



The Switch Tower

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April 2025

Seacoast Division NMRA www.seacoastnmra.org



Seacoast Division NMRA Spring Event
Saturday, April 5, 2025
10:00am-2:00pm

The Stratham Firehouse
 2 Winnicutt Road, Stratham, NH

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A picture of the Vermont Rail Systems repair facility that will be one of the tours for NER convention. Read President Glenn Mitchell's letter in this edition for more information



NER CONVENTION
CONCORD, NEW HAMPSHIRE
SEPTEMBER 11 - 14, 2025
conventions.nernmra.org

The President's Lantern by Glenn Mitchell

We've had a busy winter and now spring is here. The NER NERx video presentation series just wrapped up. I saw a couple segments of the presentation, but I need to go back on the NER web-site and see the episodes that I missed. Four of the layout videos were Seacoast members' layouts. Also, the Concord Flyer convention got a lot of coverage including a panel discussion (Peter McKenney, Tage Ericson, John McHugh and Tom Oxnard) and videos by Chris Carfaro. If you missed them take a look at them at: <http://nerx.org/index.html>.

Preparation for the Concord Flyer continues to get more intense. We expect to have the Convention Application on line by April 1, 2025 (less than two weeks!). The Concord Flyer link is: <https://conventions.nernmra.org/home/home-2025/>. If you are planning on staying at the Courtyard by Marriot don't wait – as of last night 40 of the 67 rooms that were blocked had already been booked. Book now if you want to stay at the convention location. Other “over-flow” rooms will be available since the owner of the Grappone Center and Courtyard also owns five other hotels in the Concord area. You can go through the Concord Flyer link to reach the hotel booking page.

In support of the Concord Flyer Convention I traveled to the Vermont Railway System Car Repair Facility in North Walpole NH on March 4, 2025. Member Larry Rine arranged for the access to the facility during the Concord Flyer Convention. Many thanks go to Larry for getting us in. We both met there to check things out. I went there thinking that it's an old roundhouse with a turntable that used to house Steamtown USA decades ago and didn't know much else. As I drove in from the south I passed at least a hundred freight cars parked on the old mainline. I thought these were there for long term storage but later learned that they were all there for repairs. Upon entering we met Aaron Bridge, the Superintendent of Railcar Repair for the Vermont Railway System. After suiting up in PPE (hard hats and safety glasses) we were led into the facility. We quickly learned that this was not just another old structure that appeared to have seen better days, but was a working repair facility for tank cars, covered hoppers, boxcars, and gondolas. Aaron explained how every repair meets some level of federal certification and every part is tracked, even the used parts that are being discarded. (Other railroads want proof that the repair that was made there to one of their cars was required.) The roundhouse has 5 stalls and 4 of them were used for car repairs. We saw a gondola and a high cube boxcar in bays 2 and 3 undergoing work. A Green Mountain excursion passenger car was in stall 5 waiting to have its trucks removed and replaced with temporary freight car trucks while the passenger car trucks were sent out to be overhauled. The turntable, estimated to be about 90 feet long, is still used. While we were there, all the 6 other employees were called into service unloading and reloading 16 freight car wheelsets from and on a flat-bed trailer. A contractor with a backhoe was also at work in front of a couple of the stalls. Bottom line – this is a dynamic, jumping railroad facility – and we got to see it. We were together as Aaron escorted us around to see most anything we wanted including a working Alco RS-1 and a 1912 built snow plow. If you are interested in seeing real railroading, sign up for the Concord Flyer Convention and join me as Aaron gives the group another tour of the facility on Thursday September 11, 2025. We'll be car-pooling as much as possible since parking is limited. The tour starts at 2:00. More details on the Concord Flyer website. I'll see you there!

We held our Winter 2025 Event in the Westbrook Community Center in Westbrook, Maine, on January 11, 2025. Thanks again to Jay Ehlen for organizing the event. 19 members were there in person and we had 12 more on Zoom.

The President's Lantern by Glenn Mitchell

President Glenn Mitchell conducted the 2025 Annual Meeting of the Seacoast Division of the NMRA. All three incumbent Directors – Geoff Anthony, Jim Gore, MMR, and Jim Seroskie – retained their seats.

Tage gave us the latest info on the Concord Flyer Convention.

