

Opinions expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of MER elected officials. Commercial suppliers, supplies and materials addressed in *The Local* in no way constitute endorsement by the MER. Copyrighted material that appears in *The Local* is used for educational and historical benefit only and does not constitute infringement of a copyright holder.

## Master Builder Cars - 2008 Article Revisited

By Alan Balma (Photos by the Author)

The Master Builder Cars Achievement Program certificate was the most challenging for me. As recommended, I started with a kit to gain some confidence. I am an S scale model railroader. I super-detailed an S scale resin kit of a C&O radial end gondola. For scratchbuilding a car, I needed some experienced guidance or a set of instructions. I finally found that in the NMRA archives.

In 2008 the NMRA magazine *Scale Rails* ran a monthly series of articles called *Year of the MMR* and the March issue featured “Master Builder Cars” by Frank J. Hermanek, MMR (the issue can be found in the NMRA archives). The introduction is an excellent discussion of the Master Builder Cars requirements. It gives detailed instructions for a scratchbuilt HO wooden reefer and a superdetailed commercially available hopper. *(Continued on p.14)*



*The Completed Boxcar Scratchbuilt by Alan Balma.*

From the Editor's Desk...



# The Art of Model Railroading

By Greg Warth, Editor

What is art anyway? It is difficult to precisely define because it can be many things, and often very subjective. If you look it up on Google's "AI Overview," the following interpretation is given:

"Art is a diverse range of human activities and products that express imaginative, conceptual, or technical skill, aimed at evoking emotional, aesthetic, or intellectual responses. It serves as a form of communication and self-expression across various mediums, including visual arts, music, literature, and performance.

**"Key Aspects of Art:**

- Expression & Creativity: Art is a medium for communicating feelings, ideas, and stories.
- Skill & Technique: Traditionally, art requires technical proficiency developed through study and practice.
- Diverse Mediums: It includes painting, sculpture, architecture, music, literature, dance, film, and digital media.
- Subjectivity: The definition of art is often subjective and evolves over time, with debates covering everything from classical painting to conceptual art.
- Purpose: While it can be for aesthetic beauty, art also serves to evoke emotion, challenge perspectives, or provide cultural commentary."

My own personal definition from what I have been told about art is simply the answer to a question I ask myself about the subject: Does it evoke any emotional, sensory or thought response of any kind from the viewer or listener? If the answer is yes,

## Contents

Print Issue		
<a href="#">Master Builder Cars</a>	Alan Balma	1
<a href="#">Editor's Desk</a>	Greg Warth	2
<a href="#">From the Business Car</a>	Jack Dziadul, MMR	5
<a href="#">Dead Rail Book Review</a>	Jack Dziadul, MMR	7
<a href="#">AP Update</a>	Kurt Thompson, MMR	9
<a href="#">Who's Who</a>	Staff	10
<a href="#">Meetings</a>	Staff	12
eLocal		
<a href="#">Upcoming Events</a>	Staff	13
<a href="#">Elections 2026 - Officers</a>	Staff	14
<a href="#">Cars - Continued from p.1</a>	Alan Balma	15
<a href="#">News from the Contest Room</a>	Dan Peele	25
<a href="#">Where Did All the Cabooses Go?</a>	Jim Allen	28
<a href="#">Last Stop before Luray</a>	Jim Allen	29
<a href="#">Building a Round Roof Cudahy Reefer</a>	Martin Brechbiel, MMR	31
<a href="#">Branchlines</a>	Staff	38
<a href="#">Submit an Article</a>	Staff	39
<a href="#">Art and Miniatures</a>	Martin Brechbiel, MMR	43
<a href="#">Back on Track</a>	Greg Warth	44

### Comprehensive Guide on How to Build a Model Railroad.



then it is art.

At our Model Railroad Museum in Norfolk, Virginia, a couple of our members had an interesting discussion with one of the members of the Chrysler Art Museum which is nearby. She did not really believe model railroading is an art form, at least not in the traditional sense. It is not thought of as an art generally speaking. If you're traveling and decide to see an art museum, you would not be expecting to see model railroads if you go there. On the other hand, if you go to see a model railroad, you would be disappointed if you were not able to appreciate the artistic qualities in that display, even if there is no scenery.

I have seen model railroads like that with excellent track design, turnouts, signals and other electronics build on a plywood base with not a stitch of scenery, that aroused a wonderful sense of admiration in the quality, design and technical aspects of the work. There are some people who would not be able to appreciate the artfulness of that work. So, in some respects, art is in the eye of the beholder. It is not automatically inherent in the work; it is an opinion of the viewer. In the same way, there are abstract paintings, sculptures and other displays inside a traditional art museum that do not arouse anything in me, except to think that the artist wasted his time on that one.

For myself, I love to see a model railroad that is fully detailed with scenery and serves as a real home for the locomotives, railcars, structures and people to "live in." Sometimes the scenery is *impressionistic*. You can't guess exactly where the scene is modeled from, but you can tell that it is a wooded and/or mountainous area, or an urban area. Sometimes it is *super realistic and prototypical*, like the Bethlehem Steel Plant on the Reading Company layout shown at the last MER (Mid-Eastern Region) convention in Philadelphia. Sometimes, the art is evident because of the *bias* of the viewer based on their prior experiences with the subject matter. I can "see" the artistic quality in almost any model railroad, even the wooden trains that children design and enjoy, partly because I am biased by my enjoyment of trains wherever I see them.

Perhaps, creating and viewing a miniature world over which we have complete control and is easy to understand may provide a sense of clarity and reality for our own individual real "worlds" which are often very chaotic and confusing. As a result, it may have a pleasing, calming and/or relaxing effect. At the same time, troubleshooting a wiring problem can be challenging and even somewhat stressful, but when the problem is solved, it becomes exhilarating and fulfilling.

So, there are lots of emotions associated with model railroading. How can it not be an art?

---

Once again, I would like to thank our outstanding editorial staff for all their hard work, not only for this issue but for all they have done over the last several years:

Alex Belida, MMR

Martin Brechbiel, MMR

And special thanks to all our authors. Without them, we would have nothing to show you.

Warm regards and

Happy railroading!

P.S. If you know of a good Editor and/or Publisher, let me know. I'm splitting it back into two jobs as it was originally, which I think might be easier for some. If you have already been a newsletter editor, and if you are familiar with Word, and/or Pages, you can do this. I'll be your guide and backup for both the editor and publisher for as long as you need. Thanks for considering it.

*Greg*

**SAVE THE DATE**  
**Tracks to Tidewater**  
 Oct 15-18, 2026 • Virginia Beach, VA

A large, four-day event organized by National Model Railroad Association (NMRA) Tidewater Division for the Mid-Eastern Region (MER), bringing together model railroad enthusiasts for a variety of activities. Events will feature clinics, layout tours, operating sessions, contests, prototype tours, and a banquet to recognize the winners of the contests as well as those who have achieved Master Model Railroader status. The goal is to provide a forum for members to learn, share, and enjoy the hobby of model railroading.

Add to Calendar

**228** DAYS  
**21** HOURS  
**36** MINUTES  
**06** SECONDS

**TRACKS TO TIDEWATER**

**What to Expect**

- Hands-on clinics from experienced modelers
- Area layout tours and operating sessions
- Vendor hall with tools, kits, and parts
- Meetups, raffles, and community fun

Registration opens Spring 2026.

**Error:** In the Jan/Feb 2026 issue of *THE LOCAL*, on p. 14, Dan Peele writes that Bill Brown is the NMRA Contest Chairman. That's no longer true; it's Sam Swanson, MMR.

Submitted by Jerry Lauchle, MMR



## From the Business Car

By Jack Dziadul, MMR

March-April 2026

Ladies and Gentlemen, here are a few notes to bring the membership up to speed on what happens behind the curtain.

On January 18<sup>th</sup>, the MER **Board of Directors** met via Zoom. The Board made the following **announcements** and took the following **actions**:

- Ratified President Scott Unger's earlier email vote to appoint Jack Dziadul, MMR as Business Manager.
- Accepted the resignation of Jerry Lauchle, MMR as MER photographer. Congratulations to Jerry for his many years of service in that role. Jerry will no doubt continue building his museum quality models.
- Former MER Photographer Director-at-Large Bob Bridges was reappointed to the position.
- ECC Laura Bateman provided an update to the 2026 convention. Bob Cook will be Chairman of the Tracks to Tidewater convention. Registration and Holiday Inn room reservations will open later in the spring.
- VP Gary Brown, MMR announced that contest award plaques will include the new NMRA logo.
- \$2,200 was included in the MER budget for MER and Division banners illustrated with the new branding logo.
- An Audit Committee will be appointed, and an audit will be undertaken this year.
- Treasurer Bill Wurtzell reviewed the 2025 MER actuals and the 2026 budget. The budget was approved after discussion and some minor changes.
- The 2025 convention financials were reviewed and the \$4,040.57 distribution to the Philadelphia Division was approved. Note to Superintendents: Conventions are a great way to add financial resources to support your division. Net proceeds to MER were \$3,062.72.
- Secretary Rick Stoneking has provided copies of Board and Annual Meeting minutes to Archivist Mike Maurer.
- Business Manager Jack Dziadul, MMR proposed that all paper copies of *The Local* cease distribution. It was approved that the few remaining recipients (15) of print newsletters receive notice to switching to online only unless they request to opt in to continue to receive print editions.
- There was discussion of moving the Annual Meeting to a Saturday time slot. However, there were concerns about scheduling that would adversely affect quorum, so the meeting will remain a Sunday event.
- The next Board meeting will be April 18<sup>th</sup> at the Holiday Inn, Virginia Beach, VA at 10am.

Congratulations to the new officers and directors of the Carolina Piedmont Division.

- Superintendent Bob Gamble, MMR
- Assistant Superintendent Don Roback
- Secretary Kevin O'Connor
- Paymaster Mike Rossi
- Director Rob Rousseau
- Direction Mike Maurer

If your **Division has an election** please be sure to notify MER Secretary Rick Stoneking, Editor Greg Warth, and the Business Manager of any changes to leadership.

2025 happenings? **Superintendents annually report** on the activities of their Divisions. These are sent to VP Gary Brown. We look forward to seeing those published.

**Candidate statements** for MER elective offices are due by May 30<sup>th</sup>. It's not too early to consider volunteering. The positions of President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer will be on the ballot. The statements should be submitted to the Nominating Committee Chairman Bob Charles, MMR. The Business Manager will need to confirm eligibility of candidates. Here is a link to Executive Handbook Section 3 – Position Descriptions  
[section\\_3\\_position\\_descriptions.pdf](#)

NMRA **membership codes**. These appear on rosters received by Superintendents and other officials. From time to time, we see questions about what these codes are. Here is a list of the most commonly used.

- BM Basic Member receiving access to online magazine
- PM Print Member Same as BM except also receiving a print subscription to NMRA Magazine.
- FM Family Member, which is indicated by an extra two-digit extension to a BM number. Such as -0A.
- LM Life Member This is a legacy category that is no longer offered.
- ST Student Member
- RP Rail Pass

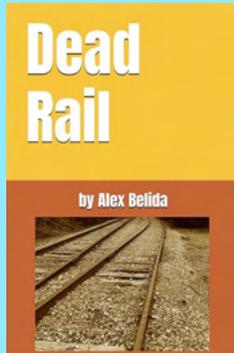
FM, ST, and RP members are not eligible to vote or to hold office. They enjoy discounted dues.

MER Calendar reminder – Section 9 of the MER Executive Handbook has a convenient schedule of what is due from the various elected and appointed leadership. Here is a link.

[MID-EASTERN REGION EXECUTIVE HANDBOOK](#)

## Dead Rail: A Book Review

By Jack Dziadul, MMR



The Mid-Eastern Region (MER) is home to a number of very good book authors. Most are railroad historians or railroad photographers. Many others have written modeling reference books, and we even have a few novelists amongst our model railroad friends. Master Model Railroader Alex Belida has joined this fraternity of storytellers.

