NMRA Mid-Eastern Region

The Local

Official publication of the Mid-Eastern Region, NMRA – A tax-exempt organization

SEARCH

Modeling the McLin Creek Viaduct

By Steven Colby (Photos by the author)

Inside the Model Railroad Center (MRC) of the Southeastern Narrow Gauge and Short Line Museum, aka "The Newton Depot," in Newton, NC, we are constructing an HO layout to represent the local area including Hickory, Newton, Conover, Catawba, and eventually the branch line to Lenoir. One objective of the layout is to have some identifiable landmarks (Layout Design Elements) represented as a matter of general interest and to make the layout as believable as possible. Most visitors appreciate the workmanship put into the layouts at the MRC, but it is enjoyable to see their eyes light up when they recognize a feature on a layout, someplace they know of or have visited. The McLin Creek viaduct (**Photo 1**) was a must have Layout Design Element on the museum volunteers' list. The viaduct was built around 1858 by the Western North Carolina RR, and it is easily viewed from Old Catawba Road which parallels the railroad right-of-way at the viaduct. (Continued on p. 14)

Photo 1: Streetside View of McLin Creek Viaduct

From the Editor's Desk…

America: 250 (or more) Years in the Making

By Greg Warth, Editor

Most of us tend to be very proud of those 250 years that we spent on building our country. Actually however, that amount of time is a pittance when compared with the many centuries it took for Europe and Asia to establish themselves. Nevertheless, there is a tremendous amount of history that occurred during those two and a half centuries. A lot of that history involved railroads moving passengers, coal, lumber, steel, textiles, food and other goods. Imagine if we had no railroads to do that important work. I'm sure our industrial progress would be nowhere as advanced as it is today.

Our Model Railroad Museum in Norfolk had to be dismantled and moved to storage temporarily this month. We are planning to rebuild it as soon as we find a new location. For at least one of our new layouts, I think if we incorporate more history into our scenes, perhaps establishing a timeline from the 1600s all the way into the 2000s, depicting important historical events along the way, the interest and the educational content would be profound. This would be wonderful, but it sounds like a Herculean project. We would have to get all the model railroaders in the Mid-Eastern Region to visit us for a year to get it done. Either that, or create a new term called "selective time compression" and spread it to the limit. Our President, Fred Humphrey, said at the beginning of this journey, "Think big." So why stop now.

Speaking of Herculean projects, this move is one of those to the nth degree.

Contents

Almost two years ago, we built ten wooden, sturdy, heavy layouts, hoping that perhaps we would not have to move them later. Unfortunately, that hope has dissolved. So here we are, perhaps wishing our "big" plans had been a little smaller.

I have no regrets though. This just means we get to start over, fix our mistakes and make something even better than we did before. By the way, if you are looking for some volunteer work to do this summer and don't mind traveling to Virginia Beach and joining up with a bunch of guys with their heads in the clouds, let us know. Have we got a deal for you!

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

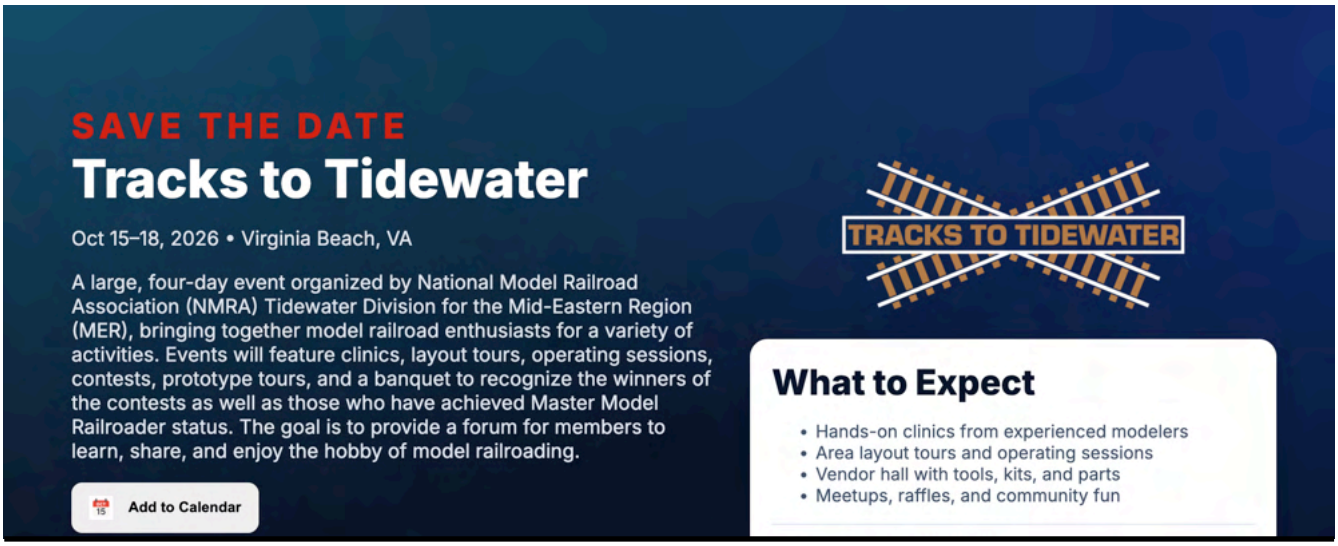
Martin Brechbiel, MMR

And special thanks to all our authors, many of whom came to my rescue recently when there was a paucity of articles in the cue for *The Local*. Without them, we would have nothing to show you.

Warm regards and

Happy railroading!

Greg



Registration Open NOW!

Letter to the Editor:

I really enjoyed the latest "MER Local".

It has come a long way since I was the clerk-paymaster for the old Dixie Division from roughly about 1978 until about 1984 (I replaced a guy from Vienna, Virginian by the name of Ted something or other). My Super was the late John Glabb, assistant super, Larry Nyce, MMR (who is now in Florida). We used to have an annual all-day meeting in Rockville at a church. We charged a buck to get in (there were some guys who even complained about having to pay that). We'd get about a hundred bucks and split it 50-50 with the church. We didn't even have a checking account—I'd keep the cash in an shoe box. I can't remember who replaced me.

I think the division was originally started by Charlie Eckstein, Bill Hammer and George Johnson in the early 1970s. Charlie was an excellent machinist (drive trains, motors, etc.), Bill was great at creating and painting figures and George was a great all-around modeler. They were all in O scale, particularly On3. If anybody is still around that can provide more information, I'll be happy to hear it. I'm sorry I still don't have any files from them "good ol' days".

If I remember correctly, our newsletter was a one-page document called the "Dixie Flyer". If you wanted to receive it, you had to give the clerk SSAEs. The only thing it did was tell you where the next meeting was. It had a hand-drawn map (stone-age GPS). Generally, if we scheduled a meeting in northern Virginia, we would get very low attendance. If we scheduled a meeting somewhere in Montgomery county, we'd get a lot more people (John Armstrong's home was very popular even though it was basically a "Plywood Pacific" with a little bit of pink plaster).

Anyway, you guys keep up the great work.

Frank A. Pearsall
Brevard, N.C.

[Reply: Thank you, Frank, for your kind words and for your historical perspective. You mentioned many of the great modelers from our past. I can see why John Armstrong's home would be a good place to gather since he was the guru of track planning, though it sounds like the whole group provided a remarkable foundation for our generation. We hope we can carry it forward to our future generations as well as you guys did.-Ed.]

From the Business Car

By Jack Dziadul, MMR

July-August 2026

Elections

The Nominating Committee has recruited candidates for Officer positions in the 2026 round of Region level elections. Candidate Statements for MER elective offices were due May 30th. They were received in a timely manner, printed in the May/June issue of The Local, and are reprinted in this issue. The positions of President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer are on the ballot.

The following hats have been tossed into the ring:

- President – Gary Brown
- Vice President – Mitchell Ehrlich
- Secretary – Rick Stoneking
- Treasurer – Bill Wurtzell

The Business Manager has confirmed eligibility.

The MER's Executive Handbook includes a calendar in Section 9 that, although somewhat outdated, includes a guide for MER leadership and membership as to important dates. This MER Elections Timetable is shown on the next page.

John Hoyt, MER's Assistant Business Manager and one-man Ballot Committee, is responsible for administering the electronic balloting. John states that there are 109 members with no email address. We are required to print and mail paper ballots to members without an email address. It would be appreciated if those who are able take the time to update their contact information with an email address.

Online clinics available

Several MER divisions record and post their clinics, most notable the Potomac Division. If you are not able to catch the clinics at their live presentations, you can expect to find them later on Potomac's YouTube channel.

MER Elections Timetable			
Due	Item	Responsibility	Completed
January 31	Call for nominations	Nominating Committee	✓
May 30	Validation of candidate eligibility	Business Manager	✓
May 30	Slate submitted to MER Director overseeing elections	Nominating Committee	✓
May 31	Submit candidate statements to the Editor	Nominating Committee	✓
May 31	Article re: non-election issues for the ballot	Secretary	n/a
June 1	Candidate statements, photos to Director overseeing elections	Nominating Committee	✓
Early June	Production of ballot	Director overseeing Nominating Committee	
August 1 or earlier	Paper ballots mailed to members without email	Director overseeing Ballot Committee	
August 1 or earlier	Electronic ballots emailed	Director overseeing Ballot Committee	
Tuesday after Labor Da	Paper ballots must be postmarked by this date	Ballot Committee	
Saturday after Labor Da	All ballots must be received	Ballot Committee	
Second Saturday after Labor Day	Ballot Committee reports results to President, Director overseeing Ballot Committee, and Business Manager	Ballot Committee	
Third Saturday after Labor Day	Deadline for President to notify candidates of election results	President	
Third Saturday after Labor Day	Business Manager notifies webmaster and NMRA national of election results	Business Manager	
September 30	Provide election results to the Editor for Nov/Dec newsletter	Ballot Committee	
September 30	Provide call for next year's nominations to the Editor for the Nov/Dec newsletter	Nominating Committee	
October 1	Election results posted to MER website	Webmaster	

Nominating Committee = Bob Charles, MMR, Ken Montero
Business Manager = Jack Dziadul, MMR

Achievement Program

The NMRA AP Manager Ray Persing advised that an AP app will soon be released. It will allow members to track AP progress and digitally submit SOQ forms.

Master Model Railroaders in the MER – 45 active members in our Region

- Potomac 13
- Tidewater 7
- Carolina Piedmont 6
- New Jersey 5
- Carolina Southern 4
- Philadelphia 3
- Susquehanna 3
- James River 2
- South Mountain 1
- Chesapeake 1

Member data updates or corrections

We sometimes become aware of missing or erroneous data on membership rosters. If you know of something that needs a fix, do not hesitate to contact us. Better yet, members can eliminate the middle man and make corrections and updates online.

Here is a link to the NMRA website: National Model Railroad Association

- At the top right on the home page click Member Log-In / Registration
- On the top in the black band click on Membership
- On the drop-down menu select NMRA Membership Issue or Change Request
- Fill in the appropriate blanks – DONE!

Lee Stoermer offers additional membership data comments.

I ran into an issue a couple of days ago where the renewal dates were not updating. I worked with the NMRA IT group on an online issue that was causing problems with processing renewals, specifically with family memberships. Fortunately, it was successfully resolved. I have had members tell me about having issues with either membership renewal, accessing the portal, or the magazine, but they did not report it.

I would offer that when these are mentioned we encourage those members to let us know by capturing a screenshot showing the error code then sharing it with us. It's the only way to get it corrected.

Good advice. Thanks Lee.

Three **advertisers** have submitted payments totaling $115 for 2026 ads in *The Local*.

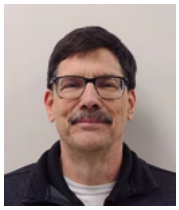
NMRA rebate of $1,396 has been received. The Divisions have received their distributions. The member dues rebates are calculated as $1 per member as of March 31st. Family and Student memberships are not included in the calculations.