We had three clinics. The first clinic by Joe Linuqita was a presentation/clinic on “Foam Based Scenery Techniques”. Next on the agenda, John McHugh took us on a slide tour of his Ossipee Valley Railroad layout. His focus was on the design and development of his two deck layout in a relatively small space. A great work in progress. Lastly, Jim Gore MMR, offered a clinic on “Improving Clinic Quality”. His theme was “organize your power point around visuals and limit text”. He also told us to be enthusiastic about your topic and avoid passing sample items around. All very useful tips.

Rich Breton and Jim Gore gave “show and tells” displaying their structures.

Following the conclusion of the event, a brief Board of Director's meeting was held where Glenn Mitchell and Jay Ehlen were elected President and Vice President respectively. All the officers and chairmen were approved by the BOD.

Finally, the Southern Maine Model Railroad Club opened their layout for a tour by the attendees after the event.

The Seacoast Division Spring 2025 Event will be held on April 5, 2025 at the Stratham Firehouse from 10:00 to 2:00. There will be two clinics at this event:

Tom Oxnard, MMR will show how the use of the Helicon Focus can improve your compositions and ability to get crisper images. He will also discuss lighting, related equipment and software to make photos ready for the NMRA Calendar.

Glenn Mitchell will present the inspiration for the design of his layout and discuss the planning phase using XTrackCAD. His layout plan was the basis for his operational documentation which helped him earn his Chief Dispatcher AP Certificate.

Chris Carfaro will give a brief presentation on organizing a photo contest for NMRA members. The winning photo will be on the cover of the Summer Edition of the Coupler. Chris will outline the contest rules and note – the winner will also receive a special prize.

Tage Erickson will present the latest on the Concord Flyer Convention preparation.

We will be holding our usual “Show and Tell” session as well as a “For Sale” table.

Bill Huebner will be opening his layout for the first time for the Seacoast Division. We all thank Bill in advance for supporting the Spring 2025 Event. Watch for more details in the next event notice.

Respectfully Submitted,

Glenn Mitchell

Seacoast Division NMRA President and Director

Seacoast Division Spring Event Saturday April 5, 2025

The Stratham Firehouse
2 Winnicutt Road, Stratham, NH
10A.M. to 2 P.M.

All NMRA members and people interested in becoming NMRA members are invited to the Spring Event of the Seacoast Division NMRA in Stratham, New Hampshire.

The Seacoast Division Spring 2025 Event will be held in person and also on-line with ZOOM. There is ample on-site parking

AGENDA - Something for Everybody

TWO CLINICS –

Tom Oxnard, MMR – If you like to take photos of your layout, Tom will show how the use of the Helicon Focus can improve your compositions and ability to get crisper images. He will also discuss lighting, related equipment and software to make photos ready for the NMRA Calendar.

Glenn Mitchell – He will present his inspiration for the design of his layout and discuss his planning phase using XTrackCAD. His layout plan was the basis for his operational documentation which helped him earn his Chief Dispatcher AP Certificate.

PHOTO CONTEST AND PRESENTATION – Chris Carfaro

Chris is organizing a photo contest for NMRA members. The winning photo will be on the cover of the Summer Edition of the Coupler. Chris will outline the contest rules and note – the winner will also receive a special prize.

“CONCORD FLYER” CONVENTION UPDATE -

Seacoast Division hosting NER Convention

Planning progress update - Division member participation

The Raffle - member donations

SHOW AND TELL – we always have time for members to display and describe recent projects, etc. If you something that you would like to share with attendees, please contact Jay Ehlen “jayehlen@gmail.com, to be placed on the agenda

Seacoast Division Spring Event Saturday April, 5 2025

The Stratham Firehouse
2 Winnicutt Road, Stratham, NH
10A.M. to 2P.M.

For Sale: There will be a table set up for any members that wish to buy/sell any surplus modeling items they may have. If you have any model railroad related items (loco's, rolling stock, buildings, etc.) that you don't need and wish to sell, you are encouraged to bring them to the meeting. Please put a tag on each item with your name and the asking price. Maybe one of your fellow members might be interested!

REMEMBER- There are limited food opportunities in the immediate area around the firehouse, so please remember to bring your lunch.

LAST - BUT NOT LEAST - LAYOUT TOUR!!!

Bill Huebner will open his layout in Epping for visiting from 2pm to 4pm.

www.seacoastnmra.org

SEE YOU ALL THERE



This will be one of the tours for NER Concord Flye convention . Be sure not to miss this one . A once in a lifetime experience .



