

THE COUPLER

NMRA NORTHEASTERN REGION



No. 251 • OCT - DEC, 2013

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www.nernmra.org

THE COUPLER

The official publication of
The Northeastern Region of
the National Model Railroad
Association

Issue No. 251

EDITOR

JOHN DOEHRING
P.O. Box 87
Pepperell, MA 01463
978-877-9148
john@jdoehring.com

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
LAYOUT EDITOR
JEFF PASTON
Syracuse, NY

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The editorial policy of *The Coupler*, the official publication of the Northeastern Region, shall be to contribute, wherever and whenever possible, to the promotion, growth, and understanding of the hobby of model railroading. *The Coupler* is published four times a year by and for the members of the Northeastern Region of the National Model Railroad Association. Subscription rate is \$7.00 per year. Any items related to the activities of the Northeastern Region and its member divisions are gladly accepted. Please address all correspondence, news, photos, and drawings to the Editor. Any submissions sent by mail will be gladly returned if the sender provides a self-addressed stamped envelope.



NORTHEASTERN REGION NMRA

NER OFFICERS AND STAFF

PRESIDENT
GEORGE "SCOOTER" YOUST
104 Bent Tree Lane
Baldwinsville, NY 13027
315-303-0100
gyoust@me.com

TREASURER
LARRY CANNON, MMR
516 Pond Road
Lewiston, ME 04240
207-786-3929
larrycannon@roadrunner.com

MODEL CONTEST CHAIR
BOB HAMM, MMR
460 Grand Avenue
Saratoga Springs, NY 12866
518-587-0743
rhamm1@nycap.rr.com

HISTORIAN
JOSEPH LECAROS
PO Box 7150
Newburgh, NY 12550
914-564-4626
jchoochoo@aol.com

VICE PRESIDENT
HENRY PIERCE
75 Shady Hill Drive
West Warwick, RI 02893
401-752-9851
jhp341@cox.net

OFFICE MANAGER
MARK HARLOW
692 N Main St
Woonsocket RI 02895-1166
508-528-8587
nerofficemanager@verizon.net

PHOTO CONTEST CHAIR
WILLIAM BARRY
35 Blaiswood Avenue
Marlborough, MA 01752-3910
508-251-1252
ner.photocontest@gmail.com

OP-SIG COORDINATOR
AL ONETO
327 Springer Road
Fairfield, CT 06430
203-255-1331
aloneto@optonline.net

SECRETARY
CHARLES "CHIP" STEVENS
1 Fletcher Reach
Plymouth, MA 02360-8240
508 209 0574
civettelover@yahoo.com

ACHIEVEMENT PROGRAM CHAIR
BILL BROWN, MMR
6002 Singletree Lane
Jamesville, NY 13078
315-454-2516
larcproducts@yahoo.com

CONVENTION CHAIR
KENNETH MAY
71 Buff Cap Road
Tolland, CT 06084
860-872-3441
kenneth.may@comcast.net

SCOUT COORDINATOR
WARREN RICCITELLI
39 Jacksonia Drive
North Providence, RI 02911
401-232-0992
warren.riccitelli@cox.net

WEBMASTER
GEORGE "SCOOTER" YOUST
gyoust@me.com

NER REGIONAL DIRECTORS

CANADA
STEVE MCMULLIN
12 Bayview Drive
Saint John, NB E2M 4E1
506-672-6960
mcmulls@nb.sympatico.ca

LONG ISLAND & NYC
KEVIN KATTA
725 Burmuda Road
West Babylon, NY 11704
631-539-8671
boxcarny@yahoo.com

NEW JERSEY
ROGER OLIVER
61 Franklin Road
Denville, NJ 07834-1558
973-625-3414
oliverr2@verizon.net

NORTHERN NEW ENGLAND
RICH BRETON
9 Riverside Drive
Rochester, NH 03867
603-332-8257
rebreton1@gmail.com

CONNECTICUT & RHODE ISLAND
JUSTIN MAGUIRE JR.
233 Naragansett Avenue
Barrington, RI 02806
401-246-0381
penneywhistle@fullchannel.net

MASSACHUSETTS
WILLIAM BARRY
35 Blaiswood Avenue
Marlborough, MA 01752-3910
508-251-1252
wbarry@dmberg.com

NEW YORK STATE
BILL BROWN, MMR
6002 Singletree Lane
Jamesville, NY 13078
315-454-2516
larcproducts@yahoo.com

NMRA EASTERN DIRECTOR
JOE GELMINI
170 Camelot Drive
Fayetteville, GA 30214
770-460-8873
papagel@comcast.net

NER DIVISION SUPERINTENDENTS

SUNRISE TRAIL DIVISION
PRESIDENT
ED NEALE
42 Indian Head Dr.
Sayville, NY 11782
631-589-3940
vermontrailroad@optonline.net

NUTMEG DIVISION
SUPERINTENDENT
JAMES M. MAYO
21 Pine Ridge Dr
Madison CT 06443-2005
203-245-7480
jmayo_railfan@yahoo.com

SEACOAST DIVISION
PRESIDENT
PETER MCKENNEY
36 Bruce Hill Road
Cumberland, ME 04021-3452
207-776-2033
mckenp@maine.rr.com

GREEN MOUNTAIN DIVISION
SUPERINTENDENT
STEPHEN LOWE
150 Green St.
Vergennes VT 05491
802-877-3783
stllowe@gmail.com

HUB DIVISION
PRESIDENT
MANNY ESCOBAR
204 Ridgewood Dr.
Norwood, MA 02062
781-762-9858
president@hubdiv.org

LITTLE RHODY DIVISION
SUPERINTENDENT
BRIAN OSBERG
1350 Main St.
Coventry, RI 02816
401-822-0956
bkosberg@verizon.net

HUDSON VALLEY DIVISION
PRESIDENT
BOB ROBBINS
11 Stella Ct.
Stony Point, NY 10980
845-942-1470
marrob17@optonline.net
CENTRAL NEW YORK DIVISION
SUPERINTENDENT
BERNARD MESSENGER
9388 Paris Hill Road
Sauquoit, New York 13456
315-737-7437
bernardmessenger@gmail.com

METRO NORTH DIVISION
SUPERINTENDENT
JEFF ZELENY
58 Stirrup Hill Rd
Fairfield, CT 06824
203-255-4149
Mt813@aol.com

GARDEN STATE DIVISION
PRESIDENT
CIRO COMPAGNO
20 Eagle Road
Staten Island, NY 10314
917-544-6745
richmondharbor@verizon.net