Photos from the Model Railroad Museum in Hampton Roads

Board of Directors and Administrative Staff

President
Scott Unger
610-462-0756
president@mer-nmra.com

Director-at-Large; *Local* Editor
Greg Warth
757-816-8399
gjwarth@mer-nmra.com
local-editor@mer-nmra.com



AP Manager; Past President
Kurt Thompson, MMR
410-507-3671
apchair@mer-nmra.com

Vice President
Gary Brown
757-641-7671
vp@mer-nmra.com

Director-at-Large; MER Photographer
Bob Bridges
rkbridges@mer-nmra.com

Nominating Committee Chair
Bob Charles, MMR
717-763-1848
rcharles@mer-nmra.com

Secretary
Rick Stoneking
856-296-9291
secretary@mer-nmra.com

Director-at-Large
Kevin O'Connor
919-593-2537
kjoconnor@mer-nmra.com

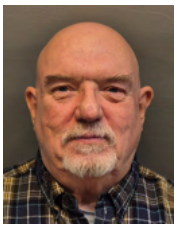
Archivist
Michael Mauer
archives@mer-nmra.com

Treasurer for MER and Convention
William "Bill" Wurtzell
201-819-8701
wwurtzell@mer-nmra.com

Business Manager
Jack Dziadul, MMR
919-721-8757
jackdziadul@gmail.com

Registrar
Kirk Bateman
410-442-0446
mer-registrar@mer.nmra.com

Assistant Business Manager
John Hoyt
410-340-1776
jhoyt@mer-nmra.com



Contest Chair
Dan Peele
Contests@mer-nmra.com

Assistant Registrar
Jim Fisher
443-504-3919
jfisher@mer-nmra.com

Executive Convention Chair
Laura Bateman
410-422-0446
ECC@mer-nmra.com

Webmaster
Jeff Burch
443-280-9127
webmaster@mer-nmra.com

MER Division Superintendents

New Jersey, Division 1:
Glyn Thomas
njdiv.super@gmail.com
Website:
njdiv@nmra.org

James River, Division 5
Philip R. Taylor
434-589-6006
drphilster@gmail.com
Website:
jrdnmra.blogsopt.com

Carolina Southern, Div.12
Andrew Stitt
919-637-1282
superintendent@carolinasouthern.org
Website: Carolina Southern.org

Potomac Division 2
Ernie Little, MMR
super@potomac-nmra.org
Website: potomac-nmra.org

South Mountain Division 10
Dan Mulhearn
southmountaindiv@gmail.com
Website:
Smdnmra.org

Carolina Piedmont Div.13
Bob Gamble, MMR
superintendent@cpd13.org
Website: cpd13.org

Philadelphia Division 3
Joe Walters, MMR
302-521-5884
josephfwalters@yahoo.com
Website: phillynmra.org

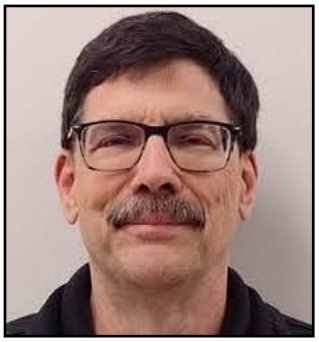
Susquehanna Division 11
Alan Mende
717-469-1047
super@susquehannanmra.org
Website:
susquehannanmra.org

Chesapeake Division 14
Kirk Bateman
410-442-0446
super@chesdiv-nmra.org
Website: chesdiv-nmra.org

Tidewater Division 4
Gary Brown
757-641-7671
alleghenyrr@yahoo.com
Website:nmra-mer-tidewater.org

Help Wanted:

Does anyone have an MP3/MP4 file of a prototype uncoupling, preferably with the air line parting with the loud hiss of escaping air? If so, send to kurtthompson129@gmail.com.



Kurt Thompson, MMR

NMRA Achievement Program Update

By Kurt Thompson, MMR
MER AP Manager

Update for July-August 2026:

First up in this update, the Mid-Eastern Region wants to welcome two new MMRs to our College of MMRs - Thom Radice of the NJ Division and Glenn Lapkin of the James River Division. When you see them next, please congratulate them on their accomplishments, and if you're looking for support in your own pursuit in earning your MMR, ask them how they did it. I'm sure they will be happy to talk with you about it.

Division	Modeler	Certificate Earned	
New Jersey	**Thom Radice**	Master Railroad Engineer - Electrical	New MMR
	Thom Radice	Master Railroad Engineer - Civil	
Potomac	**Lee Stoemer**	Master Builder - Scenery	
	Jim Allen	Model Railroad Author	
Tidewater	**Gary Friedhaber**	Golden Spike	
James River	**Glenn Lapkin**	Model Railroad Author	New MMR
Carolina Piedmont	**Tom Garren**	Golden Spike	

My apologies to Gary and Tom for my delay in adding them to my previous report.

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: Hilton Garden Inn, 65 Priority Dr., Martinsburg, WV 25403

MER BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING SCHEDULE

- October 15 at 7pm. 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

2026 SCENIC CITY EXPRESS CHATTANOOGA NATIONAL CONVENTION

www.facebook.com/NMRATakesChatt

nmra2026.org

NMRA MER 2026

Tracks to Tidewater Convention

TRACKS TO TIDEWATER

Click Here to Register Online

Download Paper Mail-In Form

For More Information:

Visit www.trackstotidewater.org

Questions?

Send email to Registrar at mer-registrar@mer-nmra.com

Elections 2026

Nominations Closed

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. They are reprinted here for your convenience.

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.

Also the Candidates' statements are reprinted on the next two pages for your review prior to voting.

Candidates' Statements

Gary Brown - for President

I am amazed at the number of people who pull together to make the MER what it is. I have seen us overcome the challenges of coming out of the isolation of Covid. I have seen National move to chart an ambitious course for the future growth of the NMRA. This hobby has so much to offer people of all ages, and I hope we will work together to bring more folks of all ages into Model Railroading.

I have learned much during my two terms as the Vice-President of the MER, and feel I am ready to take on the office of President. The work continues slowly to bring a new division to the MER and as President I will continue that process. The MER is also looking to host the NMRA convention in 2030, another project in work. As President I will endeavor to maintain open and timely communication flowing between the Divisions and the MER. I look forward to and will be honored to serve the MER if you will elect me as President.

Michael Mauer - for Vice President

My passion for railroading and model railroading began with my great-grandfather, a New York Central engineer, and has continued for more than two decades of active modeling since 2000. I have been a committed member of the National Model Railroad Association since 2009 and have served on the Palmetto Division Board, gaining valuable experience in division-level leadership, communication, and member engagement. I currently serve as MER Archivist, preserving the Region's historical records, and was recently elected as a Director in the Carolina Piedmont Division.

I strongly support the NMRA's mission of education, fellowship, and the advancement of the hobby. Through clinics, published work, and hands-on modeling, I strive to share knowledge and encourage participation. My current project, the Wood Hog Lumber Co. Railroad, reflects my dedication to craftsmanship and documenting the modeling process.

Professionally, I am an IT Manager at a law firm in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, where collaboration, planning, and problem-solving are central to my role. I live in Kernersville, North Carolina, with my wife, Amy, and remain active in railroad preservation through the North Carolina Transportation Museum. As Mid-Eastern Region Vice President, I will work to support divisions, strengthen communication, and ensure the Region continues to thrive.

Rick Stoneking - for Secretary

I currently hold, or have held, multiple positions within the MER and NJ Division of the NMRA including being the current Secretary of the MER since July 2022, and I served as MER Publisher from March 0f 2022 to November 2023. I also currently serve on the NJ Division Board of. I am the Treasurer for the Maryland & Pennsylvania RR Historical Society, and Vice President of the Burlington County Model Railroad Club. Professionally I have a degree in Electrical Engineering and work as an Engineering Manager for a Robotic automation company in Moorestown, NJ. I served in the US Army as a Military Police Officer from 1984 to 1987 active duty, and 1987 to 1990 in the Reserves.

William Wurtzell - for Treasurer

MER qualifications:

- Currently serving first term as Treasurer and member of Regional Board of Directors.
- Increased Region's income by approximately $5,300 for the period 2024-2025 by safely investing cash balances.
- Issued timely financial reports as required by the Board and MER bylaws.
- Issued semiannual rebates to divisions on a timely basis.
- Coordinated preparation of Region's annual budgets.
- Serving as James River Division Clerk from 2020 to 2023.

Professional career:

- I am a New York State Certified Public Accountant.
- From 1971 to 2002, employed by a big eight CPA firm in New York City, and employed by two investment banks and a commodities broker as a top-level financial executive, responsible for all financial recordkeeping functions, financial reporting, and regulatory reporting to the Securities and Exchange Commission and the Commodities Futures Trading Commission.
- From 1992 to 2015, worked as one of two partners owning and managing residential apartments, including all record keeping functions, paying employees, approving tenants, handling evictions and filing tax returns.
- From 2002 to 2022, developed a small accounting practice, providing bookkeeping and tax services to small businesses and individuals.

Summary:

I am a highly qualified accountant and look forward to continuing to serve as MER Treasurer.

Continued from p.1: McLin Creek Viaduct by Steven Colby (Photos by the author).

During layout construction, a place for the viaduct was framed in the benchwork and a piece of plywood served as a "bridge" until the viaduct would someday be constructed (**Photo 2**). One day while I was volunteering at the MRC, I studied a picture of the viaduct that was placed next to the opening on the benchwork and decided to tackle the project even though I had never attempted to model anything like it in the past. Like many projects, it is often a simple revelation or idea that sparks the energy and enthusiasm to tackle a new task. The fact that I could visit the actual viaduct to study it, take pictures, and get some measurements was a plus, but the spark was the idea that a 2" thick piece of standard insulation foam could be just the ticket for the main structure. On previous days when I looked at the viaduct picture, I tried envisioning how I could potentially make the viaduct by modifying a commercially available viaduct kit, carving the structure out of wood, or creating a mold for plaster. None of these options were appealing and did not generate the spark until the foam idea.

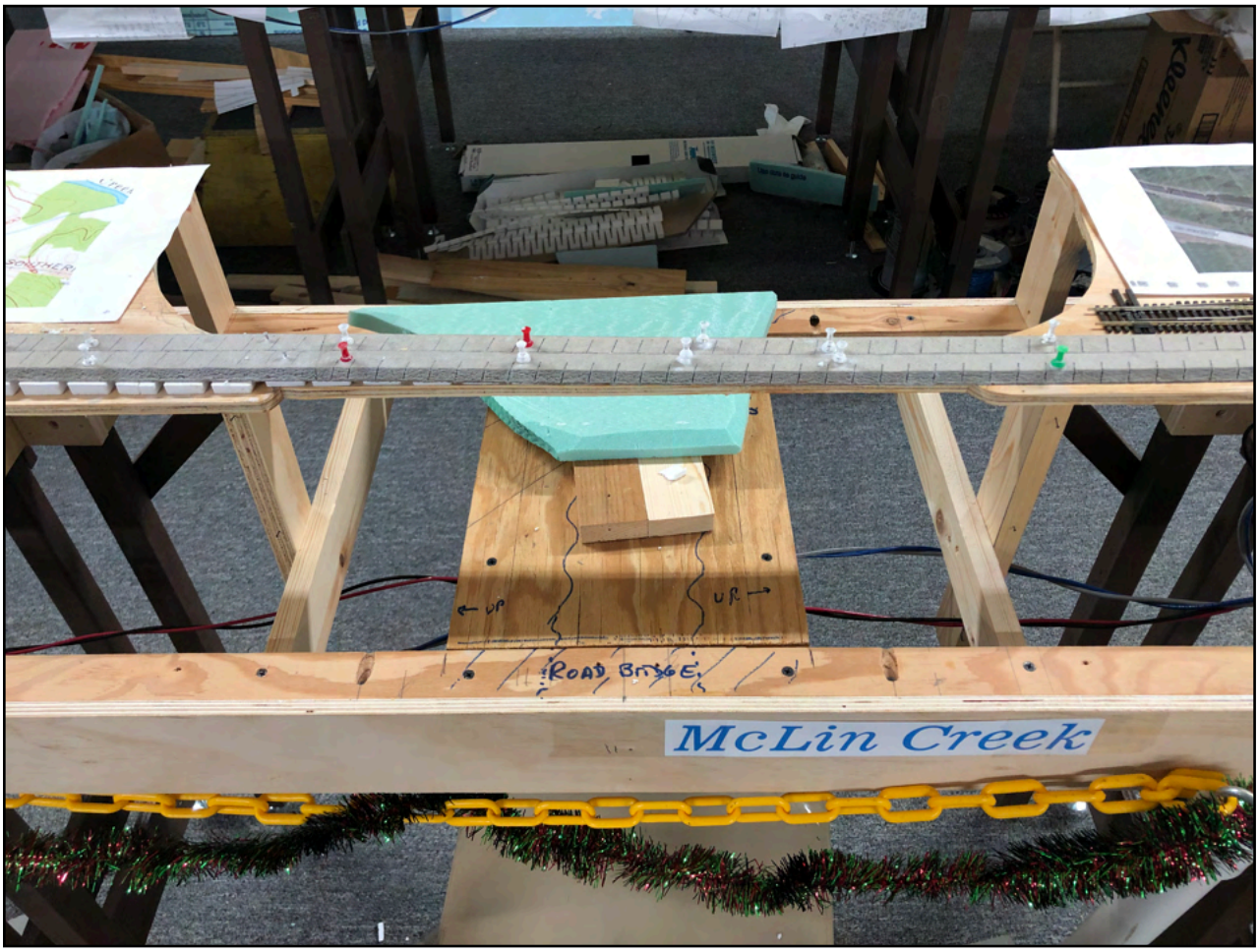


Photo 2: Benchwork Space Allocated for the Viaduct

I do not recall now how the idea of using 2" insulation foam came about, but I assume the idea had its genesis from some article in a hobby magazine. What struck me was that the 2" thickness looked about right. Visiting the viaduct, the actual measured width was 177". Some quick division revealed it would be 2.03" wide in HO, so a perfect match!