**Dead Rail** is Alex' first novel, self-published and available in paperback (Amazon \$12.99) or as an e-book (\$4.99).

**Dead Rail** is a quick page-turner as lead character Ethan Mercer takes the reader on a thrilling ride as he hunts down thieves, murderers, and spies. MER members will feel right at home as the setting for Alex' work of fiction is a national model railroad convention held in Washington, DC. Model railroad conventions are never boring, but the gathering of the National Railroad Modelers Association (NRMA) adds a level of drama and intrigue that we can only hope remains a figment of Alex' imagination.

You'll need to keep notes as Alex develops over two dozen characters throughout the 182 pages of intrigue. Intrepid reporter Samantha Pierce, notebook in hand, is by Ethan's side all the way. Alex weaves a bit of romance amongst the brass locomotive collectors and the cast of bad actors. Yes, the reporter and her subject share their first kiss on page 52, but the book remains true to the "who-dun-it" genre.

**Dead Rail** is a fun read and highly recommended.

---

### What does Dead Rail refer to in Model Railroading? - Ed.

Dead rail model railroading is a control system in which a model train is powered by an onboard battery rather than electricity from the track. Because the rails carry no electrical current—hence "dead rail"—there's no need for complex track wiring, feeders, or insulated rail gaps. Most dead rail systems use radio control (RC) or wireless DCC to operate the locomotive's speed, direction, lights, and sound.

This approach is especially popular in larger scales such as O scale and large scale (G), where there's more room inside the locomotive for batteries and receivers. Modelers appreciate dead rail for its simplified wiring, reliable performance over dirty or outdoor track, and the freedom to design layouts without worrying about electrical blocks. It combines modern wireless technology with the classic joy of hands-on railroading.

The **Dead Rail Society** is an organization dedicated to promoting and supporting *dead rail* model railroading—where locomotives run on onboard batteries and radio control instead of track power.

# Here's Your Chance to Give Back to the MER!

Positions are now open and available for:  
Treasurer, Editor, and Publisher

### Advertising in *The Local*

If you have a model railroading business and would like to place an ad in *The Local*, please contact the [Editor](#). The rates per year are shown on the right.

Your ad may appear as text, photo, art, or any combination thereof. Art must be of high quality and camera-ready. Formats must be in txt, doc/docx, pdf, jpeg, bmp or tiff only. The content must be related to model trains or railroads or provide a benefit specifically to model railroaders. If you need help with your ad, please don't hesitate to ask the Editor.

Advertising Rates (per year)	
Divisions & Clubs	Free
Clinics & Education	Free
Convention Ads	Free
Full Page - Color	\$100.00
1/2 Page - Color	\$60.00
1/4 Page - Color	\$35.00
Business Card	\$10.00
Text Only	\$7.00

## IPSWICH HOBBIES



*Craftsman Structure Kits*

*Jack Dziadul*



IpswichHobbies.com

919-721-8757



Kurt Thompson, MMR

# NMRA Achievement Program Update

By Kurt Thompson, MMR  
MER AP Manager

## Update for Mar/Apr 2026:

Since the Jan./Feb. Issue of the Local was printed, the following members have earned these Achievement Program certificates and Golden Spike Awards:

### Division 1, New Jersey

Rick Stoneking  
Robert Hans

### AP certificate Received

Model Railroad Author  
Association Volunteer

### Division 4, Tidewater

Alan Balma  
Brian Dykas

Model Railroad Author  
Golden Spike Award

### Division 12, Carolina Southern

Scott Davenport  
Andrew Stitt

Model Railroad Engineer - Civil  
Association Official

### Division 14, Chesapeake

Scott Wooddell  
Scott Wooddell

Master Builder - Scenery  
Golden Spike Award



Board of Directors & Administrative Staff					
	<p><b>President:</b> Scott Unger 610-462-0756 <a href="mailto:president@mer-nmra.com">president@mer-nmra.com</a></p>		<p><b>Director-at-Large</b> Greg Warth 757-816-8399 <a href="mailto:gjwarth@mer-nmra.com">gjwarth@mer-nmra.com</a></p>		<p><b>Achievement Program Manager:</b> Kurt Thompson, MMR 410-507-3671 <a href="mailto:apchair@mer-nmra.com">apchair@mer-nmra.com</a></p>
	<p><b>Vice President:</b> Gary Brown 757-641-7671 <a href="mailto:vp@mer-nmra.com">vp@mer-nmra.com</a></p>		<p><b>Director-at-Large:</b> Bob Bridges  <a href="mailto:rkbridges@mer-nmra.com">rkbridges@mer-nmra.com</a></p>		<p><b>Nominating Committee Chair:</b> Bob Charles, MMR 717-763-1848 <a href="mailto:rcharles@mer-nmra.com">rcharles@mer-nmra.com</a></p>
	<p><b>Secretary:</b> Rick Stoneking (856)296-9291 <a href="mailto:secretary@mer-nmra.com">secretary@mer-nmra.com</a></p>		<p><b>Director-at-Large:</b> Kevin O'Connor 919-593-2537 <a href="mailto:kjoconnor@mer-nmra.com">kjoconnor@mer-nmra.com</a></p>		<p><b>Editor:</b> Greg Warth 757-816-8399 <a href="mailto:local-editor@mer-nmra.com">local-editor@mer-nmra.com</a></p>
	<p><b>Treasurer:</b> William "Bill" Wurtzell (201)819-8701  <a href="mailto:wwurtzell@mer-nmra.com">wwurtzell@mer-nmra.com</a></p>		<p><b>Business Manager:</b> Jack Dziadul, MMR (919) 721-8757 <a href="mailto:jackdziadul@gmail.com">jackdziadul@gmail.com</a></p>		<p><b>Registrar:</b> Kirk Bateman 410-442-0446 <a href="mailto:mer-registrar@mer-nmra.com">mer-registrar@mer-nmra.com</a></p>
	<p><b>Assistant Business Manager:</b> John Hoyt 410-340-1776 <a href="mailto:jhoyt@mer-nmra.com">jhoyt@mer-nmra.com</a> And Ballot Chair</p>		<p><b>Assistant Treasurer and Convention Treasurer:</b> William "Bill" Wurtzell (201)819-8701 <a href="mailto:wwurtzell@mer-nmra.com">wwurtzell@mer-nmra.com</a></p>		<p><b>Archivist:</b> Michael Maurer  <a href="mailto:archives@mer-nmra.com">archives@mer-nmra.com</a></p>
	<p><b>Executive Convention Chair:</b> Laura Bateman 410-442-0446  <a href="mailto:ECC@mer-nmra.com">ECC@mer-nmra.com</a></p>		<p><b>Contest Chair:</b> Alan Mende 717-469-1047 <a href="mailto:contests@mer-nmra.com">contests@mer-nmra.com</a></p>		<p><b>Web Master:</b> Jeff Burch 443-280-9127 <a href="mailto:webmaster@mer-nmra.com">webmaster@mer-nmra.com</a></p>

	<p><b>MER Photographer:</b> Bob Bridges  <a href="mailto:rkbridges@mer-nmra.com">rkbridges@mer-nmra.com</a></p>		<p><b>Assistant Registrar:</b> Jim Fisher 443-504-3919 <a href="mailto:jfisher@mer-nmra.com">jfisher@mer-nmra.com</a></p>
---	---	--	---

**MER Division Superintendents**

	<p><b>New Jersey Division 1</b> Glyn Thomas <a href="mailto:njdiv.super@gmail.com">njdiv.super@gmail.com</a> Division web page: <a href="http://njdivnmra.org">njdivnmra.org</a></p>		<p><b>James River Division 5</b> Phillip R. Taylor (434) 589-6006 <a href="mailto:drphilster@gmail.com">drphilster@gmail.com</a> Division web page: <a href="http://jrdnmra.blogspot.com/">jrdnmra.blogspot.com/</a></p>		<p><b>Carolina Southern Division 12</b> Andrew Stitt (919)637-1282 <a href="mailto:superintendent@carolinasouthern.org">superintendent@carolinasouthern.org</a> Division web page: <a href="http://www.carolinasouthern.org">www.carolinasouthern.org</a></p>
	<p><b>Potomac Division 2</b> Ernie Little, MMR <a href="mailto:super@potomac-nmra.org">super@potomac-nmra.org</a> Division web page: <a href="http://potomac-nmra.org/">potomac-nmra.org/</a></p>		<p><b>South Mountain Division 10</b> Dan Mulhearn <a href="mailto:southmountaindiv@gmail.com">southmountaindiv@gmail.com</a>  Div Web Page: <a href="http://www.smdnmra.org">http://www.smdnmra.org</a></p>		<p><b>Carolina Piedmont Division 13</b> Bob Gamble, MMR <a href="mailto:superintendent@cpd13.org">superintendent@cpd13.org</a> Division web page: <a href="http://www.cpd13.org/">www.cpd13.org/</a></p>
	<p><b>Philadelphia Division 3</b> Joe Walters, MMR (302)521-5884 <a href="mailto:Josephwalters@yahoo.com">Josephwalters@yahoo.com</a> Division web page: <a href="http://www.phillynmra.org">www.phillynmra.org</a></p>		<p><b>Susquehanna Division 11</b> Alan Mende (717) 469-1047 <a href="mailto:super@susquehannanmra.org">super@susquehannanmra.org</a> Division web page: <a href="http://www.susquehannanmra.org">www.susquehannanmra.org</a></p>		<p><b>Chesapeake Division 14</b> Kirk Bateman (410) 442-0446 <a href="mailto:super@chesdiv-nmra.org">super@chesdiv-nmra.org</a> Division web page: <a href="http://www.chesdiv-nmra.org">www.chesdiv-nmra.org</a></p>
	<p><b>Tidewater Division 4</b> John Robey (571)217-0599 <a href="mailto:jrobey2019@gmail.com">jrobey2019@gmail.com</a> Division web page: <a href="http://nmra-mer-tidewater.org">nmra-mer-tidewater.org</a></p>				

**YOUR AD COULD BE HERE**

**Advertise in The Local**

**If you own a business, you may want to consider advertising here. The rates are very reasonable. Click on the link above to find out more.**



*Holiday Inn on Greenwich Road in Virginia Beach, VA: Site of the 2026 MER Convention, “Tracks to Tidewater.”*

## UPCOMING MER CONVENTIONS

- 2026 — Tidewater Division — October 15-18, 2026 — “Tracks to Tidewater,” Holiday Inn, 5655 Greenwich Rd. Virginia Beach, VA 23462
- 2027 — South Mountain Division — Location: Hagerstown, MD

## MER BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING SCHEDULE

- Board of Directors Budget Meeting — 1pm January 10, 2026, (virtual - <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/7161954603?omn=84887934378>)
- Board of Directors Business Meeting - 10am, April 18, 2026, Holiday Inn, 5655 Greenwich Rd. Virginia Beach, VA 23462

## ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

- Call to Order at 7pm Oct. 17, then recessed until 10am on Oct.18, 2026  
Holiday Inn, 5655 Greenwich Rd. Virginia Beach, VA 23462

# UPCOMING CONVENTIONS

**Save the Date:**

## Tracks to Tidewater

October 15-18, 2026 Virginia Beach, VA



### 2026 NMRA National Convention

July 27 to August 2, 2026



 [www.facebook.com/NMRATakesChatt](https://www.facebook.com/NMRATakesChatt)

[nmra2026.org](https://nmra2026.org)

# Elections 2026

## THE MER NEEDS YOU!

### Now Accepting Nominations for Officers

If you are a member in good standing (dues paid) and want to support your region with good ideas and real involvement, we need you to volunteer to serve as one of the four Officers for the Mid-Eastern Region (MER). The MER Board of Directors generally meets three (3) times per year; once at the MER convention. **The deadline for nomination entry is May 30, 2026.** The term of office is two years, with a limit of two terms for the President or Vice-President, five terms for Treasurer or Secretary. Any qualified MER member in good standing can be nominated, either by him or herself or by another member with the candidate's permission. The process is very simple:

#### **Prepare:**

A 200-word (max) statement outlining the nominee's interest and qualifications for the position, AND a photo of the candidate. Send the nominations package – **by May 30, 2026** – to ALL of the following nominations process officials:

#### **Nominations Committee:**

Chair: Robert Charles, MMR rcharles@aol.com  
Jack Dziadul, MMR jackdziadul@gmail.com  
Kenneth Montero, va661midlo@comcast.net

Optional – also by May 30, candidates may supply a 500-word statement suitable for placement on the MER website.