HUDSON-BERKSHIRE DIVISION
YARDMASTER
PAUL HOFFMAN
128 Woodfield Blvd
Mechanicville, NY 12118
518-899-5707
phpcinc@gmail.com

INACTIVE DIVISIONS
PIONEER DIVISION
MARITIMES DIVISION
DIVISION ALOUETTE

Next submission
deadline is November 4.
Contact Editor
John Doehring
at [<john@jdoehring.com>](mailto:john@jdoehring.com)

COVER PHOTO

This is not just any Ntrak module fascinating kids at the Railroad Hobby Show in West Springfield, MA. There's plenty of animation the kids can activate, including a ski lift and Faller Road System vehicles. Read all about it in "Press Button for Action" on page 5. (Photo from Ken Harstine)

FROM THE EDITOR

Stretching Out for Something New

By JOHN DOEHRING
Coupler Editor

Model railroading is a hobby unique in its diversity, in the scope of its parts, and in the many areas of potential interest. And it's in the nature of railroad hobbyists to explore – stretching, growing, doing new things for the first time. Some of these adventures are big stretches, like building a first layout, diving into the AP program, or changing scales or prototypes modeled.

But it's also in our nature as hobbyists to settle in, to become comfortable, and even to get stuck in a rut. We're creatures of routine, and we enjoy doing those things we're good at. So we collect too many similar freight cars, or build structures just like the previous ones, or operate our layout as we have for years.

Stretching – even small changes – can be good, leading to new ideas, new directions, and new skills. Here are a few examples, three small things I did this year that were for me a little different. (Perhaps you've done all of these; or maybe none really are your cup of tea. I offer them as examples, to help get your own idea machine working).

1) Attend a different (type of) event.

Like many of you, I attend a number of shows during the year, and participate in modular layouts at some of these. But my schedule is routine, the same shows (more or less) each year. This summer I visited a new one – the National O-Scale Convention (I'm an N-Scaler). The event was close by in Worcester, MA, and it certainly beat working on a Friday – so that's really why I went. Still, I attended three clinics that were fantastic: trolleys (Charlie Pitts), billboard reefers (Bob Lavezzi), and WWII military transports (Neil Gage). The last was particularly relevant, as I am currently building my own N-Scale WWII military train. Excellent!

2) Attend a meeting in a different area. I'm a proud member of the HUB Division, and I've also attended several events with the Seacoast group (even closer to home). But this

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Scooter's Junction

By GEORGE "SCOOTER" YOST, NER President



I've just returned from a very productive summer NER Board of Directors (BOD) meeting where several important items were addressed by the BOD. I had invited all of the NER Division Presidents and Superintendents to attend, and I am glad to report that several of them attended the meeting.

The first item concerns our treasurer, Larry Canon. After many years of great service as the NER treasurer, Larry has decided to retire from the position effective October 20th, the last day of the convention in Laconia. With Larry's help and guidance I have found a great replacement in Peter McKenney from the Seacoast Division. I officially appointed Peter today to take over on October 20th, and the BOD confirmed his appointment.

While I am on the topic of retirements, I would also like to announce that the Laconia convention will be Bob Hamm's last as the NER Model Contest Chairman. Bob has served this position above and beyond what was required, and he will be hard to replace (so hard in fact that I have not yet found a replacement). If you (or any member you know) might be interested in becoming our next model contest chairman, please contact me (my information is listed on the "Brass Hats" page here and on the NER website). I really want to publicly thank both Larry and Bob for all that they have done for the NER through all these years.

Thanks to the groundwork laid by NER Past President Ken May and the hard work of Larry Canon, the NER is today on very stable financial ground, so much so that the BOD has voted to begin sharing that financial stability and growth with the divisions.

Just as a bit of background information for everyone, the National office sends \$2 a year to the Region for every full member in the Region. For quite some time now the NER has passed a little over 50% of this money on to the divisions (sending \$1 to the divisions for each member in that Division). [One difference between the NER and National is that the Region has included Railpass members and all Life members in its count of members in a Division, while National did not]. The other \$1 has been used to support NER activities and to improve the standing of the Region's finances.

When I took over as NER President the Region BOD set a financial goal of \$50,000, with the idea of sharing 50% of monies earned by the Region over the \$50,000 with the active divisions. I am happy to report that we have now reached that goal, and the NER Board has approved sharing approximately \$1,000 with the divisions. (This will be in addition to the \$1 from National that the BOD has already been passing on annually). At the annual meeting this October (during the Laconia convention) the BOD will vote to approve the actual disbursement to the divisions, based on the latest membership totals from National. So we are looking at disbursing approximately \$1.50 per member to the active divisions, and (if the market continues to play in our favor) hoping the disbursement for next year will reach \$2. In that case we will be passing to the active divisions all funds sent to the Region from National. And of course we hope that funds continue to grow, so that in the coming years we may disburse more than the \$2 from National.

Also at the summer BOD meeting we had an open discussion with the Division Presidents and Superintendents who were in attendance. The topic of that discussion was the various possibilities of changes to the NER BOD to improve representation of the divisions. We discussed several ideas, including replacing the Region Directors with division leaders as voting members of the NER BOD, redistributing the area covered by each director, having directors at-large in

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SUNRISE TRAIL DIVISION

<http://www.sunrisetraildiv.org>

April 25-27, 2014 (Friday-Sunday) — *Island Ops 2014*. Join the prototype operations fun on some great local layouts on Long Island under the sponsorship of the Sunrise Trail Division, NMRA, and the West Island Model Railroad Club. Four operation sessions. Layouts range from a 2 x 10 representing a New York City block and floatbridge, to a 5,600sf club layout representing a line from the New Jersey waterfront to central Pennsylvania. Visit www.islandops.org for more details.

SEACOAST DIVISION

<http://www.seacoastnmra.org>

October 11, November 8, and December 13 (Fridays), 7-9 PM — *Derry Model Railroad Fun Night*, Marion Gerrish Community Center, Derry, NH.

November 3 (Sunday) 11:30 AM — Special Meeting of the Division Board of Directors, 36 Bruce Hill Road, Cumberland, ME.

January 11, 2014 (Saturday), 10-2 — *Quarterly Meeting*, with clinic presentations, annual meeting of members to elect Directors, BOD meeting. First Congregational Church, 301 Cottage Road, S. Portland, ME.