Although I was able to visit the viaduct, which is only a 16 minute drive from the MRC, getting all the measurements was not practical due to its height and the creek running under it. I also resisted the urge to climb the steep embankments to get pictures on the right-of-way (also, best not to trespass) and I simply used satellite images to study the viaduct from above and get a few measurements using the ruler feature on the satellite view application. There really was not much more I was going to learn from making the climb anyway. The rough dimensions of the viaduct (**Figure 1**) are based on the few actual measurements plus satellite view measurements then extrapolating the rest. With pictures in hand, the measurements, and the dimensions of the space in the benchwork, I started sketching the general layout of the viaduct and embankments.

Although selective compression of structures is often a necessity in model railroading, the viaduct is not that big and the opening in the benchwork provided adequate space so that the viaduct and adjoining hills did not have to be compressed.

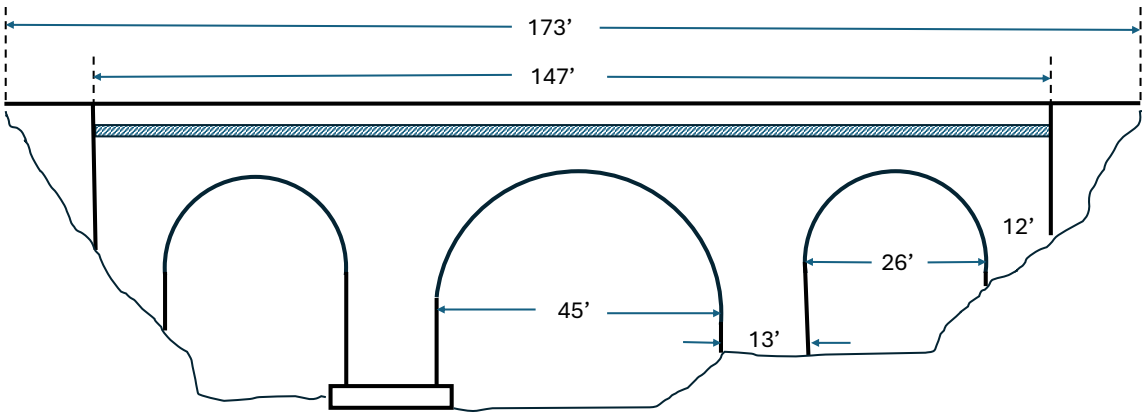


Figure 1: Viaduct Diagram

Although I normally volunteer at the MRC two Saturdays each month, my time there is not always conducive to working on complex modeling activities especially when there are many visitors to greet. Ideally, I would be able to construct the majority of the viaduct at home and install it in a day when finished. Additionally, the main line of the layout was operational with the temporary bridge and we wanted the ability to run trains for visitors at all times. It would not be acceptable to go weeks with a non-operational main line loop for continuous operation, so this solidified the plan to build the viaduct at home. I further determined that it would be possible to slide the completed viaduct under the plywood bridge, allowing the plywood bridge and trackwork to be permanent, not temporary.

This approach to building the viaduct allowed me to work on it at home whenever I had a spare 20 or 30 minutes. Twice, I brought the in-progress viaduct to the layout for a test fit to ensure there would be no surprises when it came time for final installation.

In addition to getting the physical shape of the viaduct correct, there were a few other key features to replicate to make the scene as convincing as possible:

- Exposure of the left column base at creek level (the right column base is buried in fill)
- Dirt road under the right arch
- Steep embankments on each side

Construction started with practicing carving the arches in a scrap piece of foam. A wire foam cutter might have made easy work of this, but I did not have one and I managed with a coping saw and sharp knives.

After being satisfied with practice on the test piece, the final viaduct was cut and carved out of a second piece of foam. I then used Foam Putty™ from Woodland Scenics® to smooth out any roughness from the cuts (**Photo 3**).

Photo 3: Basic Viaduct Shape Carved from 2-inch Thick Foam

Note that the very top of the viaduct juts out to create a wider base for the roadbed, track, and ballast. I will refer to this feature as the "wings" of the viaduct. Since the wings are wider than the 177" wide main structure of the viaduct, they would have to be added to the side of the 2" foam. I decided to make the wing features out of wood by ripping some scrap pieces of wood on my table saw to replicate the shape. Conveniently, they also hide the transition from the foam structure to the plywood sub roadbed "bridge." The profile of the wings can be seen during one of the test-fitting sessions (**Photo 4**).

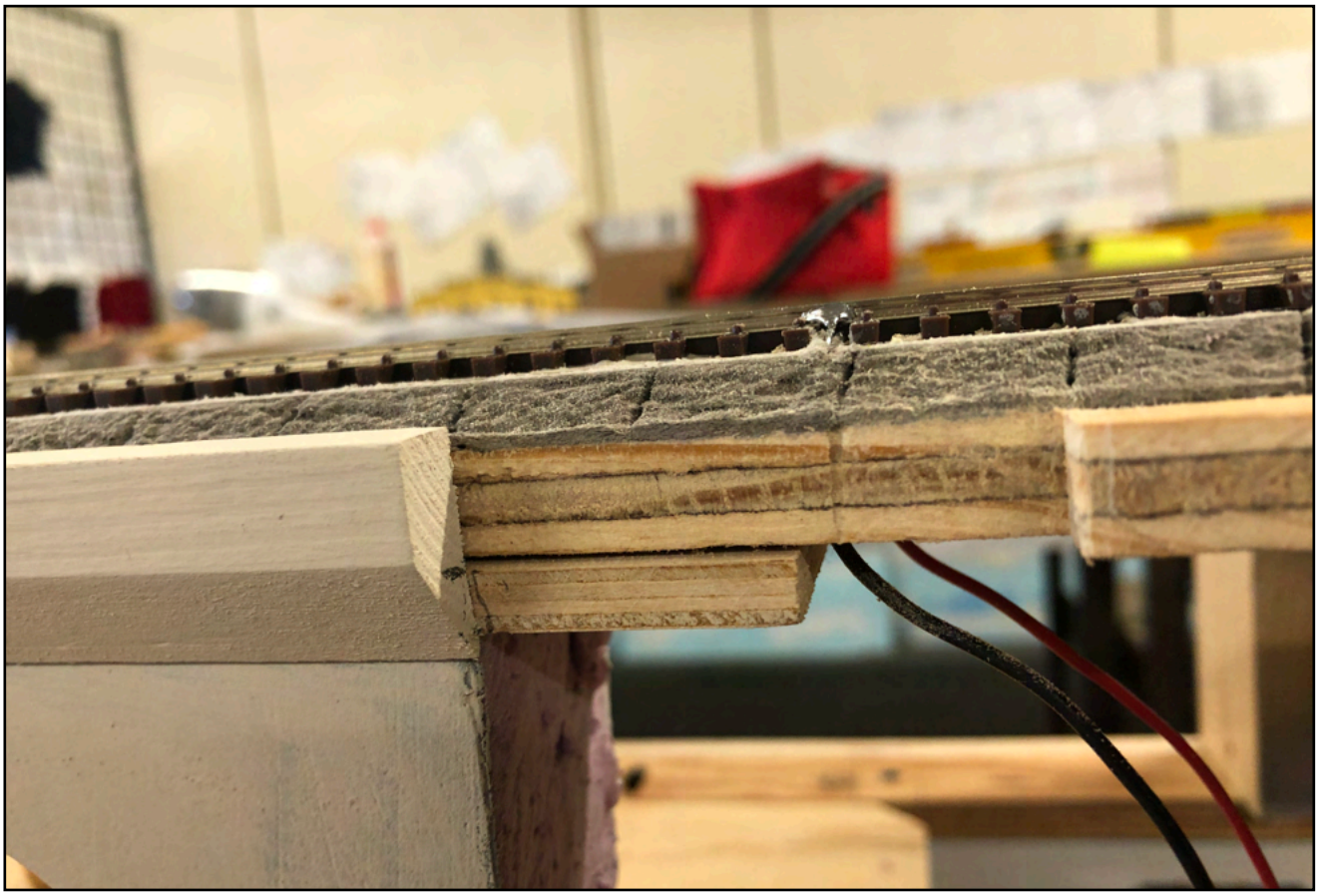


Photo 4: Viaduct Wing Profile

With the viaduct shape completed, I primed it with generic grey acrylic paint to conceal any printing on the foam. The paint coat also helped reveal any imperfections in the foam that needed to be corrected with more foam putty or spackling compound. The final paint coat was Woodland Scenics® Concrete Top Coat™ (ST1454).

The basic landforms around the viaduct were created with scrap pieces of foam, including the steep hills on each side of the viaduct and the riverbanks) (**Photo 5).** Plaster cloth was then used to cover the foam and creek bed. After painting the landforms brown, various assortments of dirt, gravel, ground foam, lichen, and sticks were used to capture the feel of the location, although I chose to not make the terrain as overgrown as it is today. The creek has a mostly sandy bottom with some rocks, which was easy enough to replicate. Since the creek is shallow, there was no need to paint the center darker than the edges, which is a common technique to replicate deeper water.

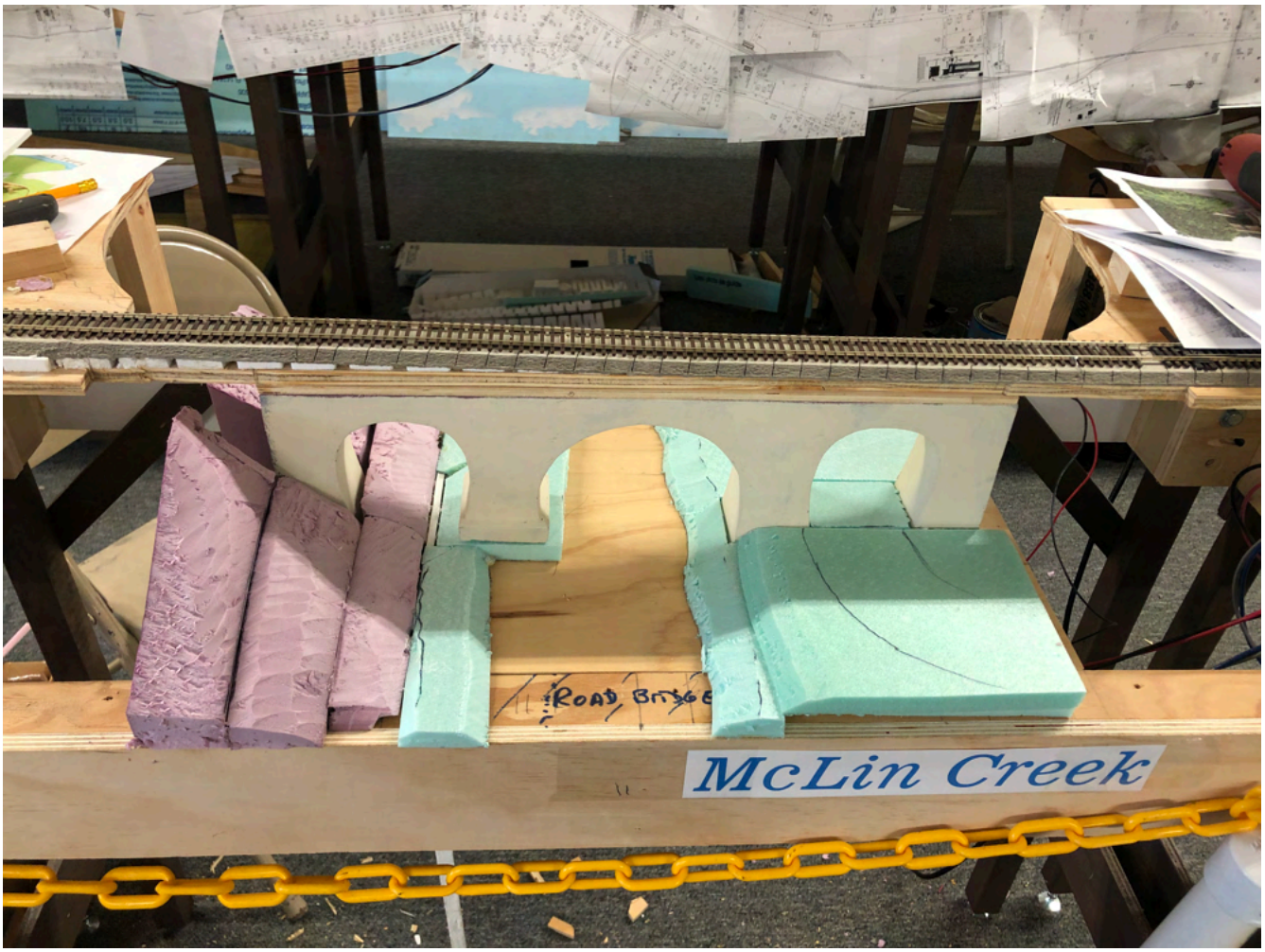


Photo 5: Building the Landforms with Foam

Final weathering of the viaduct was done with black weathering powder. A key "feature" to replicate are the black stains streaking down the sides from the drain holes in the viaduct wings (refer back to Figure 1). These streaks were easily replicated with a black pencil and more black weathering powder. Since Figure 1 was taken in 2026 and the MRC layout period is the 1950's, I did not weather the viaduct as heavily as it is today.