**Deadlines and Schedules for 2026 Nominations and Balloting:** Our Bylaws require the publication of deadlines and schedules for nominations and balloting in the first issue of *The Local* of each year. The dates and schedule for nominations, ballot and election results are in the Executive Handbook, Section 5, Policies, Article VI.

**May 30, 2026** -- Deadline for receipt of self-nominations sent to the Nominations Committee. Date for Nominations Committee to notify Board of Directors of slate of nominees validated by the Business Manager.

**August 1, 2026** -- Deadline for mailing paper ballots to members and for commencing electronic voting.

**September 3, 2026** -- Deadline for electronic voting, also last day as shown by postmark for mailing paper ballots.

**September 7, 2026** -- Deadline for receipt by Balloting Committee of paper ballots sent by mail.

**September 14, 2026** -- Deadline for Ballot Committee to transmit results to President, the Director overseeing this committee, and the Business Manager.

**September 21, 2026** -- Deadline for The President to communicate the election results to candidates. The Business Manager also notifies the MER Web Master and the NMRA of the election results.

**October 10, 2026** -- Deadline for publishing election results on MER's website.

*You can make a difference by giving something back to the hobby you enjoy. This is your chance. Successful completion of three years in office fulfills the requirements for the Achievement Program "Association Official" certificate. Please respond in one email to all three committee members to ensure receipt of your nomination! That is all there is to it! If you haven't done this before, sign up NOW! It's YOUR TURN!*

## ***Master Builder Cars by Alan Balma: (Continued from p.1)***

This later project really helped me understand the definition of superdetailed.\* Most importantly, the article made me feel like I could do this.

This article is about using the above reference to scratch build four HO Swift 37' meat reefers for Merit Award evaluation.† The cars are nearly identical but are painted in four of the paint schemes used between the late 30's and mid 50's. I want to share the updated materials, observations and techniques that I found useful. If you have access to the *Model Railroader* archive, another very helpful article in the October 1953 issue is Paul Larson's "Building an HO Swift Reefer." The article includes a scale drawing of the car and a good photograph of the underside brake detailing. I will roughly follow the order of instructions in the 2008 article, so it will be useful to have it nearby.

I did not use all the Northeastern Scale Lumber (NSL) in the Bill of Materials. I used styrene for the bolster blocks, styrene 1/8" channel for the wood NSL one, styrene 1/8" I-beam to replace the NSL grooved center channel, and styrene .080" I-beam for the NSL 3/32" I-beam. Missing on the article list is the 1/16" thick scribed siding and 1/32" thick scribed roofing material. I highly recommend defuzzing the wood material with #0000 steel wool or 600 grit sandpaper. To reduce the unrealistic wood grain showing through your paint, I used rattle can shellac as a sanding sealer. I am not sure if the Scalecoat used in the article will be available again.

I should have built the box as per the article. I put the center blocks crosswise as opposed to laterally and then had to put wings (not shown in the picture) on them to provide gluing surfaces for the grooved siding (**Photo 1**). I used six 5/16" nuts for weights to add the needed 1 3/8 oz. Draw a centerline on the inside of the floor before gluing the box together. This will help you center the weights. Glue them into place with E6000 or epoxy, and center the weights so that the car does not lean. It is essential to keep everything square and even as you do the box assembly. I glued on the ends and center first and let it dry. I should have then glued in the weights before finishing with gluing on the top. I used good quality wood glue with clamps, so I do not feel there is any need for the nails used in the article.



***Photo 1: The completed car box with the glued in weights.***

\**Superdetailed: The definition is in process of being revised by NMRA.*

†*There must be at least four different types of cars represented in the total of the required eight cars. One of these must be a passenger car.*

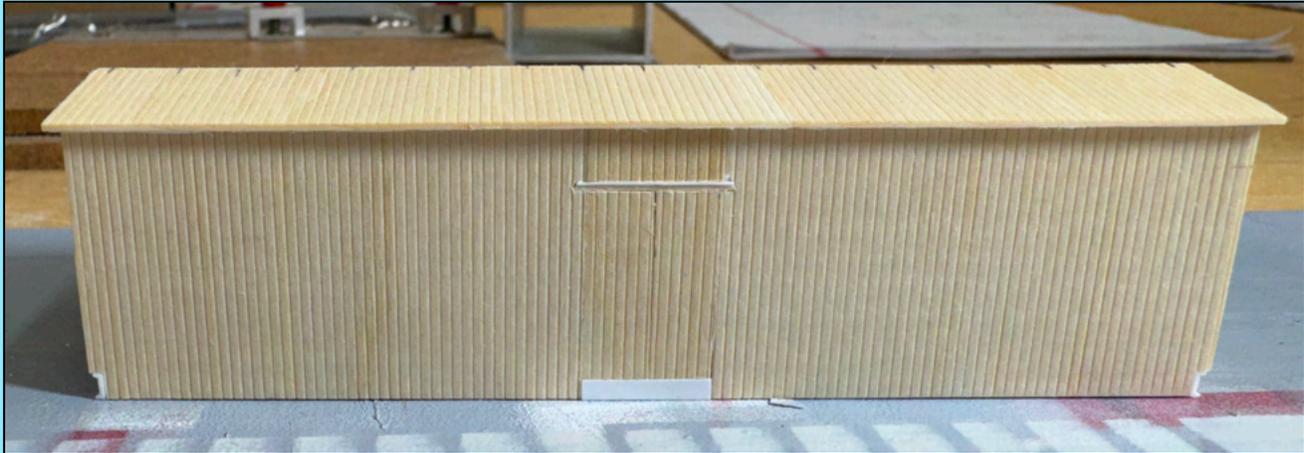
It takes about 60 NSL 2 x 6's to cover the bottom of the floor. I have found that randomly chamfering the edges of scale lumber provides delineation when glued together (**Photo 2**). I took a different approach to finishing. It would be very difficult to paint the I-beams and brake detail black whether you painted it before or after installation. I decided to mask the sides and paint the whole underside black after everything is glued in place. Before going further, it is important to draw the centerline and the position of all the side girders and truck center on the bottom. This will save a lot of time positioning the pieces. It is extremely important to mark which end is the "B" end of the car on the underside (Please don't ask me how I know that!).



*Photo 2: Bottom of the car showing the individual planks and pencil lines for positioning the I-beams.*

Out of order from the article, I now glued the scribed siding and roof to the model (**Photo 3**). When cutting the sides, I found that leaving a full board at the butted edge made it easier to fit the small piece of siding above the door. Also leaving only a little overhang over the ends made it easier to trim the corners square. It is difficult to exactly cut the front corners for the side channel. A little wood filler takes care of the problem. For the sill, I used a strip of styrene because it looks more like steel when it is finished. To make it flush with the siding, I backed it with a piece of strip wood of the required thickness. For the roof, first carefully cut the edge off the siding groove on one sheet and cut the other sheet leaving the siding groove. Fine tune this joint with a sanding block so that the joint disappears and the sheets remain square. Then glue the pieces to the roof and clamp them flat. Clamping or weighting is important. Otherwise, the 1/32" thick material can easily get bulges and not lie flat. If the butt is too tight it will bulge and if too loose it leaves a noticeable gap. I had a couple of do overs due to butt joints bulging. A very sharp chisel will separate the scribed siding from the roof for the do over.

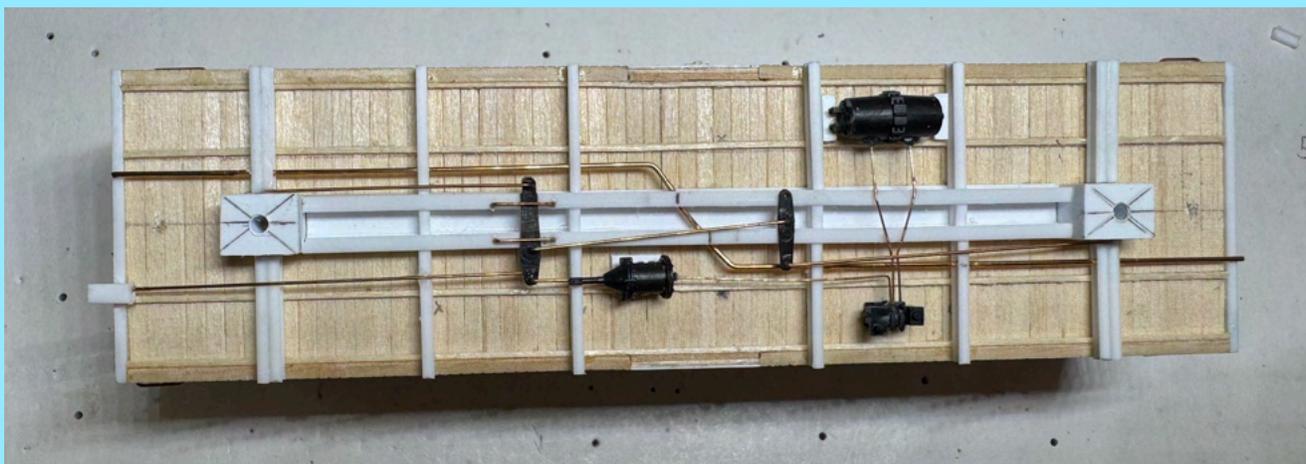
Make sure that the siding is as perfect as you can get it in place. This makes a big difference to the final model. Now is the time to use a sanding sealer (I used rattle can shellac) and then smooth it down with #0000 steel wool.