HUDSON VALLEY DIVISION

<http://www.hudsonvalleydivision.org>

November 10 (Sunday), 10-3 — Hudson Valley Railroad Society's *42nd Annual Exposition* at the Mid-Hudson Civic Center in Poughkeepsie. For information, contact Denny Evaul at (845) 297-0901

HUDSON BERKSHIRE DIVISION

<http://www.hudson-berkshire.org>

December 1 (Sunday), 10-4 — *Great train Extravaganza* at Empire State Convention Center, Albany.

HUB DIVISION

<http://www.hubdiv.org>

October 25 (Friday): *HUB Railfun Meeting*, 8 PM, Cambridge School of Weston, Weston, MA.

November 15 (Friday): *HUB Railfun Meeting*, 8 PM, Cambridge School of Weston, Weston, MA.

December 7-8 (Saturday-Sunday) — The HUB sponsored *New England Model Train Expo*, Marlborough, MA.

GARDEN STATE DIVISION

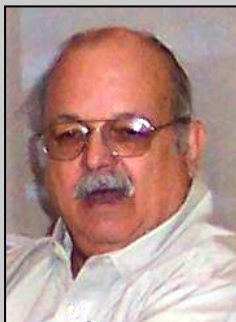
<http://www.nergsd.com>

October 5 (Saturday), 9:30-noon — Division Fall Meet: clinics in morning, bring and brag; layout tours in afternoon. Eric S. Smith Middle School, Ramsey, NJ.

CENTRAL NEW YORK DIVISION

<http://www.cnynmra.org>

October 27 (Sunday) — Layout visits and meeting: Roger Beiswenger and Bernie Messenger in New Hartford and Saquoit.



Joseph Sokol

It is with great sadness that I inform you that Joe Sokol of Vernon, CT, has died. Joe suffered a stroke in June, and was hospitalized thereafter. He passed on Monday, July 1. He was 74.

Joe's interest in trains was long standing. I remember meeting him in the 1970s as part of the 'Tuesday evening' group in the Vernon, CT, area. He was a Life Member of the National Model Railroad Association and the NMRA Northeastern Region. He belonged to the Nutmeg Division.

In the 1980s he started a business called Sokol's Structures, selling model railroad structure kits in HO and N scale. He became a fixture at train shows in Connecticut, Massachusetts and eastern New York. In the last 15 years, he organized the train shows for the Connecticut Eastern Railway Museum in Willimantic, CT.

Kenneth May
Former NER President



NMRA Canada offers Canadian member benefits

By FRED HEADON, MMR
NMRA Canadian District Director

As the Canadian District director, I am taking this opportunity to explain some features of NMRA Canada. This entity has been established for NMRA members who reside in Canada. It is an educational, non-profit association (paralleling its parent) that focuses on promoting and teaching the art and craft of model railroading. Our membership which varies between 900 and 1100 ranks Canada as the second largest national membership within the global extent of the NMRA.

Our agreement with the NMRA Board of Directors allows us to set a dues structure based on Canadian residence and circumstances while maintaining all the rights and privileges of NMRA membership. Volunteer administration allows a lower dues rate for Canadian members and allows payment in Canadian dollars to overcome exchange rate issues. A similar agreement allows Canadian members to subscribe to the NMRA magazine. Subscriptions to a member's Regional publication (four Regions span the Canada - U.S.A. border) can also be paid through the offices of NMRA Canada. Currently our Board of Directors includes representation from New Brunswick, Ontario and Manitoba. We intend to expand our representation to better reflect our membership.

Within Regions of NMRA Canada are a number of Divisions, most of which have a common pair of problems — considerable distance between centres and small member numbers. One service to our members, the NMRA Clinic DVD's (but not the Prototype or Modeling ones) are available through a Canadian address facilitating access. The bi-lingual NMRA Canada Web site offers links to sites focused on Canadian railway history and to Canadian-focused SIGs including the Canadian National Historical Association, Canadian Pacific Historical Association, Pacific Great Eastern/BC Rail SIG, Ontario Northland Historical & Technical Society, the Toronto, Hamilton & Buffalo SIG and the VIA Rail SIG. Links are included to some member's model railways and to clubs within each of our four Regions to enhance the fellowship that is so much a part of NMRA activities. ☒



by SANDY NICHOLS WARD
Reprinted from Ntrak Newsletter, March/April 2007

A young boy approaches the model train layout with bright eyes and outstretched hands. "Don't touch!" snaps a stern parental voice nearby. The boy lowers his hands and his gaze. There on the front of the case is a little button labeled 'PRESS BUTTON FOR ACTION.' The boy looks again at the scene in front of him. It's a snow-covered mountain area with railroad tracks running across the foreground and a ski lodge and skiers on the far right. Blue gondolas moving on a wire catch his eye. "Wow Dad, look at those things go!" The gondolas go back and forth across the railroad tracks, from the ski lodge to a parking lot of cars and buses in the distance. Father and son watch for a while, then look up and down the line to see if any trains are coming, and begin to walk away.

At this point I intervene. I have been standing *inside* the ring of Ntrak modules, watching the public pass by. This 80-foot long track system consists of many separate modules contributed by Ntrak clubs and individuals for the Big Railroad Show in West Springfield, MA. I speak quietly to the boy, "Could you please press that button?" Looks of surprise (at my unexpected voice) and joy (at the invitation to touch the button) cross his face. He glances quickly at Dad and me. I smile broadly at them both, and the son pushes the button.

Sandy Nichols Ward spent most of the weekend at the 2007 Railroad Hobby Show in West Springfield, MA, interacting with the crowd and inviting kids to "press button for action." You'll note Ken's module (his first) won the Best in Show Award at the NTRAK Winterfest Celebration that year!

(Photo from Ken Harstine)

"Oh, wow! The bus moves!!" A white bus in the parking lot eases out on to the roadway, turns left, and drives down the hill, follows the curve around the mountain and disappears from view. "Where did it go?" asks the boy. "How did that move?" asks the dad. I comment that the bus has gone to get more people. The boy flashes me a look of joy and recognition (we're in this make believe together.)

"Cool! Neat! Wow!" His excitement draws others. They've missed seeing the bus, but are amazed by the moving gondolas and the lovely snow scene. The boy pushes the button again and a red bus starts to move. Soon the white bus reappears, driving up the road as the red bus heads downhill. The white one turns into the parking lot and stops by the gondola terminal.