As planned, the viaduct module was completed at home, ready to be transported to the MRC for installation (**Photo 6**). Note that the creek water has not been poured yet. This was best done after installation.

Photo 6: Completed Viaduct Ready to be Installed

You probably noted in Photos 4 and 6 that the fixed plywood sub roadbed needed to sit "down" in the modeled viaduct so that the viaduct wings would be at the correct height with respect to the track and roadbed. To accomplish this, the completed viaduct was slipped under the sub roadbed, then lifted up until the top of the foam viaduct was touching the plywood. Shims were installed to keep the entire viaduct module firmly in place. Plaster cloth was used to make the transition from the viaduct module to the layout and then the same scenic materials used on the module were applied to complete the seamless transition (**Photo 7**).

Like many creeks, the opacity of the water in McLin Creek varies, primarily depending on the last rainfall when the water, which is typically clear, can turn muddy for a while. In our supplies at the MRC, we had a kit of Woodland Scenics® Deep Pour Water™ - Murky, which turned out to be perfect and saved me a few dollars (**Photo 8**).

Photo 7: Installed Viaduct (minus the creek "water")

Photo 8: Overhead View of the Creek

The viaduct has railroad ties lining both sides of the roadbed to help keep ballast in place. So, I glued stained wood track ties along the top of the viaduct wings on each side of the viaduct and then ballasted the track.

Building the McLin Creek viaduct was fun and rewarding. The finished module does well to replicate the prototype and is easily recognizable by anyone who is familiar with the prototype (**Photo 9**).

Photo 9: Streetside View of the Completed Viaduct

And like the prototype, the model viaduct offers a great spot for rail fanning (**Photos 10, 11**).

Photo 10: Backside View of the Completed Viaduct

Photo 11: J-Class on the Viaduct

NMRA Headquarters Building

By Jack Dziadul, MMR (Photos by the author)

I attended the "Grand Rails 2012" NMRA convention in Grand Rapids, Michigan. One of the treasures that I came home with was the Heljan / Con-Cor NMRA Headquarters HO scale kit **(Photo 1).** My auction bid of $10 was the winner.

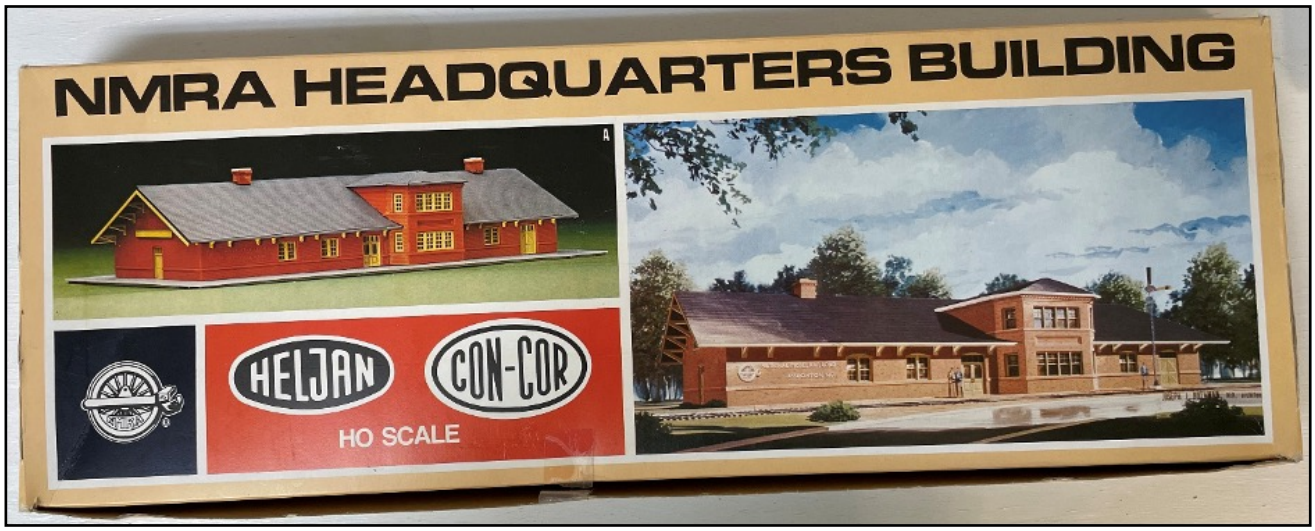


Photo 1: Box Cover

Fast forward to 2026, after almost 14 years of sitting on a shelf I was thinking of putting the kit on eBay or selling it at a train show. Inside the box was a blue postcard **(Photo 2)** that thanked the purchaser for supporting the NMRA headquarters building fund. The text noted that the building celebrated the NMRA's 45th anniversary, so that dated the kit to 1980.

Photo 2: Fundraising Insert

I ended up deciding to build the kit. Part of my consideration was that the NMRA convention is in Chattanooga this year. I figured that an article of my build would be timely and of interest to members attending convention.

But first let's take a look at the prototype. Some background and history would add a bit of "color" to the article. After all, research is a fun part of the hobby. The internet is just about everyone's starting point these days, but all that popped up in my search feed was information or sales of the kits, both HO and N scale, on eBay and other sites. Second stop: Google Earth, which provided some aerials and street views of 4121 Cromwell Road, Chattanooga, Tennessee. We'll get into the differences between the kit and current day street views a bit further into the article.

It appears that the early "headquarters" of the NMRA was in the basement or garage of whoever was in charge of membership record keeping at that time. In the late 1940s, Bob Bast's Canton, Ohio basement became the NMRA HQ for nearly thirty years. When Bob retired as office manager, the job went to Midge Reber and the HQ moved to her Indianapolis basement.

The earliest discussion of a permanent headquarters building appears to be a Gene Hickey long-range planning article in the December 1974 *Bulletin*. The January 1975 NMRA *Bulletin* editorialized about the need and provided some early cost estimates. The April 1975 *Bulletin* mentioned Headquarters Building Committee discussions with a well-known national museum. There was some delay while the legal folks applied for and received approval as a non-profit (there was a subsequent approval for tax-exempt status). The July 1975 *Bulletin* discussed two preferred locations, Milwaukee and Chattanooga.

In October 1977, after years of discussing the need for a permanent headquarters, a fundraising effort was started for the NMRA Building Fund. The November 1977 Bulletin advised the membership of the NMRA Building Fund, with a fund-raising letter noted in the following issue. Names of donors were published in February 1978 and subsequent issues of the *Bulletin*. The October and November 1978 issues of the *Bulletins* lamented the drop-off of donations and encouraged additional participation. Although over 2,000 donors had contributed, this only represented about 8% of the membership at that time. Fundraising reached approximately $106,000 by February 1980 and would eventually top out at about $300,000 in January 1983.

Chuck Hitchcock led the Site Selection Committee. The August 1978 *Bulletin* and the 1978 Dearborn convention had the first reports from the committee. Chattanooga was announced as the recommended location in May 1979. The Tennessee Valley Railroad Museum (TVRM) donated land for the new building in July 1979. In exchange, the TVRM received the first right of refusal of any future building sale.

Groundbreaking for the new headquarters occurred on October 23, 1981. Construction began in April 1982, and the symbolic cornerstone was laid on October 15, 1982. The low-bid of $415,000 eventually ballooned to over $500,000 due to change orders, including an elevator to service the walk-out basement. Chief Administrative Officer Jenny Hendricks and her staff, including long-time employee Susan Straub, moved in on April 15, 1983.

The building never reached its full potential and was underutilized. 2007 saw initial comments, including a July *Scale Rails* article by NMRA President Mike Brestel, spoke of selling the Cromwell building. But nothing came of these discussions until mid-2013 when NMRA was approached by the TVRM. The museum needed to expand and was short on available land. The parties conducted their respective due diligence with appraisals, inspections, etc. Chief Financial Officer Frank Koch negotiated the sale and the NMRA Board approved the sale price of $900,000. The closing occurred on December 31, 2013, with net proceeds of $896,360 received from the title company on January 2, 2014.

Now to the Con-Cor kits and train sets used in the fund-raising effort. There were four items:

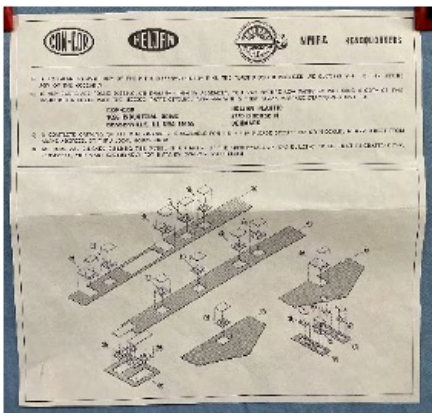
1. NMRA Headquarters Building HO Scale
2. NMRA Headquarters Building N Scale
3. NMRA "Headquarters Express" train set HO Scale
4. NMRA "Headquarters Express" train set N Scale

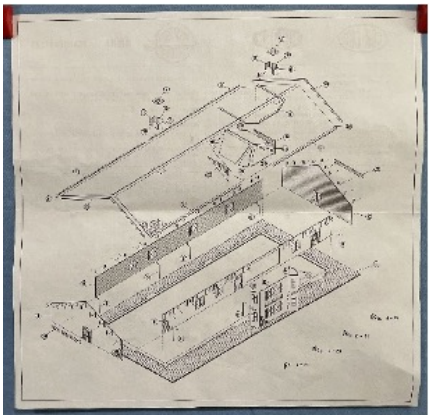
I was not able to find any ads for these models and train sets. The vintage plastic building kits were made in Denmark. Details on the items from any source were sparse. The March 1980 Bulletin indicated that 1,200 train sets were sold, HO and N combined. The December 1980 Bulletin noted prices of $16.50 and $15 for the NMRA Headquarters Buildings kits in HO and N, respectively. There were no manufacturers item numbers or prices on the building kit boxes or shown in the instructions.

There was a recent eBay sale of the N-scale Headquarters Express train set for $249.99. Recent eBay sales of the NMRA Headquarters Building in N were $24.99, $20, and $30; and an HO version sold for $19.99. Active listings on eBay are significantly higher. A recent eBay sale of an assembled HO building kit went for $19.97, so obviously my ultimate sale will not add much to my retirement nest egg.

BUILDING THE NMRA HEADQUARTERS BUILDING IN HO

It's always fun opening a new kit. Sometimes I'll make copies of the instructions and the major parts. I didn't bother here as I did not see building a duplicate in the future. The instructions are a single, large sheet with an isometric drawing of window details on one side, and roof and trim details on the reverse side. (**Photos 3, 4**) There is no text, just illustrations, showing the numbered parts. The only real guidance was to paint before assembly…always good advice. Out of the box, the plastic parts came molded in three colors: red brick for the walls, yellow windows and doors, and a gray roof.





Photos 3, 4: Instruction Sheets

I did my best to use the box cover rendering and Google Earth to match the pinkish brick color of the prototype, rather than my typical New England weathered red brick. What I produced is what my wife called salmon, and what others might call Tennessee brick (**Photos 5,6**). My concoction is a blend of four Apple Barrel acrylic craft paints in equal measure: Red Apple, Princess Pink, Yellow, and Snow White. Others might experiment with light pink and a touch of orange. Expecting to install lighting, I used a spray can to paint the interior walls flat black, preventing any light from leaking through the plastic sides. I brush painted the windows and doors with a tan color. Initially, I used rattle can flat black for the shingled roof. After scuffing up the roof a bit too much when fiddling with bracing and test fitting, I repainted the roof with a blend of black and gray pavement acrylic paints.

Photo 5: My paint concoction

Photo 6: Tennessee Brick

The NMRA name and steam era wheel logo are molded into the plastic front wall casting with raised lettering. I lightly dry-brushed those to avoid getting too much paint in the logo's wheel spokes. (**Photo 7**) The station signs at each end were separate parts. I dry brushed the raised lettering: "National Model Railroad Association, Inc." A sparce application of canopy glue as an adhesive was used to install the signs. This would make it easier to pry off and change out the signage to fit the next owner's model railroad.