On the Road to Concord

By Mike Pedersen

The preparations for the Northeastern Region 2025 convention, our Concord Flyer, September 11-14, are starting to come together. By the time you read this the convention website will be up and populated with a lot of convention information and, perhaps most important, links for the conference and hotel reservations. If you plan on staying at the hotel, you should register sooner than later. We have a block of rooms reserved at a special rate but they may fill up quickly. Go to the Seacoast Division website and click on the conventions.nernmra.org link. That will take you to the current convention information and the registration and hotel links. Also, check the convention website regularly. Clinics, model railroads and events may be added or deleted almost up to the last day.

As this is my first model railroad convention, I am looking forward to participating as fully as possible. I actually found the negatives for the photos I want to enter in the photo contest! I took them twenty to thirty years ago, and while I can't pat myself on the back for the quality, I think the subjects are unique and I hope that counts for something. I have gathered the prototype information I need for my scratch-built freight cars. After looking at the contest results from the Lakeshores 2024 convention in the *Winter 2025 Coupler*, I think I may also enter the structures contest. Nothing huge, but an improvement on a structure I built a little while ago. One reason for mentioning this is that in looking over past region conventions' contest winners I see the same name keep appearing. We have almost 1500 NMRA members in the region, and I know you are good modelers. Give it a shot; as I am. Bring your best, favorite model or photo. Even if you are unsure about entering your work in a contest, don't forget that you can bring it only for display. Just participate. I look forward to not only place my work alongside that of more well-known modelers, but to hear your and their comments and tips. It can't help but improve my modeling skills.

Again, I encourage you to come to our convention in Concord in September. What you do while you are there is up to you. There are some who fill their days with clinics and displays and may never leave the hotel. There are others who spend the time visiting layouts and attending operation sessions and outside events and are only at the hotel to sleep. It's up to you. Whatever you choose to do while you are at the convention, the important thing is to attend! I and others would like to meet you and hear and share model railroading stories and experiences.

Hanging Lights and a Valance from a Suspended Ceiling

By John McHugh



I recently had electrical work completed in my basement and consequently had to remove a section of my layout area ceiling. As I started to reinstall the ceiling, lights and valance, I thought showing modelers how I added the lights and valance to the suspended ceiling would be a good idea for an article.

Before I began construction on my layout, I finished the 11' X 12' section of my basement by adding a third wall and a suspended ceiling. I installed two recessed fluorescent lights in the ceiling which was fine for construction but soon realized that those lights would be inadequate for watching trains. When I finally constructed the upper deck about ten years ago, I had to solve the lighting dilemma. Installing lights for the lower deck was easy because I would attach them to the underside of the upper deck. The problem was how am I going to add the lights and valance to that suspended ceiling without major construction?

My solution was light-duty ceiling grid clips found at the big box stores. These plastic clips are designed to clip on to the main beams or cross tees of the suspended ceiling. They come with S hooks which would not provide enough stability so I used 1" long 6-32 machine screws bolted to a 1" corner brace. (see photo 1) The clips need to be stretched a bit to fit and I found that some of the clips need to be pinched with force to get them to seat properly on the cross tees. (see photo 2) I screwed the bottom of the 1" corner braces to a painted 1 X 4 pine board. I painted the boards white to blend in with the ceiling and help reflect the light. One could use longer corner braces. (see photo 3)

Installing was straight forward. Before I attached the corner braces to the boards I needed to determine where they would be attached. I needed to align the pine boards with the edge of the layout. I placed a 3' level vertically along the edge to mark the ceiling with masking tape. With a helper I lined up the board along the tape on the ceiling and marked where the board met the cross tees and drew lines. I

Hanging Lights and a Valance from a Suspended Ceiling

By John McHugh

I attached the two clips spaced a few inches apart to provide stability and support. I had to offset the corner braces $\frac{1}{4}$ " or so from the line to make sure the clips lined properly with the cross tees. (see photo 3) I found the easiest way to attach the board to the ceiling was to attach the clips to the cross tees first and then with a helper holding an end, line up the clip hole and insert the machine screw and secure with the nut. It does take some practice to develop a way to screw on the nut in the tight space, but it can be done. I then attached other boards along the edge of the layout having to cut a few angles for the corners.



Photo 1 – Light-weight ceiling grid clips are the key. Attach them to 1" corner braces using 1" 6-32 machine screws.



Photo 2 – Spread the clips so they fit over the cross tee. Make sure the clips are seated on the tee properly.



Photo 3 – Clips and corner brace attached to the 1 X 4. Note that I offset the metal brace so the clip is centered over the line.



Photo 4 – Lights and board attached to the ceiling. Note the angle molding pieces on the backdrop to hold up the louver panels at the bottom of the photo. The slots in the backdrop support the cross tees.