Exclamations and questions burst from the crowd. I answer as best I can. I'm just a volunteer. I didn't build this module, and I don't work for the company that makes and sells the bus-

(Continued next page)



Builder Ken Harstine and his Ntrak module draw an enthusiastic crowd at the 2013 Railroad Hobby Show in West Springfield, MA. (Photo from Ken Harstine)

Press Button for Action

(Continued from previous page)

moving system. My partner Ken bought the Faller bus starter kit, and the gondola system, and designed an attractive layout that would show both off to advantage. He based his model on a California ski resort called Sugar Bowl, which was created in the 1930's by Walt Disney and others. The lift there is called the Magic Carpet Gondola. It carries customers across the Donner Pass rail line to the ski resort, which lacks parking space of its own. Ken recalls riding on that tramway and seeing an Amtrak train run below him. (Magic indeed for a boy in love with trains.)

At the Big Railroad Show, the real magic is in the eyes of the public, as they discover Ken's Sugar Bowl model and watch the things move. Ken missed most of this magic in 2007 because he was busy being a Floor Manager at the huge train show. On that Saturday I stood for seven hours behind his module and watched. I hadn't intended to play this role, nor did I prepare for it, but I became captivated by the public reactions, and the game of engaging them further. I especially liked encouraging little girls to explore. Some would stop and stare at the button, wondering whether or not to push it.

"What will it do?" they asked. "Push it and find out," was my answer. Each girl immediately seemed to gain confidence, stand a bit taller, smile at me, and then push the button while looking around the module to see what might change. The unexpected movement of the tiny toy bus in the parking lot always brought a strong reaction. "Wow! Cool!"

Watching these young faces light up with wonder, curiosity, and joy was a real thrill for me. I had not planned to return to the show that next day (Sunday) in 2007, but of course I did and was there for hours, drawing more people into the fantasy. Since then, I have continued to attend train shows with Ken each year, enjoying the fun of displaying his animated module.

Ken's module won First Place for the Best Module in Show at the Northeast Ntrak Winterfest in 2007. This is an honor based on the popular vote of show visitors. People really liked the movement and the ability to interact with his display. In 2008, Ken won the Richard Marko Commemorative Award for the Most Creative Animation Feature on a Module at the annual Northeast Ntrak Convention. ☒



ACHIEVEMENT PROGRAM ROUNDUP

By BILL BROWN MMR, AP Chair

This year's NER Convention, *Tracks to Lakeport* in Laconia, New Hampshire, promises to be a very exciting event. And the convention will also be a grand celebration for the Achievement Program. Each year at the annual convention, we take time to recognize all of our past achievers, and to appreciate all of our model contest entrants. In addition to all of the beautiful fall color (in one of the most beautiful parts of our great country), it will be awesome to visit with those who share a common love and devotion to our inspiring hobby.



Several events are scheduled that directly relate to the Achievement Program. Of course the Saturday night banquet allows us the opportunity to bring forward all of our members who have earned AP certificates in the last year. We will also have the honor of recognizing new Master Model Railroaders and bringing them into the fold. Many are aware that Andy Clermont will be recognized with this distinguished award, but it is likely that another MMR will be enshrined that night as well.

In addition, Vice President Henry Pierce has called a meeting of all division superintendents, presidents, AP chairs, and other division brass. Part of that meeting will include some information from yours truly about Achievement Program initiatives and guidelines. I encourage all of the supers (and especially AP chairs) to attend.

Finally as you probably know, one of the many gems of an NER convention is the modeling contest. Many of this year's Achievement Program honorees have benefited from merit awards earned during contests like these. So let's all work really hard to make it a very hectic weekend for Bob Hamm and his model contest crew!

And one more thing (though it doesn't have anything to do with the AP program), I want to encourage all of you to find, uncover, and dig out your best rail related photos — and bring them along to the

photo contest. Bill Barry has now taken over management of the NER photo contest, and he too deserves to be inundated with a deluge of entries! In many ways the contest rooms are the real culmination of what we do in the hobby. LET'S GET BUSY!

Achievement Program Honorees Planned for the 2013 NER Convention Banquet

George Youst
Kevin Surman
James Van Bokkelen
Mike Tylick
Fred Wintsch
Steve Perry
Dan Fretz
Steve Goldberg
Andy Clermont
Dennis DeAngelis
Bob Seckler
Bruce Robinson

Bob Robbins
Ken Nelson
Russell Norris
Ed Neale
John Feraca
Greg Abegg
Chuck Diljak

Finally, as the NER AP chair, I have the luxury of reviewing AP submissions detailing some really great layouts. In fact, each month I receive several mail packages

with detailed descriptions, diagrams, and photos of some really fantastic pikes located here in the NER.

I cannot tell you how much I enjoy reviewing them. For me, it is just like receiving several issues of a major hobby magazine each month. As an example, check out these photos from Tom Oxnard's AP Scenery submission I processed this year. As you can see Tom's layout is stunning. So to all of the rest of you working on the Achievement Program, please keep those great AP Certificate submissions coming. "My personal FREE and FANTASTIC hobby magazines!" ☒



Adding DCC: Teaching an Old Layout

by WILLIAM DeBUVITZ

Reading the model railroad press, you might think that everyone has already converted to DCC. But in my experience, this is far from the truth. Most of the modelers I know in my age group (60s and 70s) have one-person layouts, run just one locomotive at a time, and are sticking with regular DC. Also, many of these layouts have older, pre-DCC turnouts that can cause momentary short circuits – a minor problem with regular DC, but a serious problem with DCC. Yes, they may have purchased a unit with DCC and sound locomotive to enjoy, but they have also accumulated quite a few regular DC locomotives, and see no reason to fully convert to DCC.

I was in the same situation. I have a small HO layout I built in the early 1980s using the older *Shinohara* turnouts. The layout is about six-by-nine feet in size, and I run only one locomotive at a time. I bought a couple of DCC sound units and ran them on regular DC and really enjoyed their sound.

But recently, I converted to DCC – well, sort of! Today, I actually use both DC and DCC, and I have a switch to convert from one to the other. Surprisingly, I've had very few problems with DCC on my older layout. My experiences might be worth sharing.

The first question one might ask is, "Why install DCC if you run only one locomotive at a time?" And since DCC sound locomotives can run on regular DC as well, it's a good question! One reason is that you can access many of the sound features more easily with DCC. The main reason for me, however, had to do with *uncoupling*. I like hands-free uncoupling. So I installed KADEE magnets under my tracks. The problem is that I need to do sudden direction reversals at very low speeds to uncouple over the magnets and take advantage of the delayed action feature. It's not very prototypical, but it is necessary. Unfortunately, when you suddenly reverse a DCC-equipped locomotive running on regular DC, it doesn't reverse. Instead, its horn or whistle sounds.