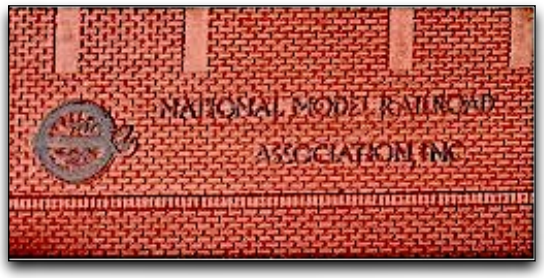


Photo 7: NMRA

Although the kit came in a large 19" x 6 3/4" box, I was still surprised with how big the footprint was. The two-piece "wood" platform measures 19" x 9 ½". I hand-painted each of the hundreds of platform boards using a variety of grays plus a few brown acrylic craft paints (**Photo 8**).

Photo 8: Each board hand-painted

The platform has channels molded into each side. The walls fit snugly into these channels for a rather good fit. No floor was provided. I could have scratch-built a floor, or at least a shadowbox at the front freight door so that some interior could be modeled. However, I chose the KISS approach and constructed the building as designed.

The front and rear walls are 17 ¼" long, which scales to 124' 6" in HO. With end walls of 51' in HO, the structures measures 6,350 square feet, not including the basement and assuming that the second floor is a false dormer. Expecting to eventually ship the completed model to an eBay buyer, or lugging the structure to train shows until sold, I decided to strengthen the building with lots of styrene bracing. (**Photo 9**)

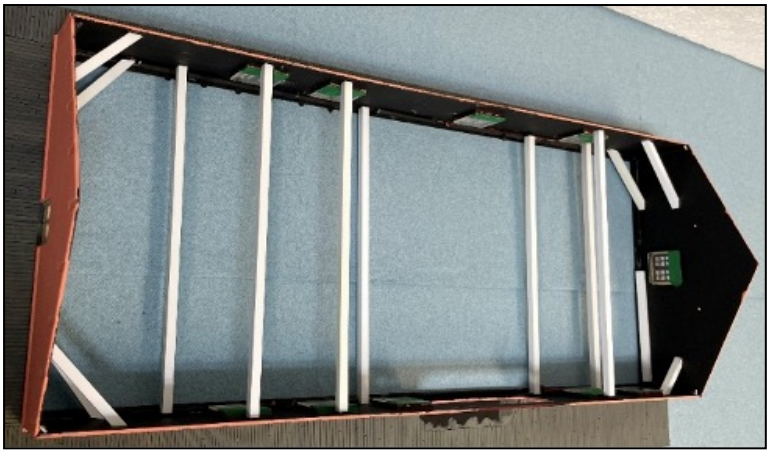


Photo 9: Styrene strip bracing will keep the sides from bowing. Beveled pieces will help to maintain the 90-degree corners.

The side windows to the agent's bay window need to be dry-fit tested, then installed before the roof is glued down. (**Photos 10,11**)

Photo 10: Bay window sides are slotted to fit into the roof. Glue was applied after the roof has been installed.

Photo 11 – The roof and bay window walls have been installed.

The large, two-piece platform needed additional support for strength and sturdiness for frequent handling. I added a Gatorfoam base. Gaps were left in the base for easier installation of future lighting.

My biggest challenge in building the kit was fitting the five-part roof (**Photo 12**) covering the station agent's bay window. I eventually gave up and scratchbuilt the three triangular pieces.

Photo 12: 5-piece roof to bay window.

Photo 13: Scratch-built substitution for better fit.

My preferred method of hiding roof cap seams is using Evergreen #292 styrene angle strips. Lightly scoring the underside of the strip down the center crease allows one to gently split the angle to match the roof peak. Roof valleys and flashing are treated the same way, except that the angle pieces are installed upside down for valleys and on edge for flashing (**Photos 14, 15**).

Photo 14: Styrene strip covers each of the roof peaks and roof valleys.

Photo 15: Styrene strip is used for flashing where shingles abut the sides of the bay window.

The following photographs of the completed model (**Photos 16-18**) show the finishing details. Differences between the kit and Google Earth street views are noted below. I have no photographs dated at the time of the 2013 sale, but I was able to use the backdating feature on Google Earth to capture an image dated June 2014.

- Gutters provided were insufficient to run the length of both the front and back roof edges. The downspouts just needed minor trimming for a good fit. I ended up fashioning my own gutters from 1/16" x 1/8" basswood strips. This gave me a better gluing surface for better long-term stability. In the end, I did not bother with gutters and downspouts on the backside as those details will be unlikely to be seen once installed on a layout.
- The only significant change to the prototype is that sometime between June 2015 and November 2016 a second set of double entry doors was added to the left side of the bay window. Curiously, the kit included three extra doors; perhaps a Con-Cor packing mistake, or the kit's original owner is still searching for his misplaced doors intended for another box.
- The two five-piece chimneys were assembled per the illustrations.
- To add some life to the building, I added a trash can, four benches, and 12 pre-painted figures. I toned down the plastic sheen with Dullcote.
- The model included a boardwalk on all four sides. Of course, the fictional prototype station had no such planked platforms.
- Other differences between the prototype and model are a) the actual structure had a walk-out basement which is visible at the rear parking lot, and b) there was no NMRA signage on the building ends.
- The prototype has five vintage light fixtures along the front of the building. Lights were not included with the kit, and I did not include any in my build. I originally intended to add some suitable lights, along with an electric meter and rooftop soil pipes. (But, between you and me, too much time had been invested already, and I needed to call this project done.)

Photo 16: Front view with gutters, downspouts, and figures installed.

Photo 17: This three-quarter view shows the end doors and NMRA sign.

Photo 18: I did not add the gutter and the four downspouts. The prototype has a rear walkout basement.

I extend my appreciation to former NMRA (1994-2000) President Bob Charles, MMR, Tom Cook, former NMRA (2012-2018) President Charlie Getz, and NMRA Treasurer / CFO Frank Koch for their assistance with this article. They each provided background information and steered me to resources used in the research of the former headquarters from its inception to final disposition.

Here's Your Chance to Make a Difference!

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

Latest from the Contest Room

By Dan Peele

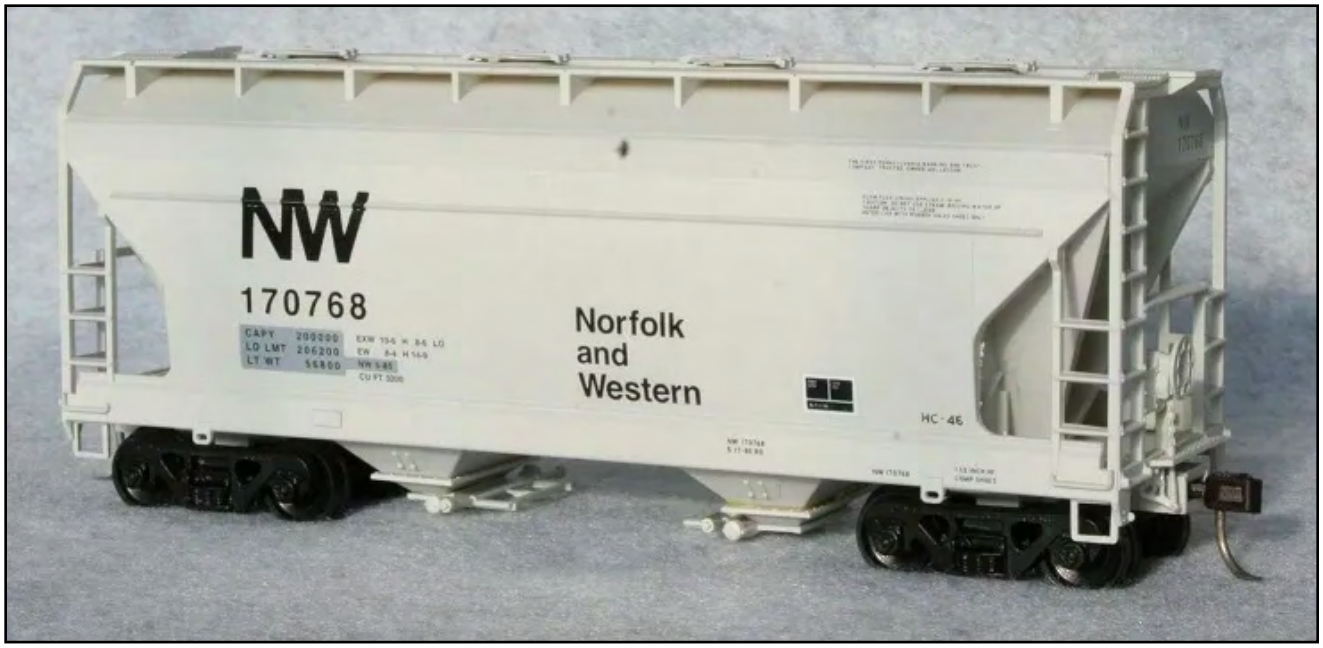
I hope this finds all of you busy working on your MER Convention Contest Room models. I know I have been busy working on contest room preparations. The MER Special Awards have been approved by the Board of Directors for another two years as required by our Executive Handbook. Plaques are ready for ordering, certificates have been prepared, and a new contest tracking spreadsheet is nearing completion. Our MER website now has a copy of the Contest Room Rules and Microsoft Word versions for the MER's version of Form 901 and Form 902 as well as links to the NMRA Forms 901 & Form 902. Now you may ask, why does the MER need its own Form 901 or Form 902? The MER does use the NMRA's guidance for the contest and uses the same evaluation guidelines; however, the MER does not host all the contests that the NMRA does. Also, some of the MER's Special Awards are based upon details that are not readily available on the NMRA's Form 901 & Form 902.

My preparations also include the inevitable plug for Contest Evaluators. We cannot have a contest without evaluators. Ideally, I would like eighteen volunteers with six of those being Master Model Railroaders such that each MMR would lead a team of three. Yes, I know, NMRA guidelines have just five categories for evaluation. Nevertheless, we need extra evaluators because our MMRs and other experienced evaluators are also modelers and may have entered models in the contest. Evaluators are not permitted to evaluate contest categories for which they have entered a model and must recuse themselves for those contest categories they have entered. For example, you are an evaluator and you entered a diesel locomotive; then you must recuse yourself from evaluating any model in the Diesel Locomotive Contest Category. Therefore, I need a few extra evaluators ready to step in anywhere they are needed.

If you think you would like to be an evaluator, please let me know. The MER has an apprentice evaluator program where you can learn how to be one. New evaluators will be paired with experienced evaluators to gain experience. And if you happen to be an experienced evaluator, all the better. You are aware of the unique evaluations during an NMRA / MER contest.

As a tease and a reminder, the photo to the right taken at the 2025 MER Convention in King of Prussia, PA will hopefully provide some inspiration for you. Once again, congratulations to Stephen Richardson for his scratchbuilt Daily Inquirer Building. Stephen earned the Philadelphia Division New Modeler Award and First Place Off-Line Structure.

Daily Inquirer Building: ScratchBuilt by Stephen Richardson. Photo by Jerry Lauchle, MMR.



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

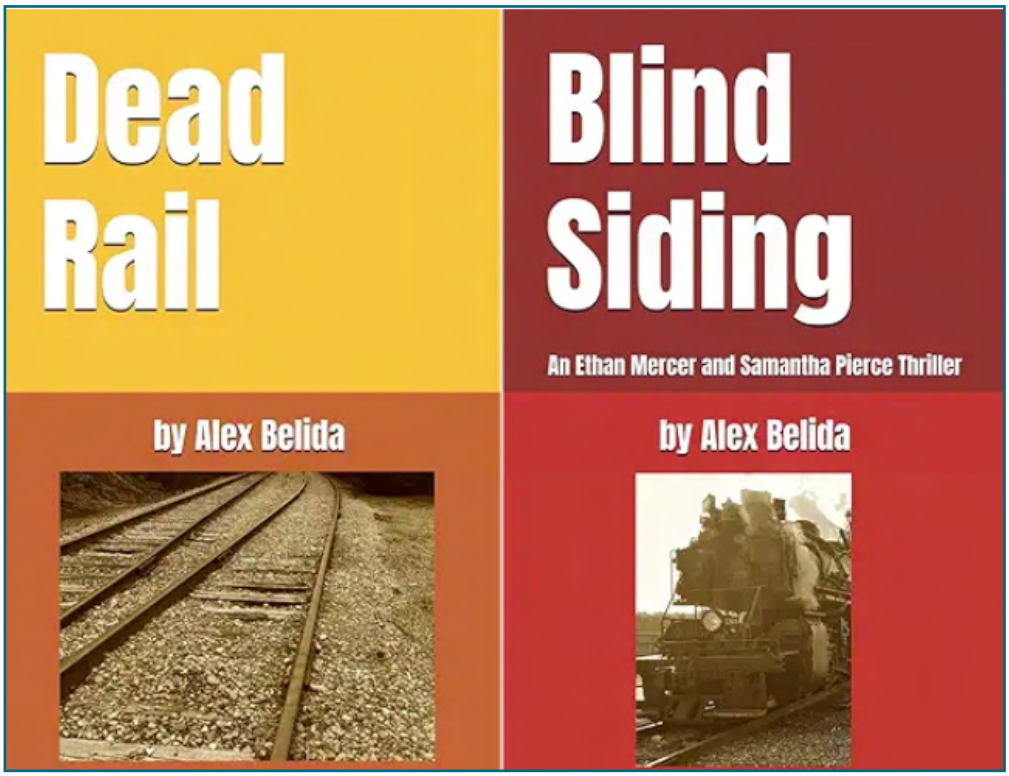
It would be greatly appreciated if you would make your membership aware of this limited-edition freight car by publicizing it in your Region's and/or Division's web page, newsletter or email blast.