*Photo 3: Car with siding, roof, doors, kick plate and end channels installed.*

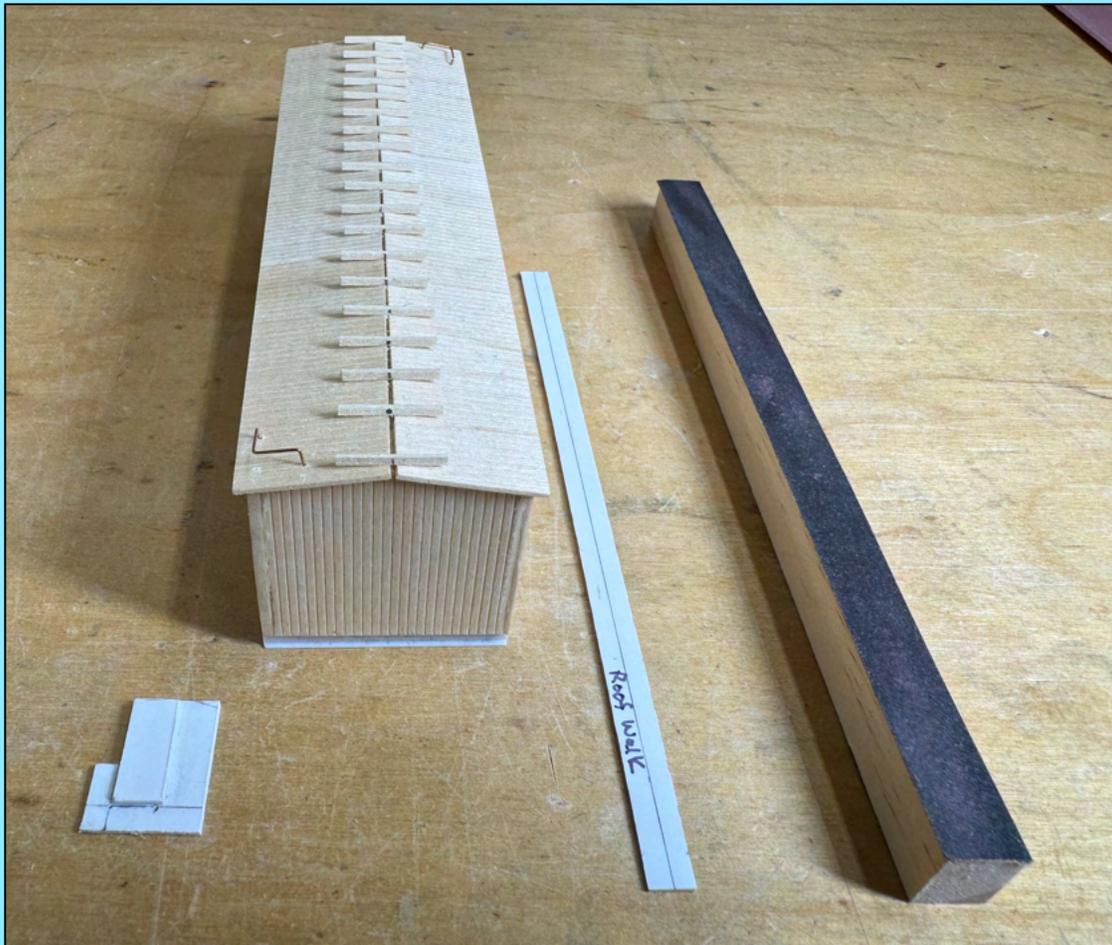
My car bolster is built up with ¼” wide styrene strip to a 0.150” thickness. After the bolster is installed, I used a 2-56 tap, or you can do what the article recommends and drill for a self-tapping screw. I located, fitted and installed Kadee 148 couplers which I then removed till the end of the project. For me the Kadee’s needed a 0.030” styrene spacer to get them to the correct height.

**The most important thing I learned in doing this project was to mark and carefully predrill all the I-beams for brake piping before gluing them in place.** My center beam is built from two styrene I-beams. I glued them to a piece of 0.020” styrene. This lets you glue the beams as a single assembly between the bolsters. The length of the assembly is the distance between the bolsters. I recommend gluing the small pieces of the lateral I-beams inside the central girder first. This will help you keep the symmetry when gluing the side beams (**Photo 4**). After installing the underside infrastructure, I waited to install the brake components. At this point, I worked on the details from the roof down.

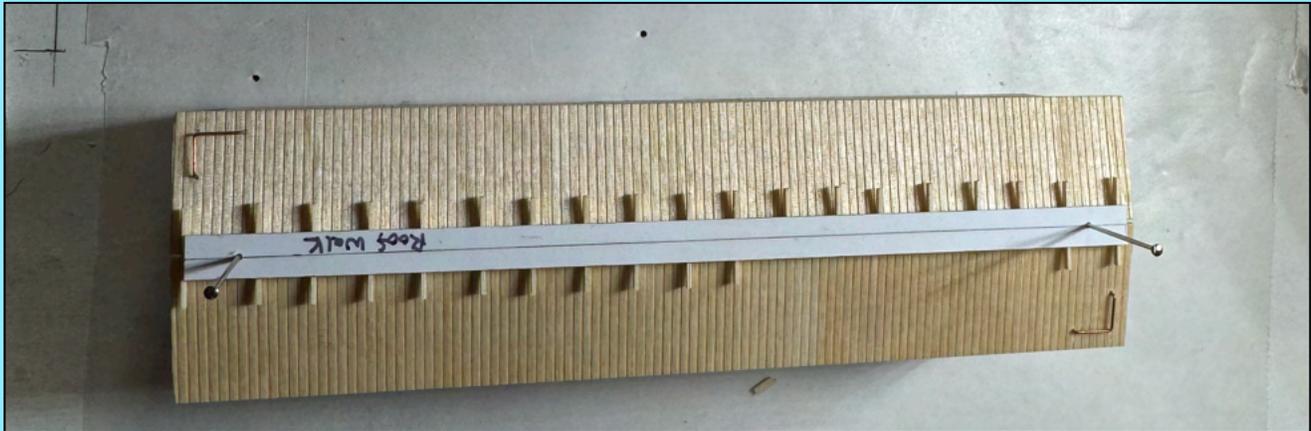


*Photo 4: The underside of the car with the bolsters, girders, brake piping, brake appliances, levers and brake control rods installed.*

My next step was to complete the roof details. To get the roof supports to the correct length and in the same plane, I made a jig and a tool. I installed the 2" x 4" roof supports as per the article. Just be sure to not file the slots too deep. I added one more support near each end of the car. I got the supports level by gluing a piece of 600 grit sandpaper to ½" wide piece of wood longer than the car (**Photo 5**). Sand the roof supports down to about three scale inches above the car. If you keep the stick level, the process will bring the supports into the same plane. Go gently, but some will inevitably break or pop out. Just replace them and continue the process. (Affixing 600 grit paper to a flat surface and sanding the supports upside down will probably also work well.) The roof walk is made of three 2" x 6"s spaced about 1/100" apart. This totals about 0.320". I cut the supports 9/32" (0.281") wide which allows the roof boards to overhang the supports just a little (**Photos 5 and 6**). I cut a strip of styrene 9/32" wide and longer than the car. I pinned the center of the strip to the center of the roof over the supports. The edge of the strip is used as a guide to cutting the roof supports to length with a #17 X-Acto blade.



*Photo 5: The roof walk supports are glued into place. Also shown are the board with sandpaper and the cut off jig. These are used to shape the roof walk supports. The jig to make the corner grabs is at the bottom left.*



*Photo 6: The roof walk support cutting jig is shown with some of the supports already trimmed to length.*

Before gluing on the roof walk boards, I masked off the roof except where the roof supports are located, and airbrushed the roof color on the roof and supports. I also air brushed the underside of the roof walk boards. It would be difficult to paint this after assembly without getting runs.

I prefer to lay planks in realistic lengths. But because the roof supports leave very little room to glue the butt joint down, I used long boards that were deeply scribed. Make sure the scribe marks land exactly over a roof support and the boards are of a realistic length.

The roof grabs were done as per the article. On one car, I used the Tichy roof hatches and cut them as per the article. This was challenging for me. For the rest of the cars, I used Grandt Line Hatches (San Juan Details) without modification. In studying prototype photos, both hatch variations were present (**Photo 7**).



*Photo 7: The Grandt Line ice hatches are shown. The picture also shows the completed roof walk and completed car side.*

For detailing the sides and ends see (Photos 8 and 9).

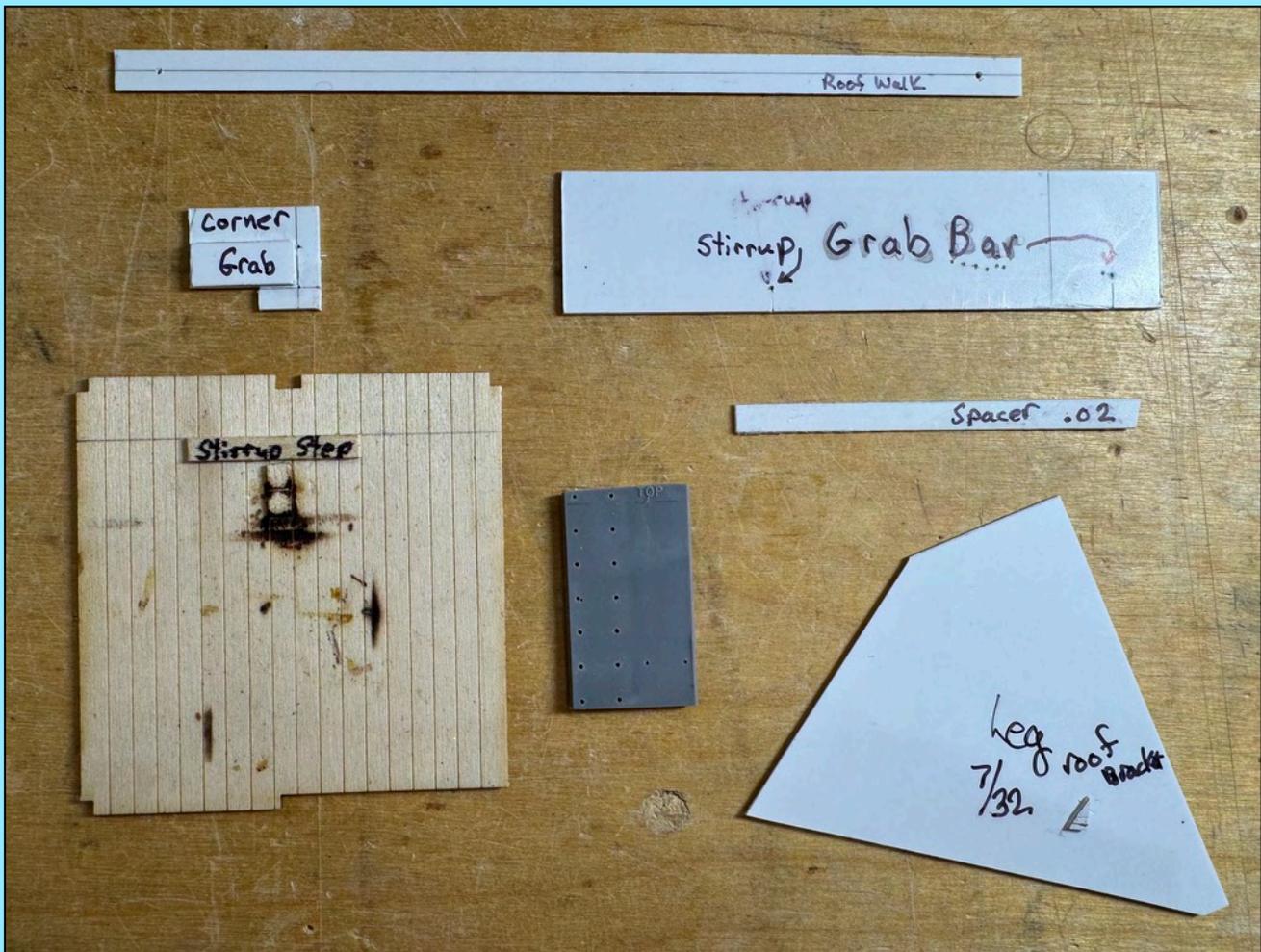


*Photo 8: The completed door hardware and the grab irons with the spacer jig.*



*Photo 9: The completed B end car details.*

The materials that I used to detail the sides are refrigerator door hardware and poling pockets from San Juan Details. The door bumpers are pieces of 0.040" x 0.010" strip styrene. I made jigs to fabricate and install all the grab bars. They are made from 0.015" phosphorbronze wire sourced from Tichy. The article uses commercially made grabs. The bolts that I used are Tichy No. 8016. I used a jig to drill the #76 hand grab bolt holes. After installing the bolts, I drilled #77 holes just below the bolts for the grabs. The legs to the corner side need to be trimmed appropriately because holes come in at the same level from both sides of the car's right corners. I used a 0.020" strip of styrene to space how far the grabs are protruding from the car side. **(Photo 10)** shows some of the jigs that I made to build the car.



*Photo 10: These are some of the jigs that I made to build the cars. The grab iron spacing jig is from Tichy.*

Instead of using commercial stirrup steps, I scratchbuilt mine from 0.015” phosphorbronze wire. These are soldered to a narrow strip of 1/64” brass sheet. Then that assembly was glued to the car with CA. The prototype had this type of mounting as well as just a bolted drop grab. My selection is a problem since the stirrups easily break off the car. I would recommend making them as a drop grab where the legs glue into the car side. This would make a sturdier construction.