Installing a DCC control system just for uncoupling might seem questionable, but I felt it was worth it. Moreover, I found a system that wasn't very expensive – the *Tech 6 Sound Controller 2.0* by Model Rectifier Corporation. The unit cost less than \$200, and it operates in both DCC and regular DC modes. MRC was smart to offer such a product. I would guess there are a lot

of model railroaders like me who only need a simple DCC system, and who want to continue to run their regular DC powered locomotives too. I was comfortable with my older RIX throttle, so I didn't use the Tech 6's DC mode. Instead, I installed a DPDT slide switch so I can easily switch between DC with my RIX throttle and DCC with the Tech 6.

But now the big question. "Can one install DCC on an older layout without major modifications to the wiring and the



Eric, grand nephew of the author's wife, takes a turn with some switching on the layout. At only five years old, Eric handled the MRC Tech 6 throttle quite well as he "moved around the trailers." (Photo by William DeBuvitz)

turnouts?" For me, the answer was a surprising yes! I did have to make some changes, but these were quite minor – my block system and route control worked fine with DCC.

My turnouts are the older *Shinoharas* with brass strips at the throw bars (to improve electrical contact between the points and the stock rails). I operate most of my turnouts manually with DPDT slide switches. These switches are mounted upside down under the layout, and are connected to *Eshelmann* turnout links by way of brass rods. The slide switches also direct the current to the sidings (route control). My new DCC system had no problems with this arrangement.

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Some New Tricks!

(Continued from previous page)

But I also have two crossovers on the mainline which are operated by *Tortoise* slow motion switch machines. These units have relay contacts to direct power to the points. Unfortunately, the brass strips under the points make electrical contact with the stock rails *before* the relay contacts reverse polarity, so there is a momentary short circuit when the turnouts are thrown. Again this is a minor issue with regular DC, but a much bigger problem with DCC. The DCC controller will shut off and the locomotive will completely ‘forget’ its settings. My solution to the problem was to simply disconnect the relay contacts on the switch machines, and to rely on the brass strips to make electrical contact. This worked fine for me, though one must be careful when ballasting the track (to make sure that glue doesn’t prevent the metal strips from making electrical contact with the stock rails). Another solution might be to cut off the brass strips and use the switch machine contacts. This could be done after the turnout is installed, assuming that it is easily accessible on the layout.

I experienced another electrical problem with momentary shorts between open points and stock rails. I could see the needle on my ammeter bounce for a moment when trains went through certain turnouts, but this didn’t seriously affect regular DC operation. These shorts typically occur when a metal wheel passes through the space between a stock rail and a point rail. Since the two point rails on the older turnouts are soldered together, they have the same polarity. The problem is that the point rail *not* in contact with the stock rail has the *opposite* electrical polarity. If the back of a wheel touches this point rail, there will be a momentary short circuit. Again, a minor problem with regular DC, but a more serious one in DCC. I only had this happen at one spot on my layout, and only with the wheels on the tender of a DCC-equipped Mikado locomotive. The wheels were in gauge, but they still occasionally shorted out at this one turnout. Solving this problem was very easy. I simply painted the back of the wheel with clear lacquer (I used clear nail polish). The wheels causing the problem are used for power pickup, but coating their backs doesn’t affect this since the brass strips used for the pickup make contact with the axles and not the wheels.

Now a word about the sound. My original exposure to model train sounds was with the chug-chug sound of *American Flyer* S-gauge trains. When I bought my first DCC sound locomotive, I had no problems with its sound because it was a diesel and I was familiar with the sounds of real diesels. But I have to admit, I

had some challenges with my first DCC sound *steam* units. I guess I was expecting a simple *chug* like those old *American Flyers*, but instead I heard more complicated sounds – including *clunks*. Then I realized that I hadn’t heard a *real* steam locomotive in years. After visiting a tourist line nearby and listening to some recordings of real steam power, I learned that my DCC sound locomotive *was indeed* making the correct sounds.

And what about dirty track? Dirty track with regular DC is a more serious problem (especially when trains are running slow) because (1) trains don’t have enough momentum to overcome the gap in the circuit caused by the dirt, and (2) the voltage is too low for the current to “jump” the gap caused by the dirt. I figured that since DCC operates at a fixed higher voltage at all speeds, DCC trains should run better at low speeds. I found that this was

I once read about a modeler who...ran his layout at house voltage.... This apparently took care of the dirty track problem, but there were some disadvantages. The death of his pet cat was one of them.

not the case. Dirty track seems to be just as much of a problem with DCC as DC. I guess that fixed voltage is just not high enough to jump the gap. (I once read about a modeler who back in the 1950s ran his O-scale layout at *house voltage*. He re-motored his locomotives to operate at 120 volts. This apparently took care of the dirty track problem, but there were some disadvantages. The death of his pet cat was one of them. I guess a much higher voltage for DCC might not be a good idea!)

Finally, what about maintenance? Regular DC units are easy to maintain and repair. There’s nothing much under the shell except a motor, some gears, and a lighting circuit. A DCC sound unit is far more complicated. (This reminds me of working at a gas station back in the early 1960s. Cars were far simpler. Very few had air conditioning and there were no pollution controls. When you raised the engine hood you saw everything up front and all of it was easy to get at. Raise the engine hood of a modern car and all you’ll see is some kind of cover – and you might not want to look underneath! In fact, you might not even *recognize* the usual parts of the engine. The same might be true for a DCC locomotive.) Fortunately, none of my DCC sound locomotives has given me any problems. Still, I hate to think what might happen if one of these units *did* have a problem. It might be a good idea for one of the model railroad magazines – or the NMRA – to do a survey of experiences to see which brands of DCC locomotives are the most reliable, and then find out how modelers deal with any repair problems.

I have to say my experience with DCC has been very good. In fact, I’ve found that you *can* teach an old layout – and an old modeler – some new tricks! ☒



My Journey to the MMR

Building the Gate Hill Railway

By Robert Robbins

You read about the Gate Hill Railway in the August *Railroad Model Craftsman*. Now, here's the story behind the story as Robert Robbins shares his road to NMRA Master Model Railroader.