We thank you in advance for your support!

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

Summer Reading…

For virologist and model railroader Ethan Mercer, threats move faster than ever imagined. For journalist Samantha Pierce, the truth is never where it's supposed to be. When their paths collide, they uncover a hidden reality: railroads have become the perfect conduit for espionage and covert operations. *Dead Rail* and *Blind Siding* by Alex Belida MMR of the Potomac Division are available on Amazon in paperback and for Kindle, and on e-books at Apple and Barnes and Noble.



NMRA NATIONAL CONVENTION 2026 —CHATTANOOGA, TENNESEE

***Coolidge Park:* Site of the 2026 NMRA National Convention.**
July 27 - August 2, 2026. Registration Now Open!

Chattanooga, TN

NMRA NATIONAL CONVENTION 2026 - REGISTER NOW

Lomax's Welding and Sheet Metal

By Martin Brechbiel, MMR (Photos by the author)

Whenever there's space on my workbench, I'm finding that it's time to jump into the next project. Rummaging about the parts bins and leftovers boxes gave me some Tichy No. 2041 doors, two types of windows (Grandt Line Nos. 3702, 3713), and some miscellaneous chimney castings to generate and develop another structure idea to build up (**Photo 1**).

1

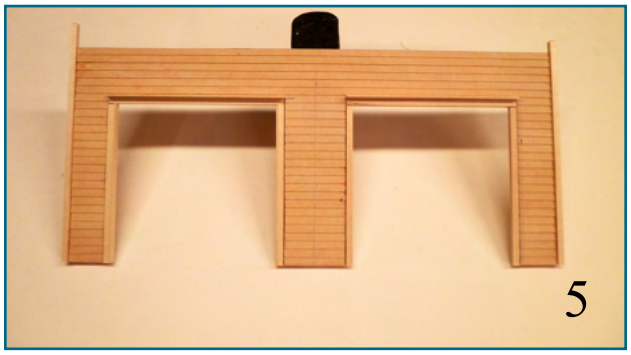

2

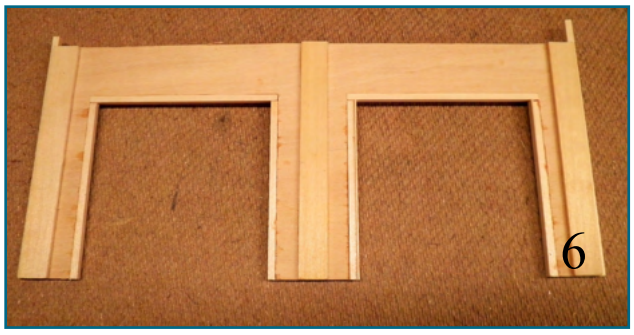

3

I started out by pulling some of my precious 6" wide clapboard (Kappler) that I've kept squirreled away up on the high shelf gathering dust (**Photo 2**). I'm not sure that this width is easily found these days, but I thought to use some of it rather than spend efforts on edge gluing up the smaller clapboard.

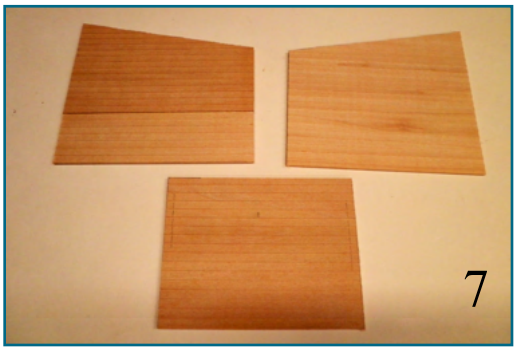
I built up four large doors for the structure. This was going to be a commercial business shop, or so I thought at the time. These were made from HO 3" x 18" stock with 6" x 10" stripwood overlay framing to hold them together (**Photo 3**). These doors were laid out on the 6" wide clapboard to will drive the design of that wall (**Photo 4**). Openings for the 4 doors were made in the clapboard. I generally use a regular utility knife cutting on top of some 1" oak for cutting 1/16 thick siding of any kind. A fresh blade using several firm strokes up against a steel ruler works well and minimizes bloodletting. I framed the perimeter of the openings with 3/32" square stock as well as on the ends of this wall. The overheads of the opening were added using HO 2" x 12". This might be a questionable time to add these as they tend to be a bit fragile, but when you are on a roll, you sometimes get things out of preferred order. I did reinforce the back of this wall to minimize the chance of breakage with some 1/16" x 3/8" (**Photos 5, 6**).

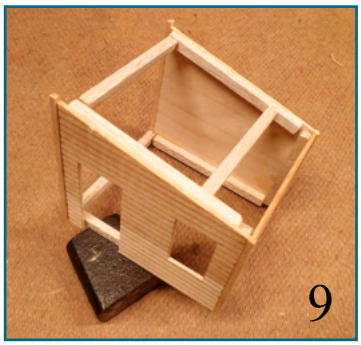

4


5


6

A commercial shop needs an office space. So, before I went any further I pulled some scrap clapboard out and cut out 2 sides and an end wall for an office. The dimensions of this were loosely predicated upon being smaller than the wall with the 4 doors and also just adequate for one of those door castings in the pile of parts (**Photo 7**). These office walls were opened up and fitted for a door and 2 windows leaving one wall blank. And, 3/32" square stock was applied to two walls for corners and assembly purposes (**Photo 8**). The three walls were assembled using Goo and CA. Copious amounts of 3/16" square balsa were used for adding gluing surfaces and reinforcements (**Photos 9, 10**).

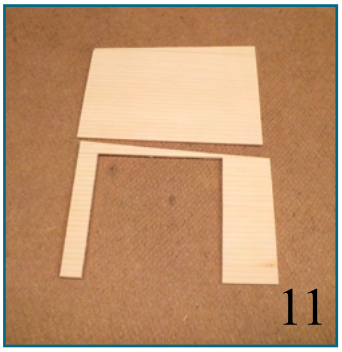

7


9

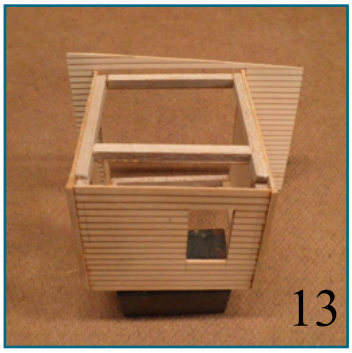

8


10

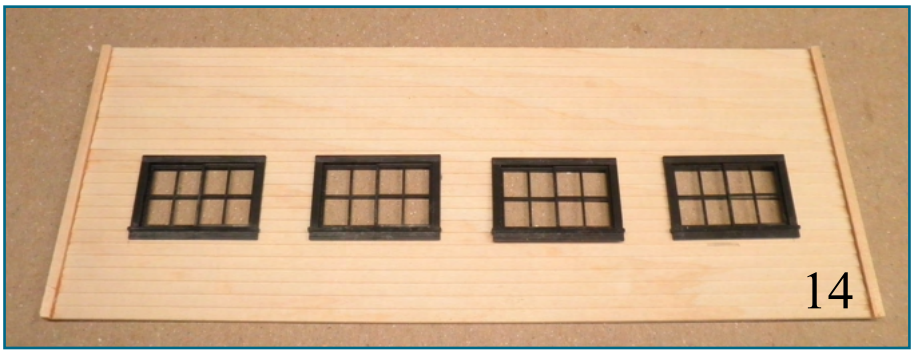
Turning back to the actual shop space, there was only the front wall. Clearly, three more walls were needed. The two side walls were cut from clapboard with the one wall opened up to meet the opening into the assembled office unit (**Photo 11**). The opening was rather close to the end and top of that same wall which called for reinforcement from behind to insure stability (**Photo 12**). The office unit was connected to the side wall using the 3/32" on the ends of the office unit (**Photo 13**).


11

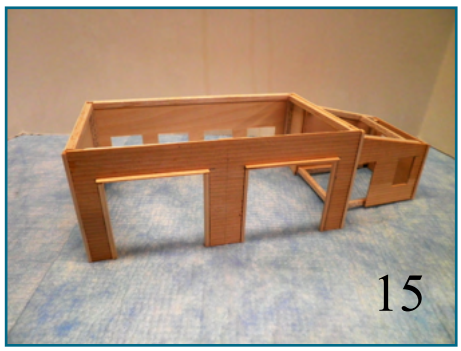

12

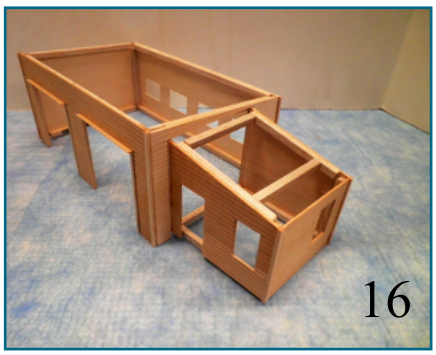

13

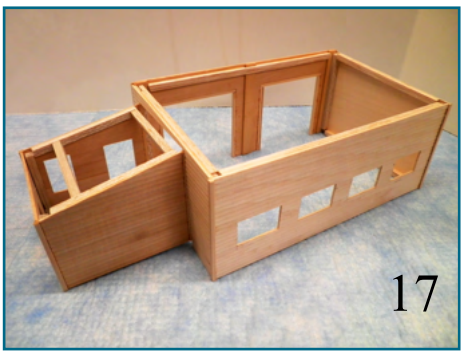
The back wall of the shop was cut to width to match the front, and opened up for 4 of those Grandt Line side opening windows. The ends of that wall were appended with 3/32" square stock to match the front wall with the four doors (**Photo 14**).

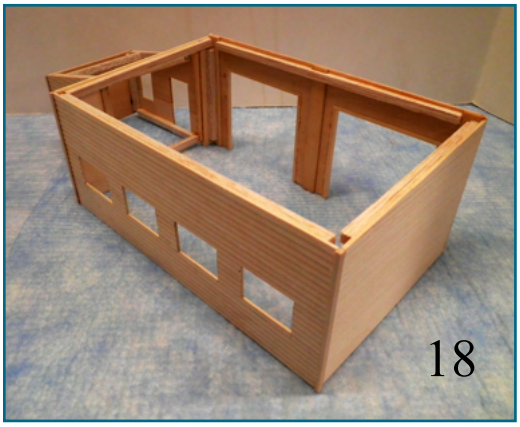

14

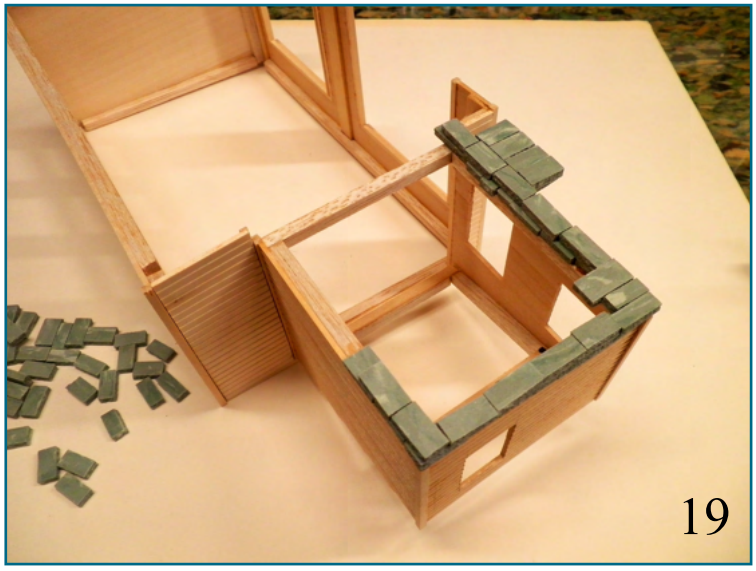
With that wall laid out, all of the remaining walls were assembled together into a single structure again using 3/16" square balsa for reinforcement of joints, for gluing surfaces of a roof to come later, and some at the base for mounting to a floor plate (**Photos 15-18**).