These are some observations on the ends. These items were not covered in the article ([Photo 9](#)). I made the roof walk end supports from thin strips of 1/64” thick brass sheet. Be sure to leave enough space behind them to clear the fascia boards. The brake wheel platform is a 2” x 6” pre-drilled with a #77 bit spaced far enough out from the car so the brake wheel rod clears the uncoupling lever. The platform is glued to two triangular wood supports. The bottom of the rod is supported by a bracket made from two pieces of styrene channel or you could use a small piece of rectangular tubing. I used two brass screw eyes from Barksdale to support the uncoupling lever on each end.

I now detailed the underside of the car ([Photo 4](#)). I used 0.015” phosphorbronze wire from Tichy for the mechanical rods and lever retention bracket. The train air lines are 0.025” phosphorbronze wire from Tichy. I used 0.010” phosphorbronze wire from Tichy for the intra-car piping. The brake levers are scratch built from 0.020” styrene strip. The AB brake hardware is from Tichy. Raise the air reservoir on 0.060” x 0.060” blocks. Raise the brake cylinder so the arm is the height of the brake lever. I did not but you can attach the cylinder arm to the lever with a small piece of fine chain. This can also be done for the underside rod connection to underside of the brake wheel rod. You will thank yourself when running the piping if you pre-drilled the holes in the I-beams!

In my order of construction. I installed pre-painted fascia after the car was painted. This saved a lot of difficult masking.

A word of caution in handling the cars. The scribed siding easily dents. My fingernails left several marks which I worked out with sanding or filling or masking with weathering.

The cars are finished with Tru-Color paint. I used Matte Black for the underside. The sides and roof, depending on the prototype, use Swift Red, Flat White, Reefer Yellow and Box Car Red. The decal sets are from Tichy. The printing on these sets is quite thick. I experimented on some painted siding, but I could not get the decals to more prototypically settle down into the grooves. I would look for alternative decals that have more thinly printed lettering. The car is finished with multiple coats of Dulcote and then all but one were lightly weathered.

After countless hours, I had four cars that I thought could be judged for Merit Awards ([Photos 11-14](#)). I am pleased and a little relieved to tell you that they did earn Merit Awards.

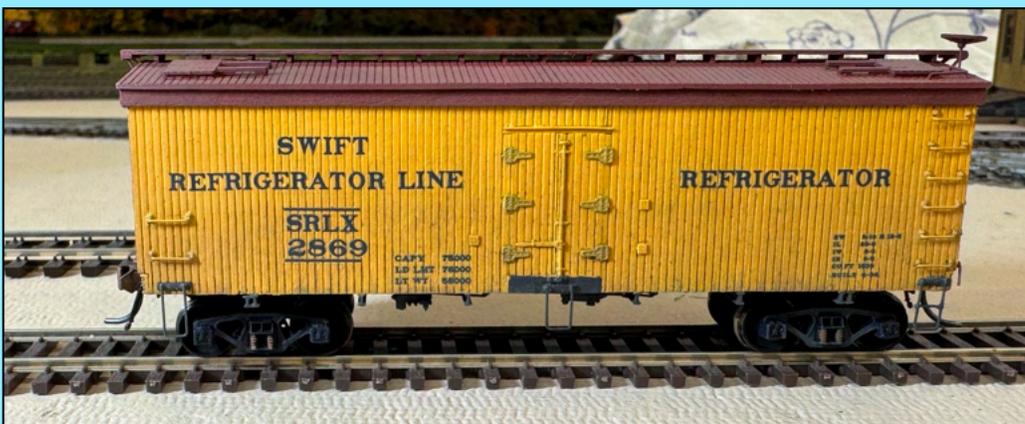




*Photo 11: Swift Car in the mid 1950's paint scheme. This was the first car that I built.*



*Photo 12: Swift Car from 1937. The paint scheme was used briefly to comply with the ICC Billboard Reefer Laws.*



*Photo 13: Swift Car from the late 30's and early 40's.*

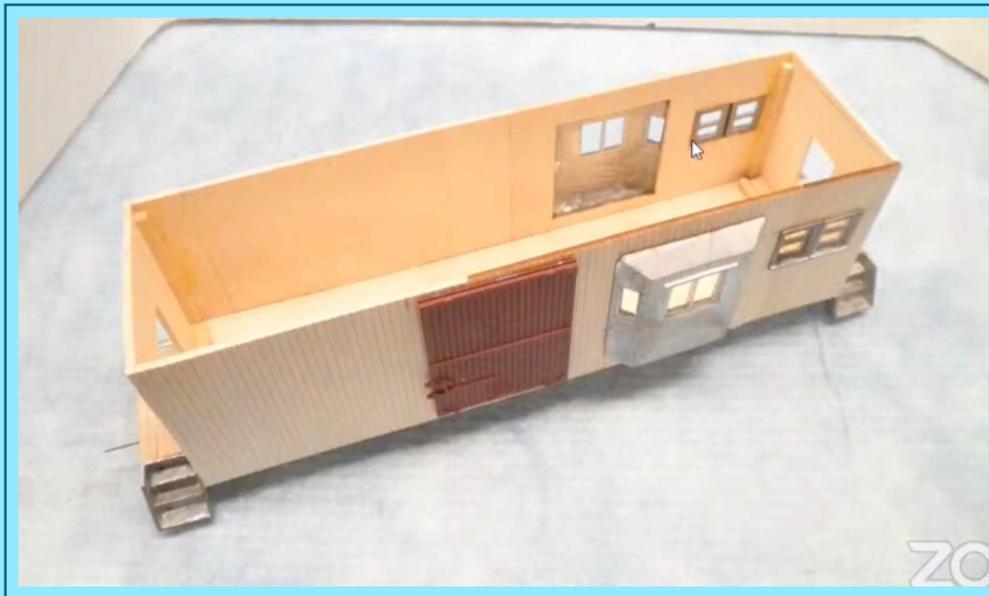


Photo 14: Swift Car from the late 40's

Video Reference on Scratchbuilding...

## Scratchbuilder's Corner

By Martin Brechbiel, MMR



How to Scratchbuild a Caboose: <https://youtu.be/QC5hcrdBa1A>

## News from the Contest Room

By Dan Peele



First things first, I need to correct another of my mistakes. In my previous article I stated Alan Mende was a Master Model Railroader. Alan was kind enough to correct me; he presently has six achievements and is working on his seventh to achieve his MMR. Perhaps I was a little early, however, I am sure it is soon to come. So, was it a mistake or just bad timing? I've been guilty of both in the past and I doubt that it will change anytime soon.

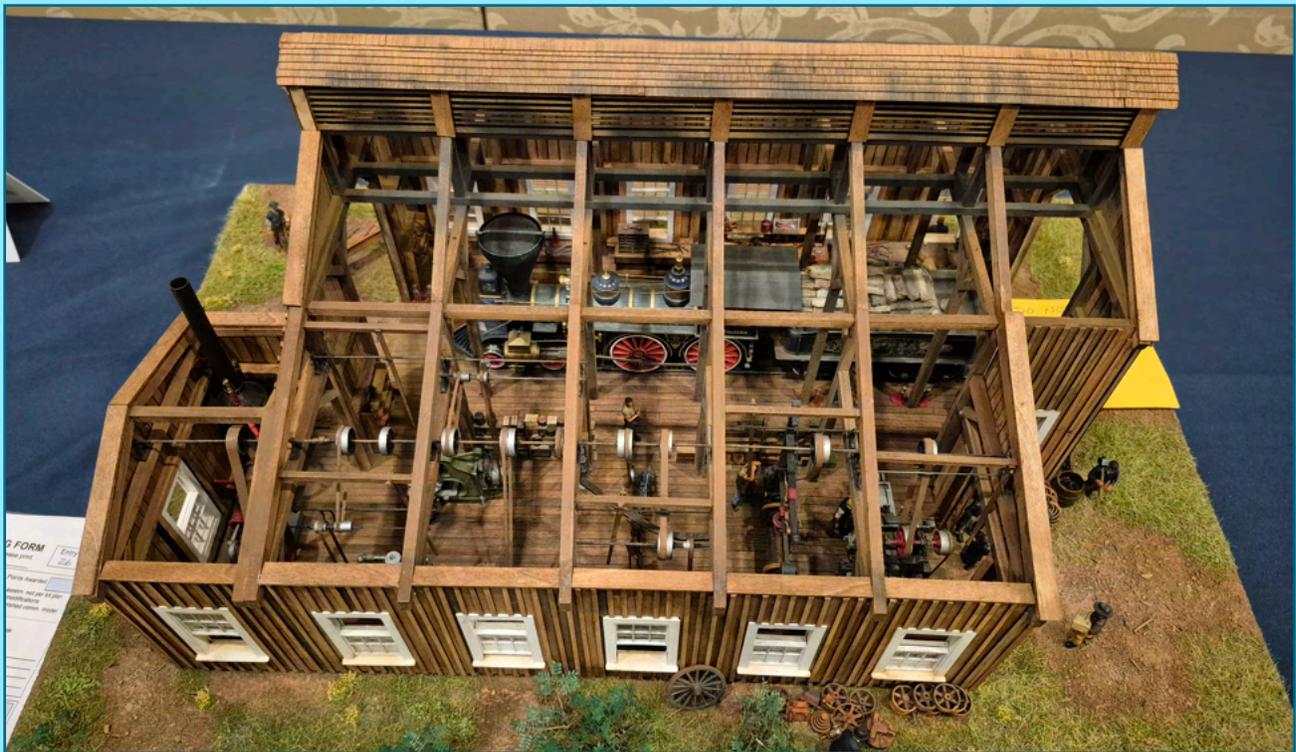
After reviewing all the data I could find for past contests, especially the amount of manual data entry required, I thought I would brush off a few Excel cobwebs to develop a new contest tracking spreadsheet. One feature I am considering is an option to allow the modeler to directly enter their information to the contest laptop. Why would this be nice? Primarily, I or the volunteer entering your data cannot misspell your name or enter any of your personal information erroneously. This applies to your model information also. I think we all agree that it is nice to win an award, but it is even better when the award correctly identifies both you and why you are being awarded. This will also help prevent overlooking an award or presenting an award to the wrong person.

Once again, I encourage all modelers to prepare an entry for the contest room. Remember, your model need not be evaluated, it can be for display purposes only for the admiration of all who enter the contest room. However, if you desire to have your entry evaluated for a possible merit award, I want to personally encourage you to do so. Based on the data I have, the MER did increase participation in the contest room from 2024 to 2025, we had 39 entries in 2024 and 42 entries in 2025. Can we have another increase in 2026? I hope so.

I am confident that we all enjoy the contest room. What is there not to enjoy, fantastic modeling on display and the modeling is railroad related. However, I alone cannot make the contest room happen. As mentioned previously, I need models. I also need evaluators. Please consider being an evaluator at the Tracks to Tidewater Convention in October. I would like at least six Master Model Railroaders to lead five teams of evaluators. Some of you may be wondering about my math skills. I would like the sixth MMR and the additional two evaluators to be ready standby in case an evaluator needs to recuse themselves. Confused, let me try again. You can enter any model you desire, however, if you have entered a model of a steam locomotive, then you should not be evaluating any steam locomotive in the contest.

So why volunteer to be an evaluator? First, you become a part of a team that gets to have a much closer look at all the models. The lead evaluator, preferably a Master Model Railroader, is the only team

member who can handle the entered model. However, they should present the model to their team displaying all sides, bottom, and top to their team, when practical. One team member will be the scribe, and the final team member may be an apprentice evaluator. Collectively, they then summarize their comments, offer praise and assign a value to your efforts based upon the NMRA's evaluating criteria. Ideally, the comments, critiques and praise will provide additional encouragement and ideas as to how to become a better modeler. Additionally, many of us are working towards the NMRA's Association Volunteer Achievement Program certificate. As an evaluator, you earn points toward this award. Also, the MER provides the evaluation team with lunch. Now who doesn't like a free meal? Finally, just look below at another image of 2025's Best in Show, Bernard Kempinski's scratch built USMRR Engine House and Machine Shop (**Photo 1**). Please remember, the evaluating teams will always get the best views and enjoy the discussion of the merits for each model.