I began building my current layout, the On30 Gate Hill Railway, in 2007. The railroad occupies a 17-by-25 foot train room above my shop, and is today about 99% complete. In fact, the layout is about to be sold. Then, I'm planning to begin building a new one – a HOn3 version of the Rio Grande Southern.

Around the time I began construction of the layout, I also began my quest to achieve the MMR. As anyone who's chosen to take the MMR journey knows, the path can be a long and challenging one. As I now approach the completion of that effort, I've been reflecting on my journey and experiences along the way. Some of what I've learned might help as you participate in the Achievement Program and pursue your own MMR.

When I first decided to work towards the MMR, I evaluated the list of 11 possible certificates. I tried to choose the seven that I felt most obtainable that best fit with my skills and background. Of course you must pick at least one from each of the four described categories, guaranteeing that you'll need to touch on almost all aspects of the model railroading hobby.

Let's start with the first category, *Railroad Equipment*. My first thought was to look at what I'd already done in *Motive Power*, since I'd previously kit-bashed several pieces of power equipment. Unfortunately, when I took two of these to the NER Convention in Syracuse last September, neither achieved a merit award. (Alas, this sort of setback is sometimes a part of learning and improving in our hobby!)

After returning home, I decided it was going to have to be the *Cars* certificate for me to qualify in this area. So I chose to model several D&RGW cars – partly because there is so much material in print about them – and partly because I love Colorado railroads. After much research, I decided to scratch build a stock car, a gondola, and a box car that could be judged. (A total of eight cars are required, of which four must be scratchbuilt and four must earn a merit award). I'd previously scratchbuilt a snowplow, but it didn't get the 87.5 points needed at the convention, so I decided to build a kit instead for my fourth judged car. (I already had the other four cars that would not have to be judged from years past, including a passenger car with an interior).

I found an article on the NMRA Web site (under AP Cars) by David Halpern MMR done in 1992, which provided some really good advice on how to present your models, and on what to include and what's not necessary.

I started building in October and was ready for judging by February. Things went pretty well until the judges came to my kit-built reefer. There were just too many problems for it to garner the needed 87.5 points, so it was back to the drawing board for some major changes. I had to replace the sides that had too much weathering on them, along with fixing a few other parts. The car was re-judged in April and passed. All of the requisite paperwork was then assembled and sent off to Regional AP Chairman Bill Brown MMR for his approval, and then on to National.



It wasn't easy, but Bob successfully re-worked a D&RGW refer kit to gain enough points for a *Cars* certificate on his road toward attaining MMR.

The *Cars* certificate will be my fifth, and I feel now that the really difficult work of the MMR is behind me. I can see the light at the end of the tunnel!

The second area of the Achievement Program is *Railroad Settings*. Here I chose to pursue the *Scenery and Structures*



Some samples of Bob's structure work are evident in his engine facility, stretching to the left, as a passenger train sneaks by in foreground. Another locomotive switches a stockyard to the right. (Photos by Robert Robbins)

certificates. I had the Gate Hill Railway judged for scenery back in 2011, and fortunately it passed. From this experience I learned a lot that I can apply to my next layout.

Structures was an easy choice for me, since building structures is by far my favorite part of the hobby. In fact I've been building structures for about 50 years now in both HO and O Scale. The centerpiece of my current layout is a scratchbuilt sawmill and sawdust burner. I went so far as to show the interior of the sawmill with a full arraignment of Sierra West equipment, all of it driven by an overhead belt system. The mill is fully lighted, and a sound module underneath brings the whole scene alive with sound. The sawdust burner includes a smoke generating machine and a red light buried within to give the effect of burning sawdust. Judging of the sawmill complex – along with the other five required scratchbuilt structures – went well. These six (and the additional six required for the 12 total) were all completed and approved. I received the *Structures* certificate just a few months ago.

Continued on page 12)



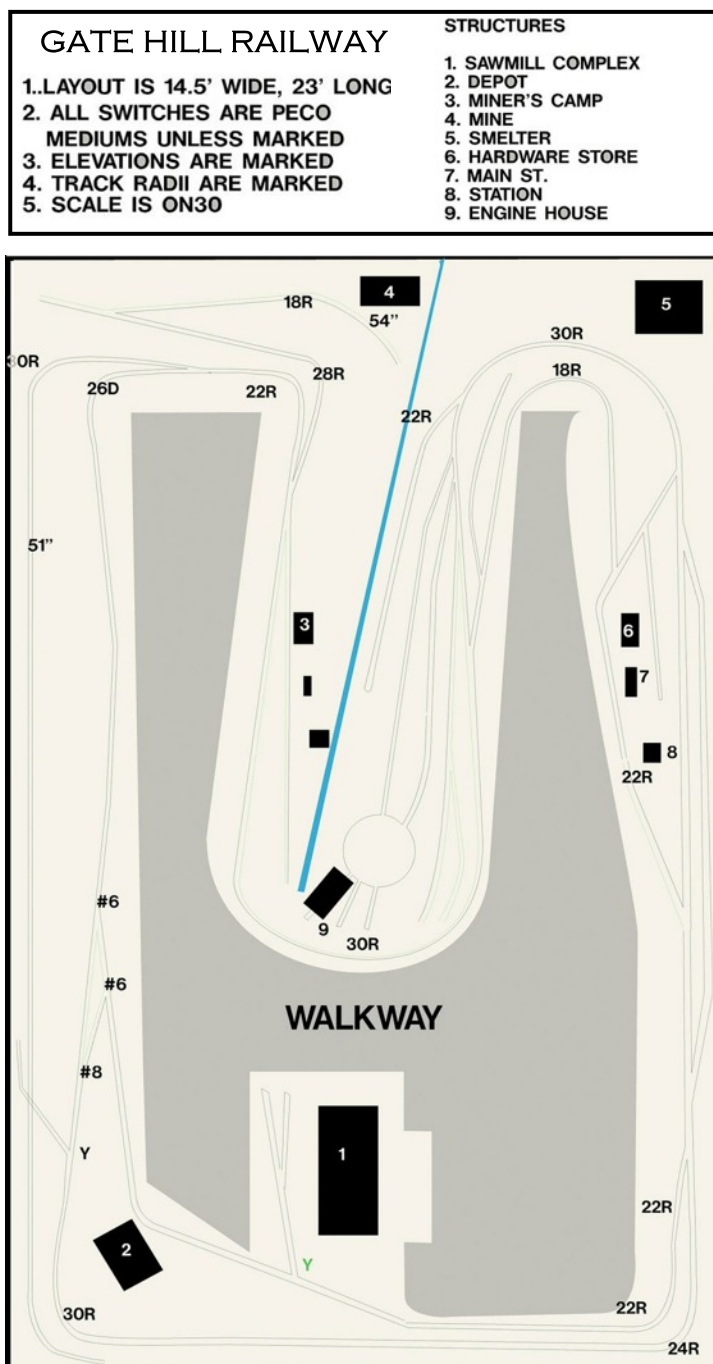
Bob did well with the judges when he submitted this scratchbuilt O gauge sawmill. The interior is detailed and lighted. He also scratchbuilt other buildings to support the sawmill and logging operations. (Photo by Robert Robbins)