Hanging Lights and a Valance from a Suspended Ceiling

By John McHugh

Once the pine boards were attached to the ceiling, I added the lights. I knew I'd have to have lots of

lights since I wanted well-lit scenes and needed lights that didn't emit much heat. (I have about 40 lights for each level) When I installed this, LED lighting options were expensive so I settled on using 48" fluorescent fixtures on the straight sections and the curly CFL bulbs in the curved areas. As LED bulbs came down in price, I replaced the fluorescents and CFLs with LED bulbs. After a few years the CFLs were bleaching the wires. If I was starting today, I would use multiple LED strips which allow varying color temperatures.

The bulbs were screwed into black outdoor rubber lamp sockets. The price has gone up a lot in the past few years but I just bought a pack of six for \$10 online. I attached the sockets to the pine board with metal 1" conduit straps using a piece of 1/2" plywood as a spacer. (see photo 5) Note that I only tightened the conduit strap enough to hold the socket. I used appropriate gauge suitcase connectors to attach to the 14-gauge wires. (see photo 6)



Photo 5 – Socket attached to board using 1" conduit strap with a 1/2" plywood spacer.



Photo 6 – Lights showing the suitcase connectors and inside of valance. Note the blocks of wood at the bottom of the valance used to attach the lighting louver which will hide the lights. The blue light rope is installed to simulate night.

The valance was made using 1/8" hardboard which easily conforms to the curves. I made mine 8" wide, painted the inside white and used a countersink bit on the outside where the hardboard will be attached to the pine board to try to get the screwheads as smooth as possible. A coat of earth colored paint finished the project. The lighting looked great, but the lights were too visible, especially under the peninsula blob. I needed a way to hide the lights without diminishing the lumiance.

Hanging Lights and a Valance from a Suspended Ceiling

By John McHugh

I solved this problem with lighting louvers. These 2' X 4' plastic panels fit into the ceiling grid and can be easily cut to conform to the curved areas. Along the inside of the valance, I cut $\frac{3}{4}$ " pine into blocks of 1" wide X 1.5" long and painted them white. Using construction adhesive, I glued the blocks vertically so they lined up with the bottom of the valance maintaining a constant height. (see photo 6) Along the backdrop I used a level to transfer the height with the top of the inside blocks and drew a line. I cut drop ceiling angle molding into 1" wide strips and glued the angle molding to the hardboard backdrop with construction adhesive along the line at appropriate intervals. (see photo 4) After installing a few panels, I realized that I needed to install cross tees to support them. I had to add additional blocks and molding to support the cross tees. To properly fit the panels, especially on the curved sections I made cardboard templates and fine-tuned until satisfied then used the template to mark the louver. I cut the most of the louvers with my bandsaw but used nippers to tweak the fit. The valance easily bends out to install the louvers. The louvers do diminish the light a bit but the lights are hidden unless one looks directly underneath. The valance, hidden light and fascia force the eye to the trains and scenery which is what we want. (see photo 8)



Photo 7 – Louver panel attached to backdrop and valance. The cross tee is needed to prevent the louver from sagging.



Photo 8 – Final effect illustrating how the valance and hidden lights focus on the scenery.

**A.P. Report Tom Oxnard Ap Chair
Peter McKenney Associate Chair**

There is no A.P. report this month . Everyone is working feverishly on the Convention this September. Some of you should be inspired to work on the Golden Spike Award. Let me know if you do.

Tom Oxnard MMR

Editors Ramblings :

I hope everyone has made it to spring intact and healthy. Been working on chip cars for my club and realizing how much stuff I have and that I am running out of room. So I have been busy putting stuff on eBay and will have tables at Westbrook and Topsham to sell some of my excess . Hope to see some of you at one or the other. Or support them both. Been watching some good videos on you tube but not letting it be a big time suck as it can be and listening to Around the Layout podcast which I find really interesting and informative. Have a good Spring and an even better summer.

Timetable

April 5th Great Northern Train Show

Dover New Hampshire

April 5 th Seacoast Division NMRA Spring event. Stratham NH

April 12 Southern Maine Model RR club show
Westbrook ME

April 26th Great Falls Model RR Club Show
Topsham ME

April 27 Hookset Lions Club Show
Hookset NH

May 3 Sea Shore Trolley Museum opening
Kennebunkport ME

May 24 Opening Day Downeast Scenic RR
Ellsworth ME

July 14-19 NMRA National Convention
Novi [Detroit] MI

July 26 Seacoast Summer Event
TBD

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