*Photo 1: 2025's Best in Show, Bernard Kempinski's scratch built USMRR Engine House and Machine Shop( Photo by the author).*

The NMRA provides guidelines for evaluating each model. These guidelines may be found on the NMRA's website; however, I will go over them briefly to encourage you to volunteer. The purpose of the contest evaluation is to choose the winning models in each category. The purpose of the guidelines is to help the evaluators choose the winners with a secondary purpose to encourage consistency in scoring. The evaluator attempts to answer the following two questions. First, what did the modeler try to do? And second, how well did the modeler do it?

I do need to make one big clarification. Contest evaluations are quite a bit different than typical AP evaluations. Contest evaluators do not have the time to read your entire documentation package; however, they typically skim through the documentation. Their primary reference is your Form 902. Your additional documentation, while invited, is generally skimmed through quickly looking for some tidbit of information to assist their evaluation. Contest evaluators are primarily concerned with what the modeler has done and how well they have done it. Evaluation by weight of the supporting documentation is not done at the contest room level. AP evaluators are obligated to read the entire documentation package. Remember also, that you can earn the same achievement via either evaluation process. The award is the same regardless of how it is earned.

One other major difference between AP evaluations and contest evaluations is that the contest evaluators generally do not know who the modeler is. The models in the contest room are just that, a model distinguished by number. No names are included in the documentation the contest evaluators see. This makes it difficult or impossible to evaluate the modeler; therefore, the model is all that is considered.

Now, just in case you are not aware, the MER does not follow the National Contest completely. The MER has discontinued the Photo Contest in the past due to a lack of participation. We also divided the categories Structures and Displays of the Model Contest into On-Line and Off-Line for both at some time in the past. I have heard some people say they do not see the need for this and desire to more closely match the NMRA National Contest categories. I agree with this and would like to see the MER follow the NMRA's guidelines and plan to ask our board to adopt standard NMRA categories for the Model Contest. If you want to keep the separation or agree with the consolidation, please let me know your thoughts on this.

The Module Contest will continue to be scored like the National Contest. The MER Contest Room will use a simple ranking system based on overall impression to determine the top three modules; they will no longer be evaluated by any criteria or eligible for AP certificates as I do not see that option on the NMRA's website.

The People's Choice Awards have been revised by the NMRA which I hope the MER adopts also. Again, please let me know your thoughts.

Finally, the NMRA has updated Form 901 and Form 902. Please use the new forms for your contest room entries. I am using the new forms as my guideline for the new contest spreadsheet.

Links to referenced websites:

NMRA's Achievement Program Judging Guidelines

<https://www.nmra.org/sites/default/files/2006-judging-guide-lines.pdf>

Form 901 & 902

[https://www.nmra.org/sites/default/files/education/contest/form\\_901.pdf](https://www.nmra.org/sites/default/files/education/contest/form_901.pdf)

[https://www.nmra.org/sites/default/files/education/contest/form\\_902.pdf](https://www.nmra.org/sites/default/files/education/contest/form_902.pdf)

## Where Did All the Cabooses Go?

By Jim Allen

Somewhere between graduating from school, having kids, and getting established in a career, they phased out the caboose. They were very sneaky about it. They took their time and slowly got rid of them, thinking we wouldn't notice. Well, they were right. I mean I noticed once in a while that a train was missing a caboose, or was it? Life can get pretty busy.

All of my life I loved to watch trains, but who didn't? Steam locomotives were long gone before I was born, so I didn't really know to miss them. Nowadays it seems most people get aggravated when the cross bars come down, but not me. I do miss the cabooses, though. As kids we would wait and wait until finally one of us would spot it, "There it is!"; so cool. No man standing at the end, though; it's ok, maybe next time. It was the trifecta to see a train, hear the horn, and see the caboose. Perfect, now if the man was standing outside on the caboose platform, Eureka!

In the early 2000s I had the opportunity to explore the Virginia Transportation Museum. It was there that I spotted many of the missing cabooses. Everything was cool until I saw them. They were lined up in rows side by side and behind one another. Some were still good looking, but many were old, relics from a bygone era. It's kind of like the houses in rural Virginia; people just can't bear to get rid of them. I get it that they cost too much, they aren't needed, and technology is so much better now. Well, I don't care! They could put a hollowed-out caboose at the end of the trains. They don't need to do anything but look like a caboose. Think of all the smiles they would be putting on people's faces. Oh my God, did you see that, there goes a caboose! Just maybe it would even slow people down, and make them happy to see the cross bars come down.



*Photo taken at Shaffer's Crossing Roanoke, Va. by Jim Allen*

## Last Stop before Luray

By Jim Allen

If you wanted to come to Page County to visit family in the early 1900s, you probably took a train. Perhaps you came in from Manassas, or Fairfax through Front Royal. Between Front Royal and the town of Shenandoah there were several little depots or stations along the way. Sadly, many of these communities are long gone, and with them their depots/stations. One such would be the Elgin depot in Kimball, Virginia. Last stop before Luray, folks! In some cases, the train didn't stop at all; they could just snag the mail bag from a line on the way by.

In 1910 the Elgin depot was slated for expansion to help with the ever-growing Norfolk & Western Railway's freight business. Other than that, I found very little on this depot, and so I have no idea if it ever did expand. We do know that it was not used that far into the future and in fact it has been long gone for some time now. Armed with an old map, I set out to find the exact spot of its location. I believe that I succeeded. The house seen in the original photo still stands. The Kimball Post Office, which was on the other side of the depot has been moved across the street and used for storage. Interestingly there are a few old non-functioning poles still in the area which also helped me find the exact spot.

Did you know that Kimball, Virginia was named after a very early N&W railway president, Frederick J. Kimball? Under Kimball, the N&W railway would become famous for manufacturing steam locomotives in Roanoke, Virginia. An elderly man I met wanted to talk to me about the Elgin depot. Elgin depot was originally named Kimball depot. As we spoke, he told me where he lived and how when he was young the train engineer would pick him up or drop him off at his home. The gentleman actually didn't live that far from the station, but the engineer knew where he lived and offered to drop him in front of his house. He spoke of the different seasons and the cargo that was loaded onto the train. In the fall, the local farmers would load the train full of apples and peaches. The gentleman spoke of riding the train all day for next to nothing.

The following is provided by Wiki: *"A request was made to rename the town of Big Lick, now Roanoke, in his honor, but Mr. Kimball turned it down. Kimball Avenue in Roanoke, Virginia, was named in his honor. A decorative fountain in downtown Roanoke was named for him and dedicated in 1907. The rail station Kimball, just north of the town of Luray, VA was originally named after F.J Kimball, but the name was later changed to Elgin to eliminate confusion with another station. Kimball Road in Luray still bears his name though."*

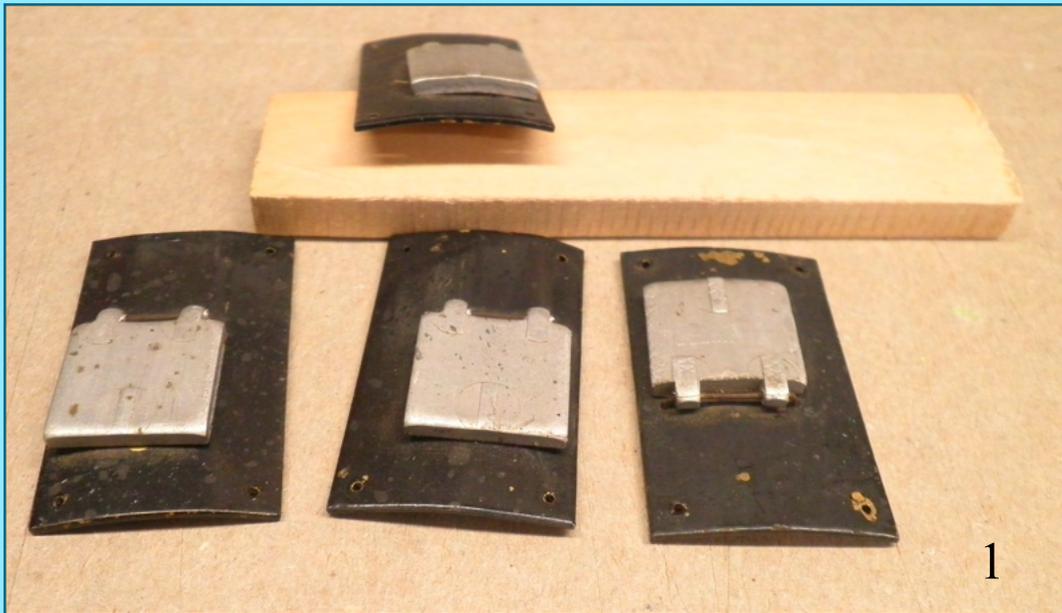
The black and white photo was found in the “The Pictorial Heritage of Page County” book, a great book with lots of nice photos. The other image (below) was taken by Jim Allen.



## Building a Round Roof Cudahy Reefer

By Martin Brechbiel, MMR

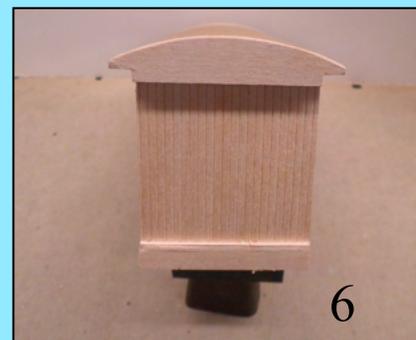
This project had its birth in a set of reefer roof hatches that I had acquired once upon a time that had curved bases and hatches for being used on a rounded roof (**Photos 1, 2**). They had rested for a number of years in a zip lock bag in a parts bin until that bin was inspected for items no longer needed. The bag sat on the back of my one work station until I decided that they had to be put into use. It was just a matter of time to assemble the rest of the cast of basic parts to build up a round roof reefer car.



A length of roof stock was the first and obvious requirement (**Photo 3**). After that, I needed a floor. The floor was assembled from stripwood with 1/16" thick scribed siding facing downwards and with a train line (0.032" wire) threaded through the floor beams and out the end sills (**Photo 4**).



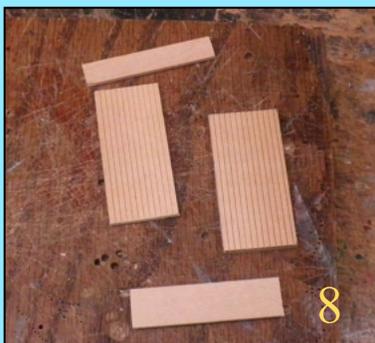
From there, it was a simple matter to assemble the basic core “box” on the floor. The end blocks were just cut from scrap pine. Scribed siding was glued to one side and the ends were recessed when the box was glued together leave a roof overhang and an exposed end sill. The ends of the roof stock were also first covered with some 1/32" basswood and shaped to the contour of the roof to conceal the end grain of the wood (**Photos 5, 6**).

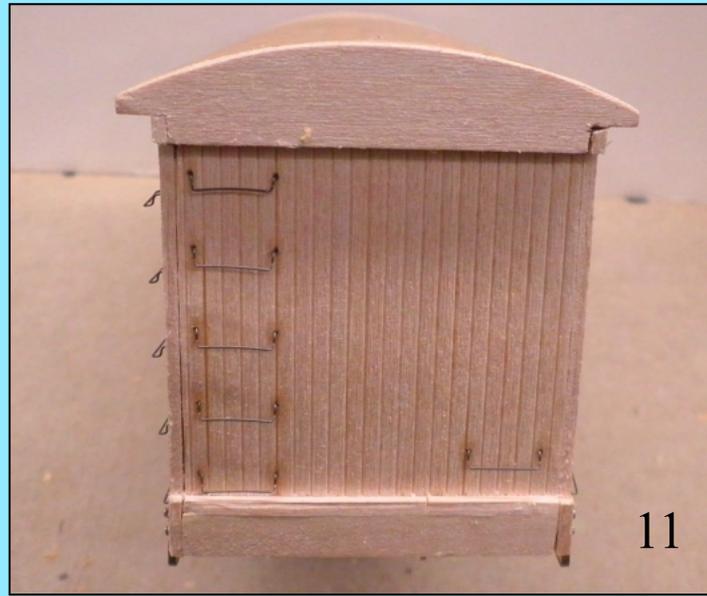


Scribed siding was applied to the sides of the car leaving an opening for the reefer doors. Some scrap 1/32" basswood was glued behind the siding across the interior of the opening to provide support for building up the doors in place (**Photo 7**).