(Continued from page 11)

In the area of *Railroad Construction and Operation* I chose to pursue the *Model Railroad Engineer-Civil* and *Model Railroad Engineer-Electrical* certificates. I built two small modules to meet the track laying requirements for *Civil* – including a scratchbuilt turnout and crossing on one of the modules, and a gauntlet track on the other. Wiring all of these properly counted towards the *Electrical* requirements, as did several other electrical projects on the layout. Admittedly, the paperwork (in particular, the schematics) took me a while to work out and several attempts before they were satisfactory for the judges. But eventually, I figured it out and these two certificates were earned.

Finally, the fourth area of the Achievement Program is *Service to the Hobby and NMRA Member*. Here I must admit to being in the right place at the right time(!) when the current Superintendent of the Hudson Valley Division decided to retire. He was also the editor of our newsletter, which he also wished to give up. So I ran for Superintendent and was elected, and I also took over writing the newsletter. These two roles will go a long way toward my earning the *Volunteer* certificate. I've also volunteered to be the registrar for this year's NER Convention, and I've become a Boy Scout counselor for the Railroading Merit Badge (and have helped nine scouts obtain this merit badge so far). Luckily, I am retired and have the time required for these endeavors. I have also chosen to pursue the *Author* certificate, and my layout was recently in the *Narrow Gauge Gazette* and *Railroad Model Craftsman*. I've created a Web site for my railroad <www.gatehillrailway.org>, and I hope to receive some points from this as well. If my calculations are right, I should satisfy the basic requirements for these two certificates by November or December.

My journey toward MMR has probably been similar to that of many others. The path isn't always a straight line, and it certainly hasn't been easy. But now I'm almost there. I don't mean to sound over-confident, but I've long felt that I could do it. In fact, I learned a long time ago that if you plan your work and work your plan you can achieve most things. (I sure hope that it's true in this case!) And of course, pursuing the MMR has also been a lot of fun. I've made some great new friends, and reconnected with some old ones too – all on the way to building the Gate Hill Railway and pursuing my MMR. ☒



Scooter's Junction

(Continued from page 4)

conjunction with division leaders, and retaining the current directors with a few of the division leaders on the BOD in a rotating manner (so that over a four year period each Division would have a member on the BOD at some time). One thing that most of us agreed upon was that we had to improve communications in both directions between the NER BOD and the divisions. We knew we could go on for hours further discussing these issues and ideas, but we had already been in meeting for three hours, so we agreed to form a smaller sub-committee (made up of a few NER BOD members and a couple of division leaders) to study these possibilities further.

If you have any questions, or new ideas, about anything I have mentioned, feel free to contact me now, or chat with me (or any other BOD member) at the convention in Laconia. Remember, NER BOD members will be wearing the red name badges. See you in Laconia! ☒

FROM THE EDITOR

(Continued from page 4)

summer, I ranged farther to join the Garden State Division for its 50th Anniversary Celebration in Sparta, NJ. I saw a nice presentation on model manufacturing by Rob Pasani of Atlas (unfortunately I missed Tony Koester's talk), and I met several NJ area modelers (including Division President Ciro Campagno and *Whistle Post* Editor Joe Calderone) – all of whom graciously offered to help me with *The Coupler* in the future. I even met a fellow (Tom Callahan) who's done some hands-on research in the archives of the *Lehigh & Hudson River Railway* (a favorite). Super!

3) Create a hobby website or blog. Okay, this has been a bit more involved than simply attending a meeting – but not that much more. I've been working to build my own hobby related Web site for a while. Many of you are further ahead with your own site or blog up and running. Others are still in the ideas and

thinking stage. Today, it's easier than ever to create a site (and probably even easier than you think). I used the WordPress software (free) for mine – you can check it out (remember, it's a work in progress!) at <www.armchairrailroader.wordpress.com>.

My goals here are modest: to add an article or two each month, and over time assemble and present some of my ideas and the photos I've taken. And I do note that the *AP Author Certificate* allows for up to half of total requirements to be published electronically (via Web site or blog). Hmm!

Again, these are just some ideas to bolster your thinking. As we've said, our hobby is big and broad – it's not hard to find opportunities (both large and small) to try something new, to stretch out, to grow. Are you in a rut today? Well, we've begun a new train season. So, what will you do this year to stretch out for the new? ☒

Model Railroading is Fun

The title of this column was prominently displayed for many years on the masthead of *Model Railroader* magazine as its motto. And it is an outstanding motto! Sometimes in the hustle and bustle of a busy NMRA life, we can forget the purpose of this organization and the reason for its existence. Although we are a not-for-profit educational corporation with a multi-million dollar budget, the bottom line is that we are promoting a wonderful hobby which defines what we do and is the common glue that holds us together.

When I started in this hobby more than 50 years ago, "*Model Railroading is fun*" would have seemed redundant. Of course it was fun and a wonder to a 13 year old who was mastering the intricacies of building with balsa and brass snap track.

But over time, I changed and hopefully improved, as did the hobby. I marveled at the work done by this organization and how it made model railroading more fun because it ensured that products worked together. My hobby changes were in knowledge and sophistication. So were the changes in the hobby. DCC, sound, proto operations, specialty modeling, and the Internet with its vast array of sites for research, transformed the hobby. There is more specialization and interests than ever before. And the NMRA is changing with the hobby.

Regardless of scale, interest, era or skill level, we are all model railroaders. The hobby we all enjoy has changed to become as varied as our own interests. So it is somewhat surprising that I continue to receive complaints and reports – mostly at the division level – about intolerance and sometimes abusive practices by our own members toward other model railroaders. One division official supposedly announces with regularity that women are not welcome within the NMRA. Can you imagine anything so ignorant or small minded? This, despite the fact that we number quite a few talented women among our master model railroaders. I receive reports of clannish behavior, refusal to embrace new members, and cliques.