15

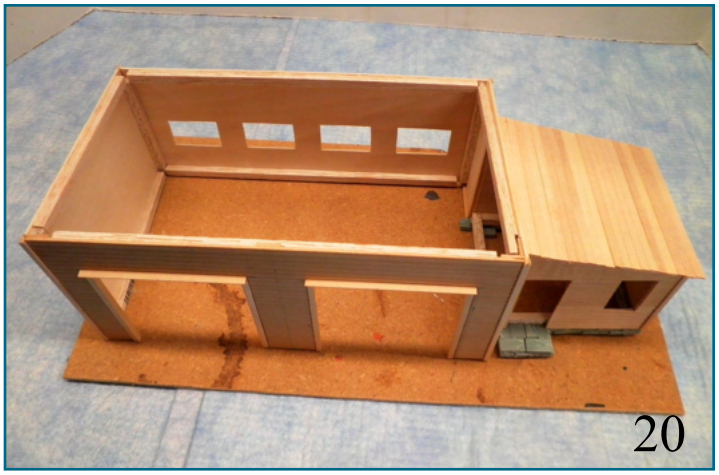

16

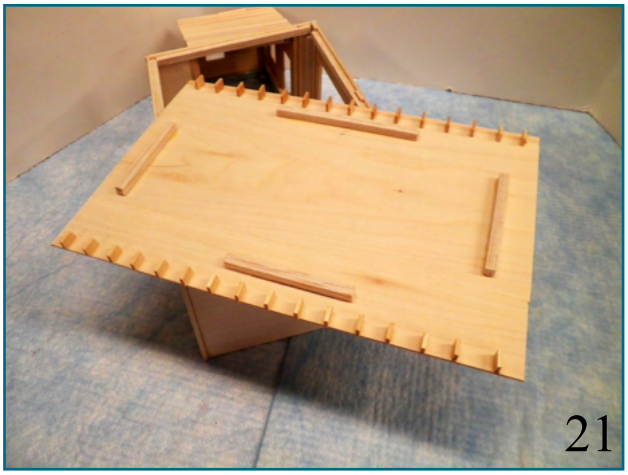

17





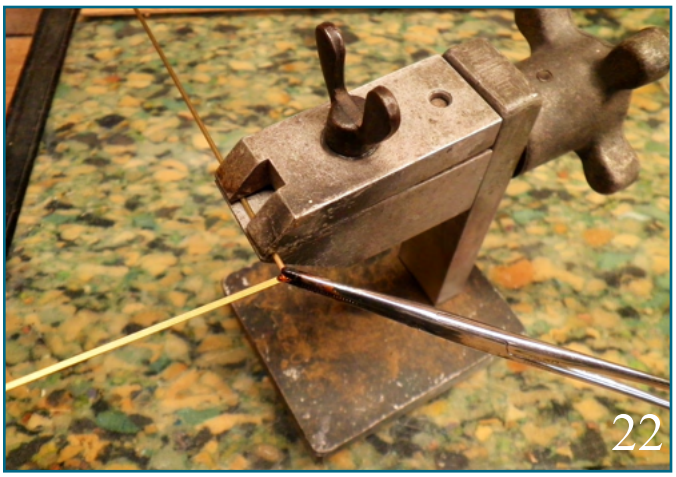
I was dissatisfied with the way the structure looked sitting on a mounting plate not liking clapboard resting on the ground, particularly under the office. I found some foundation "stone" in another box on the shelf and added that to the base of the structure. This also provided for a step up to the entrance of the office door (**Photo 19**). A roof for the office was also added using O scale 3" x 14" stripwood at this stage (**Photo 20**).



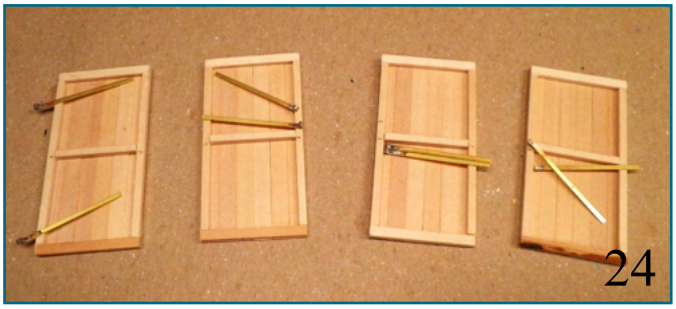


The main roof was assembled from glued up 1/32" flat sheet basswood with 3/16" square balsa glued in place to act as blocking for positioning making the roof removable. Faux rafter tails (O scale 3" x 10") were added to the front and the back to block and lock the removable roof into place (**Photo 21**).

With the basic structure assembled, it was time to start in on installing some of the details. Specifically, those four large shop entrance doors needed to be installed. I set about making hinges that would let these doors open and be positional. The basic strap hinge was made from 3/64" brass tubing soldered to 0.015" x 0.060 flat brass stock. I like to clamp everything into place, add flux, and then solder using my small torch (**Photos 22, 23**). Once soldered together the tubing was cut off, filed smooth, and cleared of any debris in the tube. Eight strap hinges were fabricated. The strap was then glued to the door using Goo and CA with the tubing positioned clear of the door (**Photos 24, 25**).


22


23


24

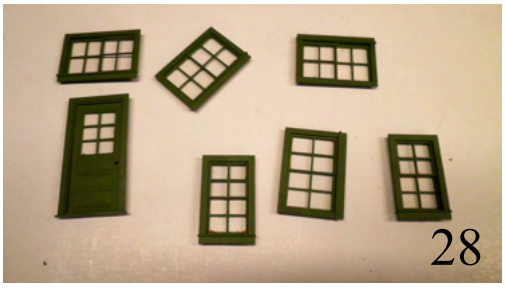

25

Once in place in the doorway opening, the locations for two pintles for each door were drilled out. The pintles were formed from 0.025" wire and glued into place. The doors were then just dropped into place onto the pintles to make working doors (**Photos 26, 27**). The straps were also drilled out to receive nbw castings.

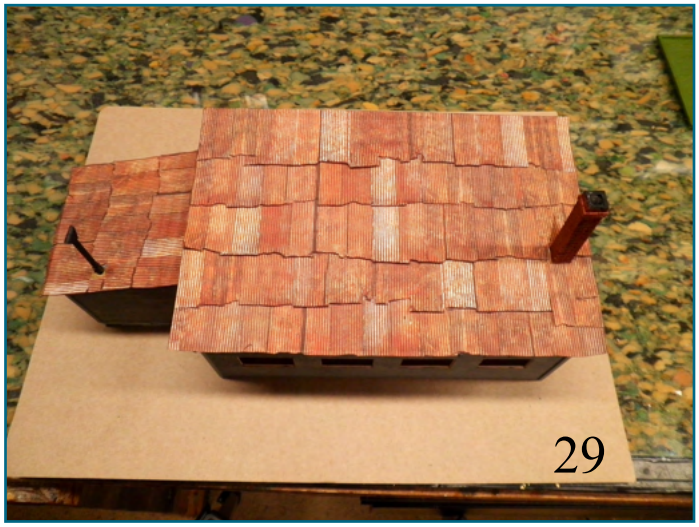

26

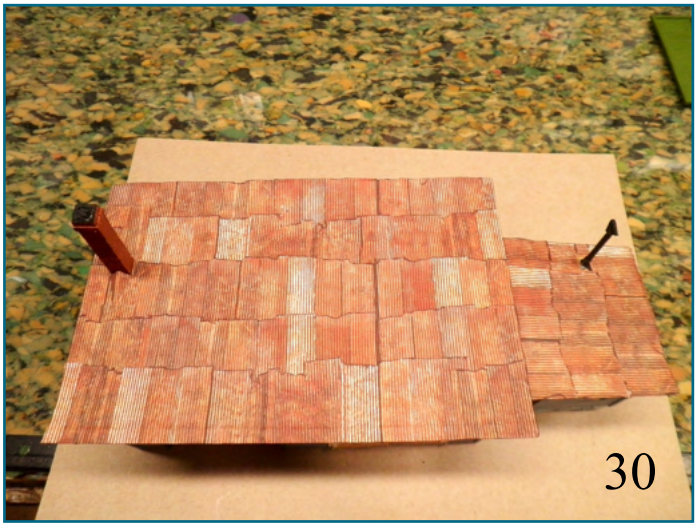

27

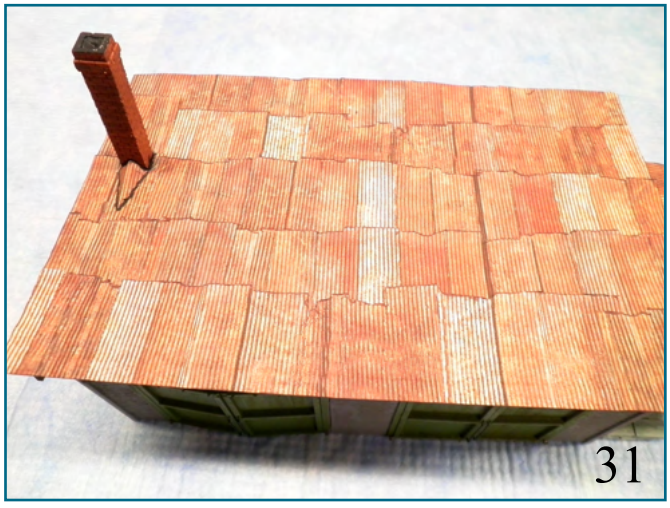
The remaining door and windows were next on the list of detail parts to finish. These were all styrene molded parts that were all painted Pullman Green (Floquil) and then glazed with overhead transparency film (**Photo 28**). The four large shop entrance doors were similarly painted.


28

The roofing that was applied was a paper product (Paper Creek) that was cut out in strips and glued down on both roof areas (**Photos 29, 30**). This looks pretty nice representing a rusted corrugated metal roof. Going around the strips prior to gluing them down with a brown Sharpie helps hide the white paper edges. One of the chimney castings was painted using several red Polly Scale colors and inserted into the roof with the paper roofing product wrapped up tight to it. On the upper side of the chimney, a roof cricket was added. These divert rain or melting snow away from a chimney and this is a detail that seems not commonly modeled as well. I added a little black paint at the seams to represent roofing tar (**Photo 31**).


29


30


31


32

Over on the office roof a smoke stack made from brass tubing and some scrap sheet brass soldered together was mounted. There were two concentric brass tube parts at the base and then the top of the stack was folded over on to the tubing, soldered into place, and then shaped with a cut-off wheel chucked into the Dremel tool (**Photo 32**).

Closing in on completing the basic structure, the walls were painted Harbor Mist (Floquil). Then the doors and windows were installed. A working lamp fixture over the office door was added with the electrical passed through the wall. An "Office" sign was printed off using Powerpoint and mounted to the wall (**Photos 33-35**).


33


34


35

To complete this project build, the entire structure was mounted onto a bit of thin wood with room for a little landscaping scenery. There was also a need for a large sign that gave the business some presence. That was made using PowerPoint and mounted to some 1/32" basswood. This was framed with some pre-painted wood angle and more stripwood from behind to support the mounting angles down to the roof where a little roofing tar finished this detail (**Photos 36, 37**). Basic Woodland Scenics ground cover and gravel was applied all around the building. Crates and a barrel were left out front by the office door for delivery. Around back there are two areas of small solvent or oil drums for "disposal" and another barrel (**Photo 37**). The fourth wall that's not been mentioned received a little attention getting some signage added to alleviate its otherwise blank status (**Photo 38**). A final addition was to install a cobblestone floor in the interior as a possible encouragement to someday install a full interior (**Photo 39**).

36


37


38


39

That wraps up this structure for the foreseeable future. That interior will just have to wait for some other day.

Air Eraser: A Precision Paint Removal Tool

By Scott Wooddell (Photos by the author)

If you've been in model railroading for any length of time, you've probably run into this situation: you've got a great model, but the paint just isn't quite right. Maybe the road name is wrong, maybe the number needs to be changed, or maybe you just want to start fresh. For me, that's been a regular part of the hobby. I've always enjoyed picking up decorated rolling stock and locomotives in a neutral paint scheme (i.e. all black), stripping off the factory lettering, and reworking them for my own freelance line—the Deer Creek & Susquehanna Railroad. There's something especially satisfying about seeing a model go from "off-the-shelf" to something that feels uniquely yours.

That process, though, depends heavily on being able to remove paint cleanly and selectively. Whether I'm taking off reporting marks or clearing space for new lettering, I don't want to lose the fine details that made me buy the model in the first place. Over time, that's what led me to start using an air eraser.