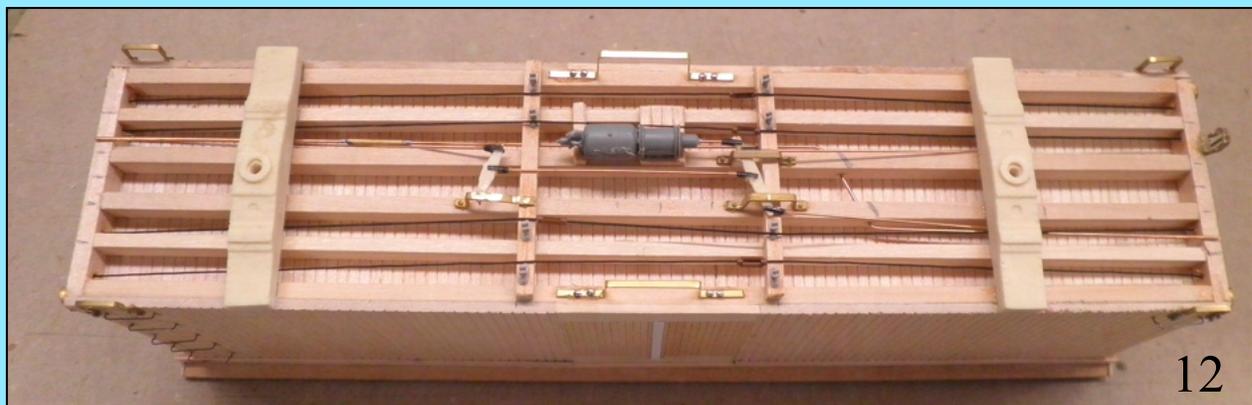


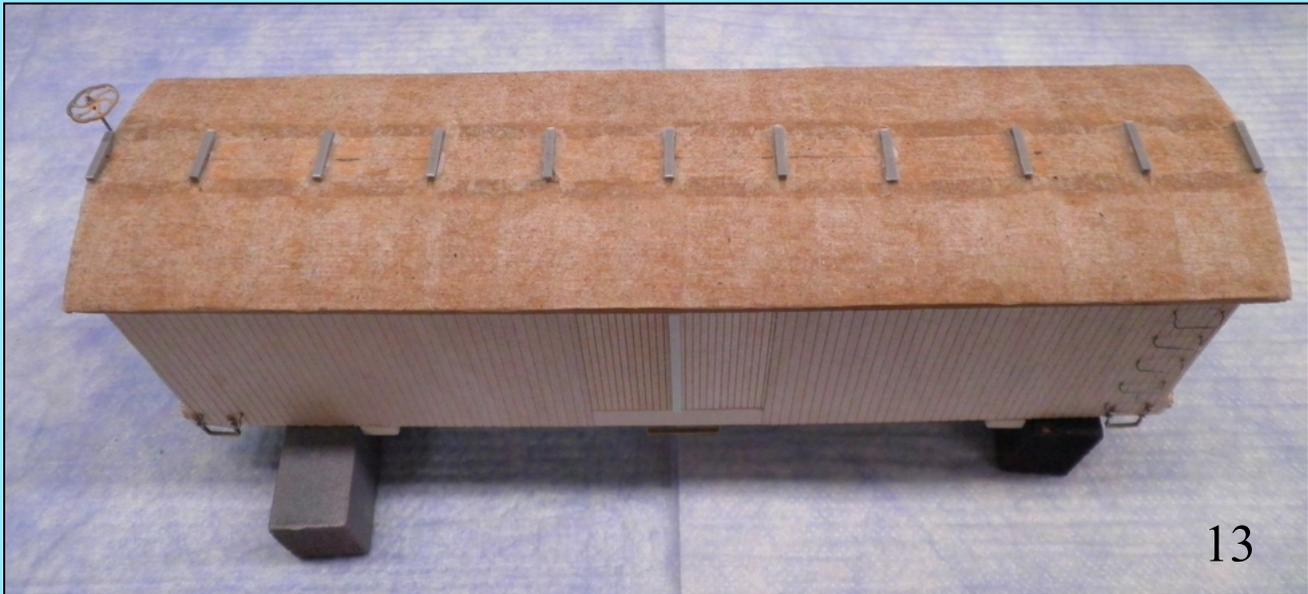
The doors and their surrounding top and bottom plates were built up from some finer scribed siding and some 3" basswood stock (**Photo 8**). These four parts were laid into place in the openings and glued into place with Titebond. A strip of 0.020" styrene was added as an overlap detail of the doors (**Photo 9**). Stirrup steps were glued into place on the corners and then pinned into place. Grab irons were added to the sides and ends (**Photos 10, 11**).





The underbody parts were then installed. A truss rod underbody with Grandt Line 10" queen posts and added needle beams was installed. The truss rods were a single length of surgical silk passed through each of the car end sills four times adding a Tichy turnbuckle. Each passage was secured with a large nbw (nut-bolt-washer) casting added into the end sill with CA glue. The K brake casting was a 3D printed part. All of the brake rigging was done using Tichy 0.025" phosphorbronze wire with Grandt Line turnbuckles cut down to form the connecting clevises. The brake levers were made from styrene and the brake lever hangers were brass PSC parts. Side steps under each door were made from 0.015" x 0.060" brass (Detail Assoc.), first glued into place, and then pinned with CA for strength. A brake stirrup casting (PSC) was added at the brake end on the bottom of the end sill. A brake wheel (PSC) was soldered to some 0.028" wire and mounted to the brake end of the car (**Photo 12**). Roof walk supports were added across the length of the roof. Tar paper was added using overlapping single ply napkin glued down with aqueous Titebond (**Photo 13**).





The roofing tar paper was painted Lark Dark Gray and the reefer hatches were painted Engine Black. The roof walk was painted Roof Brown. The reefer door hardware including the drip edge (brass angle) was painted Engine Black and the car body was painted Freight Car Red. All of the rest of the details were painted Engine Black. All of these parts and more were added to the painted car body. The underbody components were painted black and the rest of the underbody stained with mystery MinWax. The lettering for this car was done using dry transfers from Clover House. There were two color layers, so following the order in the instructions, the first layer was applied and the lettering sealed with Matte Clear. A day later the second color later was applied and then that lettering along with the rest of the car was sealed with Matte Clear. Airhose castings (PSC) were soldered into 3/64" brass tubing and then added to the train line through the end sill. Trucks and couplers completed the build of this car ([Photos 14-16](#)).





And this just shows what kind of trouble you can get into when you find an old Ziploc of odd parts in your shop!

# Dead Rail

by Alex Belida



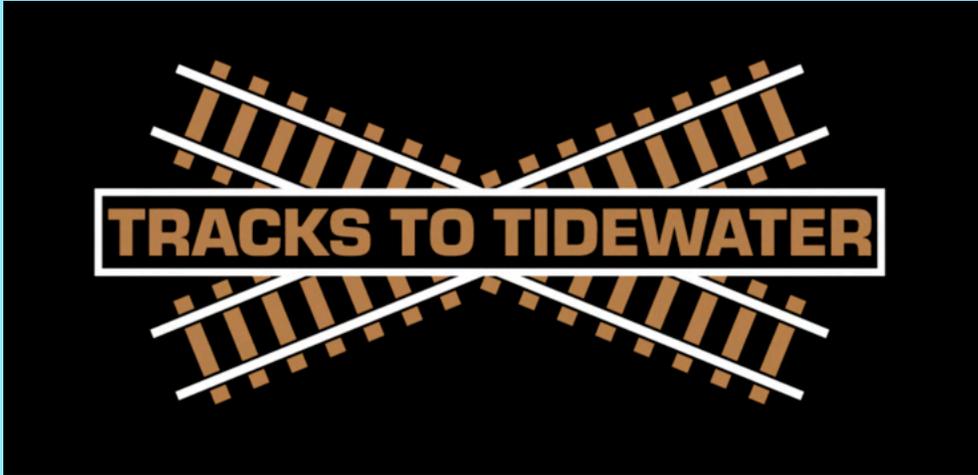
Alex Belida, MMR has written a model railroad thriller:

At a crowded national model railroad convention, the disappearance of a rare brass locomotive sets off a chain of events no one expects. What begins as a theft soon escalates into murder and a conspiracy threatening national security. An expert model railroader and a determined reporter follow the trail to uncover a shadowy espionage scheme. As the truth comes into focus, they discover the model railroading world can conceal deadly flaws. *Dead Rail* is a suspenseful thriller that proves even the smallest rails can carry the deadliest secrets.

Now available on Amazon in [paperback](#) and for [Kindle](#). Also as an eBook-on [Apple](#), [Barnes & Noble](#), [Smashwords](#) & [Kobo](#).

Mark your  
Calendar now!

2026 MER  
Convention  
October 15-18



TRACKS TO TIDEWATER

## From the Divisions... Branch Lines

As *The Local* Editor, I have the distinct pleasure of receiving a copy of all the Division newsletters, which are all very informative and creative to say the least. Here are links to those publications and to their Division Websites for easy access:

Divisions	Newsletters
<a href="#">1 - New Jersey Division</a>	<a href="#"><i>Train Orders</i></a>
<a href="#">2 - Potomac Division</a>	<a href="#"><i>Potomac Flyer</i></a>
<a href="#">3 - Philadelphia Division</a>	<a href="#"><i>The Dispatcher</i></a>
<a href="#">4 - Tidewater Division</a>	<a href="#"><i>The Callboard</i></a>
<a href="#">5 - James River Division</a>	<a href="#"><i>Crossties - Index</i></a>
<a href="#">10-South Mountain Division</a>	<a href="#"><i>Wheel Report</i></a>
<a href="#">11 - Susquehanna Division</a>	<a href="#"><i>Sidetracks</i></a>
<a href="#">12 - Carolina Southern Division</a>	<a href="#"><i>The Brass Pounder</i></a>
<a href="#">13 - Carolina Piedmont Division</a>	<a href="#"><i>The Herald</i></a>
<a href="#">14 - Chesapeake Division</a>	<a href="#"><i>The Relay</i></a>

### Other NMRA Links:

[Bulletin](#)

[NMRA Partners \(Discounts\)](#)

[Events](#)

[Archives](#)

[Education](#)

[Turntable](#)

[Submit Articles](#)

[Videos](#)

[Clinics](#)

## Send in Your Articles

We are always looking for new articles, tips, ideas, photos, and comments from our readers. If you have been awarded an AP (Achievement Program) Certificate or an MMR (Master Model Railroader) award, please consider writing an article about it so others can learn how you did it. We always enjoy looking at new layouts, dioramas, and models that our members have created. If you would like to contribute to *The Local*, please send an email containing your article and photos to [The Local Editor](#).

*The Local* welcomes and encourages articles, photographs, and model railroad related material as contributions to our members' education and enjoyment of the hobby. Materials should have a wide appeal. The Editor will exercise all due care of submissions, but contributors should not send paper/photo originals without retaining back-up copies. Editors, by definition, reserve the right and have the responsibility to make corrections, deletions, and changes to accommodate space. If your item is time-sensitive in any way, please advise the Editor. Otherwise, stories and photos that are accepted are published in approximately the order in which they were received.