Model railroading is fun until the "politics" of the association makes it less so. The NMRA should be a place to celebrate model railroading, not a place for petty jealousies, little fiefdoms or personal grudges. Any association with as many members as ours will obviously have personnel issues and peculiarities. I hope that those of you reading this might reflect upon whether your region or division has any of these problems and if so, what is being done about it.

These are my thoughts. What are yours?

– Charlie Getz, NMRA President



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COMPILED BY MARK HARLOW, NER Office Manager

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WORKIN' ON THE RAILROAD

By GLENN GLASSTETTER



What is "Good Enough"?

Years ago, famed Virginian & Ohio builder Allen McClelland coined the term "good enough." But just what is "good enough"? To put it another way, at what point do you concede that what you are working on is "good enough" for its intended purpose? The answer depends on what you are working on, what you are trying to accomplish, and what you will personally settle for. Perfection takes time and can even kill a project.

Layout Design

When I designed my railroad, I had never even operated on one. I also knew very little about the physical plant and actual operations of the C&O in West Virginia. But since I was modeling the C&O, and Allen McClelland's V&O was also an Appalachian coal hauling railroad, I used his trackplan as my guide. While the C&O mainline was double tracked, my initial design followed Allen's single track mainline with passing sidings. While building the layout I was learning more about the C&O. Along the way I redesigned portions of my mainline to double track, but I realized that without a total tear down and redesign, I was unable to double track the entire mainline. This would have to be "good enough."

Trackwork & Benchwork

When building a model railroad for operation, there are some things that require your best work. I think that most experienced model railroaders would agree that *trackwork* is near the top of the list (not necessarily how well it looks, but how well your trains run over it). In order to accomplish this, the benchwork does not have to be furniture grade construction, but it does need to be sturdy and not given to movement though the seasons.

Wiring

Wiring seems to be the bane of most model railroaders. When we operate a model railroad, we don't look at – or think about – the wiring. Nevertheless, good

wiring is essential to make the railroad run. It is all too easy when installing wiring just to keep moving along. But in addition to keeping it at least somewhat neat, you should also be doing two more things – testing and documentation. The more wiring you have installed since you last tested for operation, the more difficult and longer it will take to find any problems. And without some form of documentation, it will be even more frustrating a couple of years later when a problem develops, especially during an op session.

Scenery

Scenery products have improved immensely over the years, allowing us to more easily create realistic scenery today. (Even those of us with less artistic talents

Building highly detailed models takes time, and we must decide at what point they are "good enough."

Case in point: Mike Evans and Andy Clermont each recently kitbashed models of a Barrett covered hopper (see the photo of Mike's car). The prototypes were built from modified tank cars and were used for hauling slate chips for Barrett's roofing material business. Andy built what Mike calls a 'layout quality car,' while Mike added even more detail to his model (since he wanted to submit an article on the project for publication). You would be very hard pressed to see the differences in a side by side comparison. Mike spent more time on his car, but he really enjoys building highly detailed models.

When building a model for an NMRA contest, we need to decide how far to go and what is "good enough." Are you going for the NER Baldwin Trophy for Best in Show, or are you just looking for 87½ points for a Merit Award? It can make a difference in time spent.

I'm sure many of you already knew most



Mike Evans' highly detailed Barrett tank car is one man's definition of "good enough!"
(Photo by Glenn Glasstetter)

can create attractive and believable scenery). In addition, scenery is one of those areas that we can go back and redo with relative ease as our skills improve and new products become available. What may be "good enough" today can be readily improved in the future.

Modeling

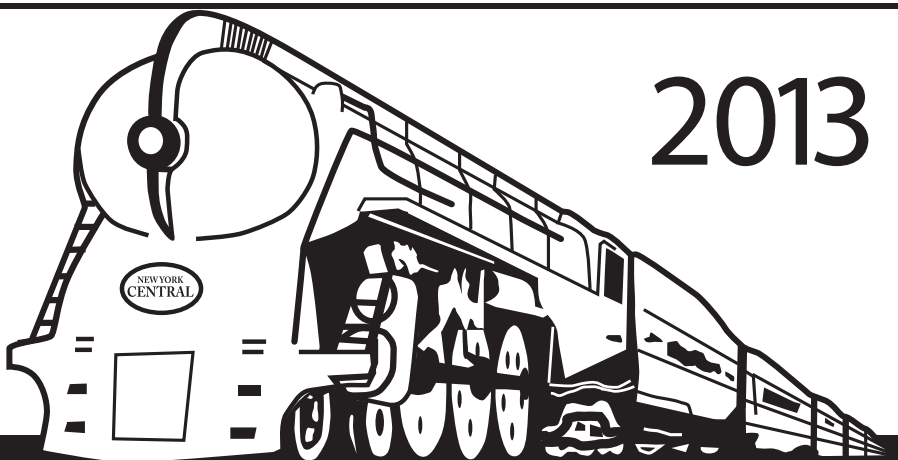
Structures, locomotives, and rolling stock are where Allen's "good enough" philosophy really comes into play. Modeling is probably the main endeavor where you must decide how well you adhere to the "good enough" philosophy.

of these things, but we sometimes need reminding. I know I do, when I go from building a contest model to building a layout model. When I'm building a model at the bench, I'm looking at it much more closely than others amid all the other models, scenery and moving trains on the layout. We are lucky. With the products we have available now, "good enough" is better than ever, and it can be achieved more easily than back when Allen coined the term.

OK, break's over. Back to work. ☒

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Another view of Robert Robbins' On30 Gate Hill Railway. The scratch built engine house is on the immediate left and kit bashed railcar on the right. The rest of the engine facility is in the background. (Photo by Robert Robbins)



BACKSHOP BITS

Here is a really simple way to make some standout structures that will impress visitors to your layout. Turn digital photos into walls of buildings. Add scratch built or commercially available window frames (Grandt Line, Tichy, Campbell, etc.) and you will create a gem!

Bill Brown, MMR, has successfully applied this technique on his layout. In his travels, Bill often finds old buildings — many with painted advertising from a long gone era.

After printing his digital images (copy centers can print rich color photos on laser printers), Bill cut and fit the image's prototype wall (*inset photo*) onto a model wall (*large photo*). In an instant, he created a superb piece of modeling complete with brick detail and weathering that enhances his model town. — Jeff Paston

