street side, while you need pipes and hoses on the railroad side. There would be a washroom for cans on the street side. There, railroad cars are washed at the receiver, so no wash equipment to speak of would be on the railroad siding. Creameries often had double-ended sidings to facilitate rapid dropping or picking up of cars in either direction, though in the can era, many creameries were some distance from rail, with a long runway down to the side of the main line.

So the point is, even if you are building a scene freelance, you can follow prototype on details, much to the benefit of scene quality. Down the road apiece, if your research turns up a photo of the actual industry, don't be afraid to change the scene to match. It will.

If you find your prototype efforts a

Continued on p. 12>>



Ronald J. Bergeron  
Office Manager, NER  
11 Alpine Drive  
Sanford, ME 04073-2446



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TO: [redacted] meet  
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### p. 11>> Messages from Tower A

bit constricting, as I have, then add a free-lance branch line and put in every neat and interesting scene you always wanted. In my mill district, I'm using available kits with a bit of scratch building. I'm detailing from my many photos of similar prototype scenes. If I can do it well, I will have a scene so logical and so similar to reality, that it will seem just as believable as the true to prototype scenes on the remainder of the railroad.

Best of all, my operating group enjoys a diet of both industry and agriculture, city scenes and country scenes, winding streams and mill town races, steep grades and mild wooden trestles and steel bridges. I try to keep related scenes next to each other, while using view blocks for visual punctuation. Most important, I detail from photos of the prototype details, not imagination. You can't know enough to guess well every time, and neither can I. Incidentally, I have 2000 photos of industrial and other railroad scenes. They are a big help, but they are not as good as 250 or so books. Most people think that's overkill. I think it's too few. Just keep a book or two in the reading room next to the T. P., and a magnifying glass. I get some of my best ideas there. You might too.

**BRIAN WHITON**



"GENERATIONS". A Photo-diorama depicting different generations of one family looking over motive power of the Central Railroad of New Jersey about 1950. Grandfather and grandson talk with the engineer of the aging camelback, Father and older son gravitate to the shiny new Baldwin "double ender". **Photo by John E. Bortle, First Place Color Print-Model category at NMRA National Convention, Long Beach California, 1996.**