We love our authors and we love our jobs in creating *The Local* for you to enjoy. We receive many articles with great content and we are always anxious to publish them. However, so many articles that we receive are not in a good format and require many hours of work to get them ready for publication. When you are preparing your article to send to the Editor, please follow the instructions presented here. It won't require any more work for you in writing the article, but it will save us many hours of proofreading and publishing time. Depending on the size of the article, it may take as many as 10-12 hours to actually get it in the newsletter. We can save at least half that time if it comes to us prepared according to the instructions.

## How to Submit an Article for The Local (Please Follow These Steps Carefully!)

1. **Please read** the article written by Martin Brechbiel, MMR on "[Preparing Your Manuscript for Publication in The Local](#)."
2. Compose and submit your text in Word format (.doc or docx).
3. Use Times New Roman font in 12 pt size.
4. The title should be **centered** and in **bold**.
5. Directly under the title should be "By (your name)" - centered, not bold. If you are an MMR, put it there.
6. If the photos are yours, enter in parentheses (Photos by the author) right after your name.
7. Enter your text with no paragraph indents. Justify the text so it is even on both sides.
8. In your text, refer to your photos this way: **(Photo 1)** - in parentheses, bold and blue.
9. Between paragraphs in your text, write "**Insert Photo 1 here**" where you want the photo to appear. **DO NOT** put your photos there. Otherwise, we just have to take them out.
10. Include the number of the Photo in the file name of the Photo so we know which one goes with which number.
11. Photos must be clear and sharp or they cannot be accepted. JPG, GIF, TIFF and PNG formats are acceptable.
12. Photo captions should be listed at the end of your article, or in a separate Word file, and numbered with the same number as the photo.
13. Send your text and your photos separately by email to [The Local Editor](#). They can all be sent in the same email as long as the total file size is less than 25 MB. If the size is larger than that, you will have to split them into two or three emails.

## What Happens to Your Article after You Send It In?

First, the substance and context of the article has to be reviewed. Is it original? Has it been used before, or published elsewhere? Was it borrowed from someone else's work? Is it an appropriate topic for our newsletter? We've had to reject a few articles because they were more about rail fanning than they were about model railroading.

Then the text is carefully reviewed line by line by four different sets of eyes to check for typos, grammatical errors, wording or phrasing problems that have to be rewritten to be more understandable. Punctuation has to be corrected. If there are photos in the text, they have to be removed. Photos frequently require editing to make them look brighter and more appealing. File names of the photos have to be changed to include the number of the photo.

After the proofreading is finished, the text has to be entered into the publishing program, paragraph by paragraph, sometimes line by line. The text often has to be resized to make it fit properly without looking inconsistent. When we come to a point where a photo has to be inserted, it has to be resized so that it fits in with the text and in the right order with the proper caption. If a photo is missed, the whole article may have to be redone in order to get the photo in the right place.

It's just like putting a model together in many ways. You start with the raw materials or the parts that come in a kit. The materials and instructions for the kit are what the author provides. In this case, the various parts include the words that have to be put together properly. Then the paragraphs and the photos may have to be rearranged. Then you have to fit the pieces into the right places, so that they make sense and look appealing. There are many details that have to be added or corrected. Eventually, we glue them all together by converting them from Word into a pdf file.

## What Kinds of Articles Do We Like to See?

1. Anything about modeling, whether it be about just putting a kit together, kit bashing, scratchbuilding, or just adding details or weathering to a model.
2. Any type of "How to..." article, as long as it is about model railroading.
3. New tips or techniques, or even old ones used in a new way.
4. A tour of your layout or that of a friend, including its name, location, theme, era, scale, size, best features and biggest challenges.
5. Summary of a model railroad conference you visited.
6. Tell us about your workbench, or any special tools you use.
7. Tell us how you fixed a problem you encountered with your model or layout.
8. If you received an AP or MMR Certification, explain how you did it, what were the challenges. What would you recommend to others working on the same project.
9. New electrical techniques that you performed, new automations, how you set up signals, how you installed sound or flashing signs, billboards, or other details.
10. Scenery techniques, mountains, water, river rapids, trees, forests, ground cover.
11. Building a bridge or trestle.
12. Photographing your layout or model.
13. How to recruit more people into the hobby.
14. Your summary of a clinic you attended.
15. How we can help each other.

---

**Special Notes for Authors (MUST READ before submitting an article):**

---



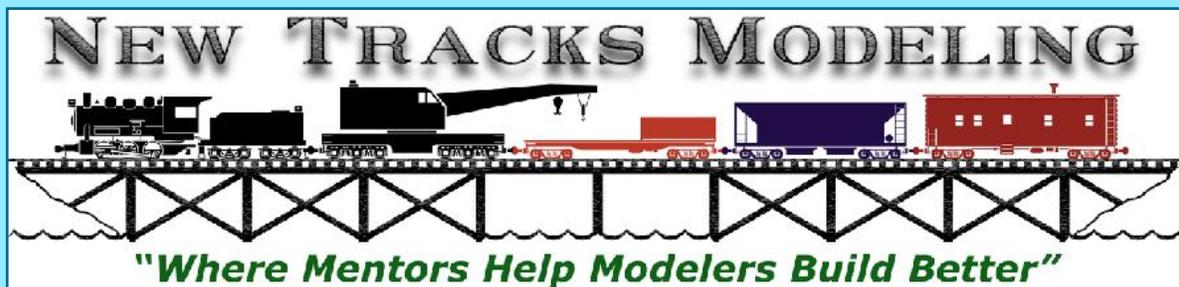
Please only send us your own creative work or that for which you have written permission to use so we can give that source proper credit. We need to avoid any copyright infringement situations. If you have previously published your article or photo in any other magazine or newsletter, including a Division or Regional newsletter or your own website blog, it cannot be reproduced in The Local without written permission from the magazine publisher, editor, and author or photographer. Also, ***Please read*** the article written by Martin Brechbiel, MMR on “Preparing Your Manuscript for Publication in The Local.” If this is your first submission to The Local, please fill out and return this Media Agreement Form to the Editor, which gives us permission to use your material and verifies that the work is yours, or that you have obtained written permission to use it. Once your article is approved for publication, and you have qualified for 42 or more points in the Author Category of the Achievement Program (AP), you may submit a Statement of Qualifications Form along with a Record and Validation Form to your Division AP Manager to receive your Author AP Certificate.

---

## NMRA Membership Programs and Savings

The NMRA has several money saving programs and discounts exclusively for NMRA Members.

Check out the ones listed on this page!





*HO Covered Hopper from the Cincinnati Division*

Hello once again to NMRA, MER, Division Superintendent, Assistant Superintendents, Directors, News-Letter Editors, Web Masters, Facebook Managers and members in-general. We previously reached out to you in the Fall of 2022 and in subsequent ads since then.

We are getting in touch with you once again with a request to publicize and promote Cincinnati Division 7's limited-edition, HO scale, N&W HC-46 ACF 2-Bay Covered Hopper cars that we have for sale. This car is unique in that it is a repaint scheme with patched-out data.

The following link provides details about it as well as pricing, shipping and ordering information.  
<https://division7mid-centralregionnmra.godaddysites.com/car-projects>

It would be greatly appreciated if you would make your membership aware of this limited-edition freight car by publicizing it in your Region's and/or Division's web page, newsletter or email blast.

We thank you in advance for your support!

Paul Maciulewicz  
 NMRA; MCR; Cincinnati Division 7  
 Car Projects Chairman

## **Art and Miniatures**

By Martin Brechbiel, MMR

We have often looked at the models for a modeler or the layout and remarked, “What an Artist!” This of course leads into the thoughts that Jim has expressed questioning whether model railroad models can be considered an Art form. I for one have frequently related and embraced the philosophy of Andy Warhol that “Art is anything you can get away with.”

What many may not be aware of is that there is a very real and vibrant constituent of art that is related to miniatures. During the course of far too many bland and boring bowl games this past December while struggling to maintain consciousness, I wandered off to one of the several PBS stations and stumbled upon a series, “Craft in America.” What caught my interest was that this specific installment (S15E2) that was titled, “Miniatures”, which features a rather extensive international show in Santa Fe, the International Folk Art Market. Watching that opening was enough to stimulate my flagging brain from a state of somnolence for another hour that was spent most worthwhile in fascination. The episode is available on-line at <https://www.pbs.org/video/miniatures-episode-ktse0u/>

No, model trains were not evident. But there was a segment about Cuban artist Leandro Gomez Quintero who builds trucks from scratch using what we might describe as scrap and trash found in his daily travels. These models are what we might term “super-detailed” and highly creative representing vehicles that he has seen in his life. Watching him carve tires from Styrofoam packing and then weather those with real dirt really depicted the sense of frugality interesting with creativity. And, who has not used real dirt, real stones, etc. on their model train layout?

But then what really caught my attention were the furniture miniatures created by Mark Murphy. He uses tools very much from the same catalog that model railroaders employ to make strikingly accurate copies of 18th & 19th century American, 20th century Japanese and Arts & Crafts furniture in 1/12 scale. This is a common doll house scale, but I do hasten to add the 1/48 (O scale) is also a scale with an active doll house miniatures arena. Take a look at his craftsmanship: <http://www.markmurphyminiatures.com/>. If you peruse his web site you will find that he does sell a selection of chairs, some of which I am familiar with in 1:1 scale. And, if you search for his work on eBay you might find a corner cabinet available for a mere \$3,999! As some have argued about model trains not being just toys, neither are these chairs and more just children’s doll house furniture.

Those were just two of the artists featured that rose to the top in interest as they might be related to model railroad models and their relationship to Art. The others were also quite impressive and form the basis of recommendation of watching all of this show. I have always appreciated the works of Gustav Baumann beyond just his color woodcuts, but also his oil paintings and furniture.

So, let’s go back to the beginning. One can connect our hobby to Art in miniature form, the replication of reality, or even something fanciful without too much effort. In any case, Art is in the eye of the beholder as well as quite probably, whatever indeed that you can get away with, and I’m sticking with that as my position here, too!

(Reprinted with Permission from New Tracks newsletter -Ed.)

Back on Track...

# Imagination and Creativity

By Greg Warth, Editor

I am always amazed, as I review these pages in every issue, by the imagination and creativity of the remarkable craftsmen who imagine and then create these projects which heretofore did not exist. And even more of a treasure is that they write these articles so that we can share in their thoughts as they delve into their crafts. They are all unique scholars in developing and explaining their creations, each in his or her own way.

Each of these projects is a wondrous achievement for which these artists, authors, and constructive engineers don't always receive an award. Nevertheless, we all truly appreciate what they have done and what they continue to accomplish. They are true artists in every sense of the word. They deserve our praise and encouragement to do more.

Their creations tell stories of how man has built and interacted with complicated machines and their environment to build lives for themselves and their families over many years. It all starts with imagining what could be done, followed by creating it and then sharing it with others.

Leadership helps to organize these artists and these projects into groups and categories that make sense, that foster and inspire the imaginations of others who are drawn to be involved in this expression of creativity. Those artists who have accomplished the most become the teachers of those who are new to the art and who want to learn how to use their own imaginations to create new things, even better things.

We are not perfect in these endeavors. Sometimes we make mistakes or we find better ways to create things and then we have to create do overs. But that's part of the process also, having the wherewithal to take a step back and review what we've done and determine how we could do it better. As a result, failures often result in improvements and even more imagination and creativity.

One thing leads to another.

Imagination —> Creation —> Artistry—> Do Overs —> Improvement —> Sharing—> Teaching—> Leadership—> Organization—> Inspiration—> Aspiration—>Participation—> Group Imagination—> More Creativity—>More Artistry

There is considerable overlap in these different categories, but we are all a part of this circle in one way or another. Which part do you belong to?

Thanks to all the editors, proofreaders, staff, officers, leaders, authors, artists and craftsmen who make this organization possible. And thanks to all who participate in this imaginative and creative development, which is the Art of Model Railroading.