For years, most of us relied on chemical strippers or careful sanding. Both still have their place. But more and more modelers are discovering a tool that offers a surprising amount of control—the air eraser. Once you get the hang of it, it feels less like "stripping paint" and more like gently persuading it to disappear.

What Exactly Is an Air Eraser?

At its core, an air eraser is a small, precision version of a sandblaster. It uses compressed air to shoot a very fine abrasive through a tiny nozzle. That stream is just strong enough to remove paint (maybe one layer at a time), but (when used correctly) not strong enough to damage the plastic underneath. That "when used correctly" part matters, but don't let it scare you off. This isn't a difficult tool to learn. It just rewards a light touch.

Why Bother with an Air Eraser?

The biggest reason is control. With chemical strippers, you're often committing to removing everything whether you want to or not. With an air eraser, you can take off just the reporting marks, just the number boards, or just a small area where you made a mistake. It also does a great job of preserving detail. Those tiny rivets and panel lines that make a model look realistic; they can get softened or lost with aggressive methods. An air eraser, used gently, leaves them right where they belong. And then there's the cleanup factor. No soaking, no mystery chemical reactions, no worrying about whether a particular plastic is going to turn brittle. It's a much more controlled, predictable process. As a bonus, the surface it leaves behind is actually ideal for repainting, slightly "toothy," so new paint has something to grab onto.

What You'll Need

You don't need a huge setup, but a few basics make all the difference:

- An air eraser tool (plenty of hobby-friendly options out there) (https://shorturl.at/9Rvi2) A compressor with a regulator (being able to dial in low pressure is key)
- Abrasive media
  - Baking soda for lighter work
  - Aluminum oxide for tougher finishes
- A contained workspace (a spray booth is perfect, but even a simple box setup helps)
- Safety gear (eye protection and a dust mask at minimum)

One quick tip: before you go anywhere near a favorite locomotive, try things out on an old shell or scrap piece. You'll learn more in five minutes of testing than from any article—including this one.

How does it feel to use the tool?

This is one of those tools where technique matters more than anything. The first time you pick it up, your instinct might be to "blast" the paint off. That's not really how it works best. Instead, think of it like airbrushing in reverse. Start with low pressure—somewhere around 15 to 20 PSI and hold the nozzle a few inches away from the surface. Then just… move. Smooth, steady passes. Don't camp out in one spot. At first, it might feel like nothing's happening. Then you'll notice the paint starting to fade, almost like it's being erased (which, I suppose, is the whole point of the name). That's when it clicks. Work slowly. Let the tool do the job in layers. If you need more power, bump the pressure up a little, but only a little.

A Basic Workflow

Most projects end up following a similar rhythm:

Take the model apart first. You'll save yourself a lot of headaches by removing windows, trucks, and small details ahead of time.

Start gently with low pressure, light passes. Always.

Build up gradually. Don't expect instant results. This is a controlled process, not a race.

Adjust as you go. If the paint is stubborn, increase pressure slightly or switch media.

Be extra careful around details. Short bursts and lower pressure help you avoid flattening fine features.

Clean everything when you're done. Compressed air, a rinse, or a gentle wash will remove leftover abrasive.

A Few Lessons Learned the Hard Way

Most people make the same mistakes early on, so it's worth calling them out:

- Too much pressure: this is the big one. If something goes wrong, it's usually because the pressure was too high.
- Holding still: that's how you end up with uneven spots or small divots.
- Rushing the job: slower really is better here.
- Skipping cleanup: leftover grit can ruin an otherwise great paint job later.

None of these are deal-breakers; they're just part of the learning curve.

When It Shines (and When It Doesn't)

The air eraser really shines when you need precision. Removing lettering, fixing a paint mistake, or prepping a model for a custom scheme; this is where it excels. If you're trying to strip a thick, factory-applied paint job from an entire locomotive shell, it can still do it… but you might be there a while. That's where chemical stripping can still make sense for the heavy lifting, followed by the air eraser for cleanup and refinement. A lot of experienced modelers use both, depending on the job.

Final Thoughts

There's something satisfying about using an air eraser. It's quiet, controlled, and just a little bit surgical. You're not attacking the model. You're working with it. Like most things in this hobby, it takes a bit of practice. But once you get comfortable, it opens up a lot of possibilities. Fixing mistakes becomes less stressful. Custom projects feel more approachable. And you gain a level of control that's hard to get any other way. If you've never tried one, it's worth the time to learn. Chances are, it'll earn a permanent spot on your workbench.

Photo 1: An air eraser setup includes the air gun, hose, and abrasive compound supplied with the kit. Many modelers substitute ordinary baking soda for the included media, as it is less abrasive, inexpensive, and readily available for weathering and paint removal. A source of compressed air is also handy for blowing excess material off the model during and after the process.

Photo 2: A standard air compressor is used to supply air to the air eraser. A compressor with adjustable pressure works best, allowing you to begin at a lower pressure (15-20 psi) setting and gradually increase it as needed for the job.

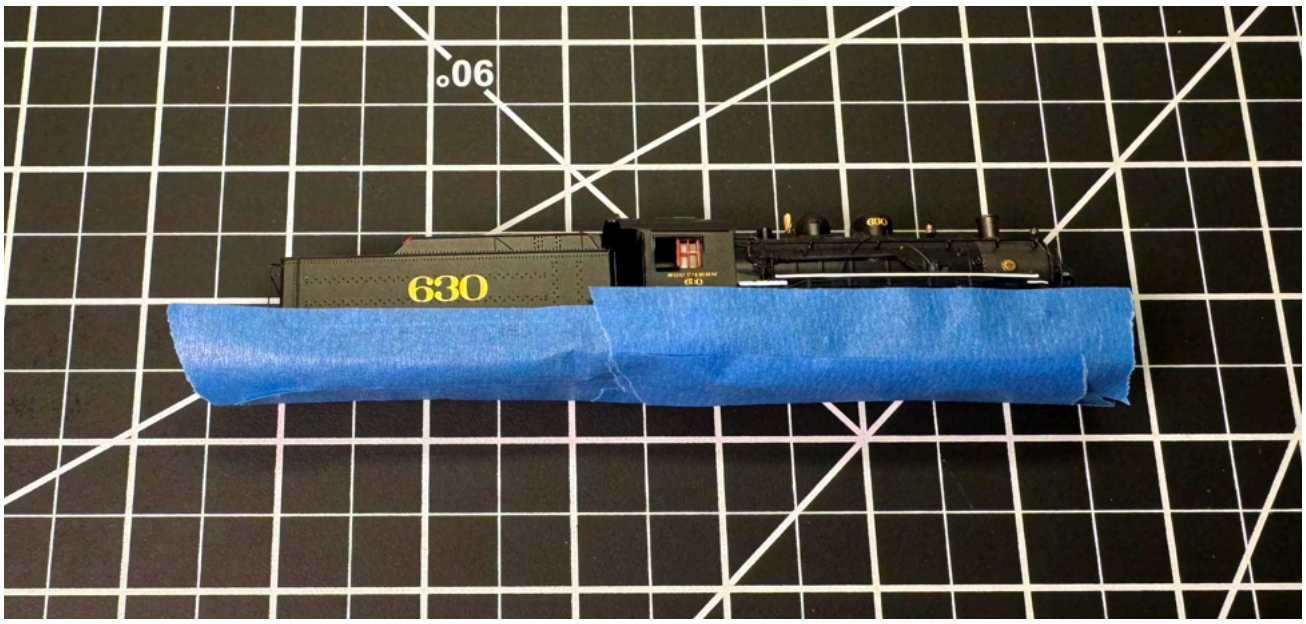
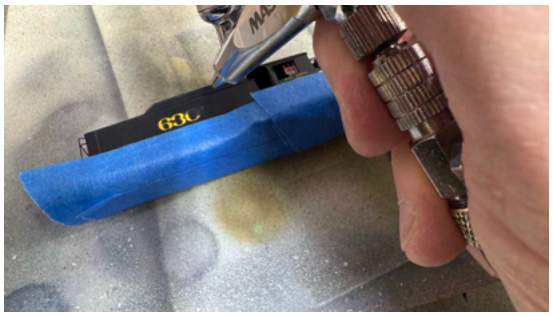


Photo 3: A before photo of an N scale Bachmann Industries 2-8-0 Consolidation locomotive in its factory-applied Southern Railway lettering and paint scheme.



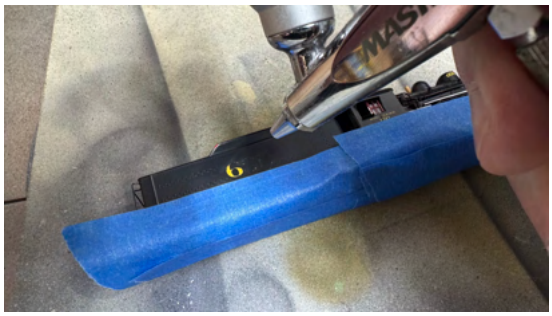


Photo 4 and Photo 5: The air eraser is shown here working its magic to remove the factory lettering and finish. It is sometimes necessary to work very close to the model for precise control. Eye protection and a face mask are highly recommended, as the abrasive compound tends to spread everywhere during the process.

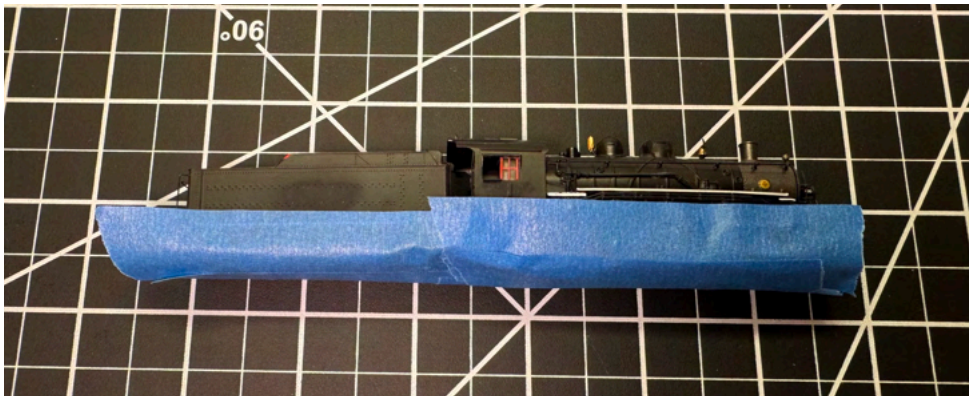


Photo 6: An after photo showing the factory-applied lettering successfully removed from the locomotive. Once all of the air eraser compound has been thoroughly cleaned from the model, the locomotive is ready for black paint touch-up work and a gloss clear coat prior to applying new decals.

Photo 7: This locomotive began life as an N-scale Broadway Limited Imports SW9 factory-lettered for the U.S. Army. After removing the original lettering, it now serves as motive power on the Deer Creek & Susquehanna Railroad.

Photo 8: Shown here is a "Ma & Pa" boxcar produced by Micro-Trains Line Co.. The two production runs of this car were only offered with road numbers 1154 and 1157, but additional numbers were desired for operations on my layout. Using the air eraser, the M&PA lettering and car number were removed without disturbing the surrounding factory decoration. New white decals were then printed with a "Ghost White" toner cartridge on a laser printer and applied to the model.

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
1 - New Jersey Division	*Train Orders*
2 - Potomac Division	*Potomac Flyer*
3 - Philadelphia Division	*The Dispatcher*
4 - Tidewater Division	*The Callboard*
5 - James River Division	*Crossties* - *Index*
10-South Mountain Division	*Wheel Report*
11 - Susquehanna Division	*Sidetracks*
12 - Carolina Southern Division	*The Brass Pounder*
13 - Carolina Piedmont Division	*The Herald*
14 - Chesapeake Division	*The Relay*

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 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 be 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.

Off the Track…

Fourth of July Jokes!

By Greg Warth, Editor

How is your knowledge of American history? Let's check it out. However, you will have to use these at your July 4th Celebration at your own risk. We cannot be responsible for the groans you might receive from your listeners.

What did George Washington say to his men before crossing the Delaware?

"Get in the boat, men!"

What did King George think of the American colonists?

He thought they were revolting.

Where was the Declaration of independence signed?

At the bottom.

Happy Independence Day!!

What do ducks love about the Fourth of July?

Fire-quackers

Why did Paul Revere ride his horse from Boston to Lexington?

Because the horse was too heavy to carry.

Why does the Statue of Liberty stand for freedom?

Because she can't sit down.

Who can jump higher than the Statue of Liberty?

Anyone. Statues can't jump.

What do you call a fancy patriot dog with really curly hair?

A Yankee poodle dandy.

What's red, white, black, and blue?

Uncle Sam after a boxing match.

NMRA Mid-Eastern Region

Who was the biggest jokester in George Washington's Army?

Laugh-a-Yet

What were the first turkeys in America called?

The Founding Feathers