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- Before doing your dream track plan
- Ken’s layout rebuild continues
- ... *and more inside!*

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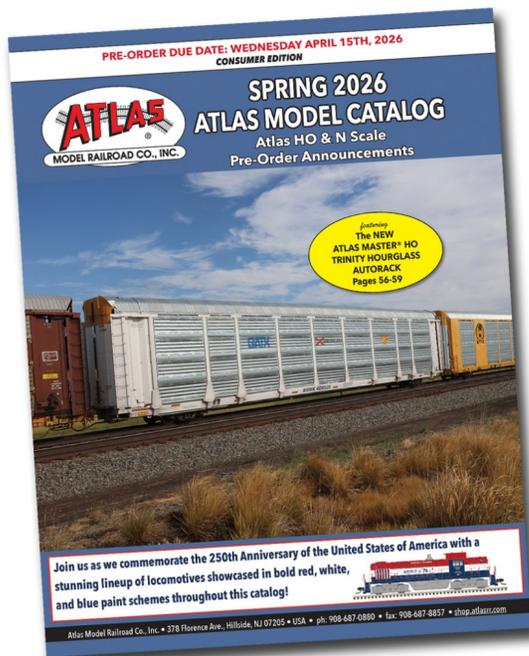
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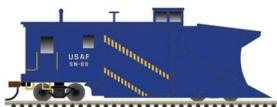
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MRH

MODEL RAILROAD HOBBYIST

Model Railroad Hobbyist | March 2026 | #193

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1.1 March 16

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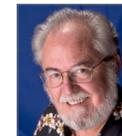
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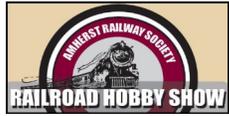
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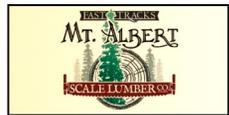
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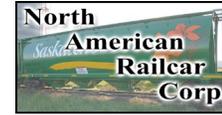
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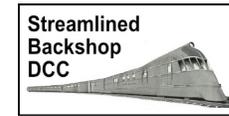
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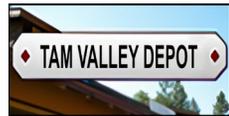
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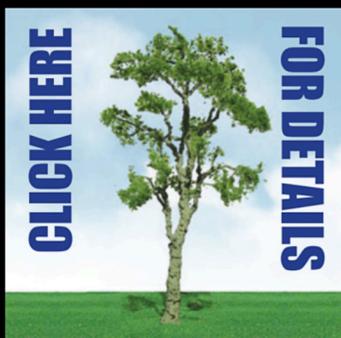
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Publisher's Musings: Building MRH magazine

JOE FUGATE



ALL SCALES

MRH Website this month: Proper flesh tones, and more ...

Compiled by JOE FUGATE



ALL SCALES

Let's talk ops: Before doing your dream track plan

JOE FUGATE



MULT. SCALES

What's Neat: Layout reconstruction part 4, ...

KEN PATTERSON



ALL SCALES

Electrical Impulses: No more wiring in the dungeon

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March 2026 news and events

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PUBLISHER'S MUSINGS



Model Railroad Hobbyist | March 2026

JOE FUGATE ON WHY WE BUILD MRH THE
WAY WE DO ...



EVERY MONTH WHEN WE ASSEMBLE *MODEL RAILROAD HOBBYIST*, we're making decisions about what goes where and how to help you get the most out of your hobby time. That last part – your time – drives everything we do.

We didn't name this magazine *Model Railroad Hobbyist* by accident. The most important ingredient in this hobby isn't the latest decoder or the most spectacular layout. It's you – the people who build, tinker, problem-solve, and find satisfaction in creating a miniature world. If we can help your hobby time be more rewarding and productive, we've done our job.

Making the hobby more satisfying means solving real problems: connecting you with the wisdom of thousands of other modelers, cutting through noise to find the signal, and anticipating questions before you ask them. That's why every section of *MRH* exists – not to fill pages, but to solve specific pain points or meet genuine needs.

Starting with your voice

Issue ratings show what resonated with our fellow modelers last month. They serve three purposes: social proof that an

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article connected with the community, as a reminder to take a second look at pieces you might have skipped, and as a signal to potential writers about what topics are in demand. The ratings remind us that *MRH* isn't a one-way broadcast – it's a conversation. Giving an article a "like" helps us know it's helpful to you.

Connecting you to more

Reading through *MRH* each month, you'll find ads for what's in **Running Extra**, our premium add-on magazine. *MRH* is free and ad-supported, but we receive more quality submissions than we can publish in the free magazine alone. *Running Extra* brings you an additional 80+ pages of ad-free content for less than three dollars a month.

We put our most in-depth articles in *RE*. Subscribers get the free *MRH* included in the same PDF, so one download gets everything we publish that month. Subscription deals also give you access to our entire back-issue library for as little as 13 cents per issue.

Here's the real value: if one issue of *Running Extra* saves you from making a costly mistake on your layout, it's paid for itself many times over. The *RE* ads shows you at a glance what's available each month.

Tapping into community wisdom

Our **MRH Forum** has thousands of active contributors, and readers have told us it's the most valuable part of what we offer. The challenge is helping busy modelers discover what they're missing if they can't hang out on the forum all month.

Best of the MRH Forum presents the most valuable recent threads – the ones with genuine insight, creative solutions, or

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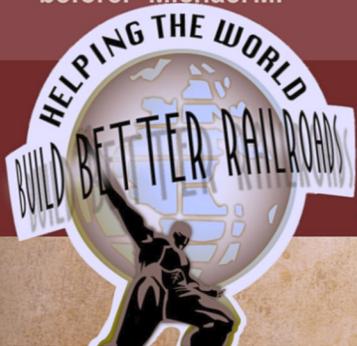
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helpful debate. It's a service for our fellow modelers who want to tap into the community's collective wisdom without spending hours scrolling.

When you're stuck on a problem, someone in the forum may have solved it already. "Best of the Forum" helps you possibly find that solution.

Industry insight you might not find elsewhere

Ken Patterson's What's Neat comes from someone with over 100 model railroad magazine covers to his name – an industry veteran with insider access and a willingness to try anything.

Ken gets information your average modeler may not have. He knows the manufacturers, understands the development

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process, and can give you context about a product. But he doesn't just talk about products – he uses them.

Ken's "home improvement show" style means you see him building layout modules, testing techniques, and working through real-world challenges.

Recently, after a fire in his layout room, Ken is planning to share hard-won lessons about safer, better layout construction methods – the kind of real-world insight you won't get from a press release.

Keeping your trains running

If you want your trains to go, you need to understand the electrical side of the hobby. **Electrical Impulses** demystifies DCC, wiring, decoder installation, and all things electrical.

We've covered step-by-step decoder installs, short-circuit protection strategies, soldering techniques, and multimeter roundups – whatever helps you keep your trains moving reliably.

You can have the most beautifully detailed layout in the world, but if the trains don't run smoothly, the hobby becomes frustrating instead of satisfying. 'Electrical Impulses' solves that pain month after month.

Learning from real layouts and real builders

Our **Cover Story** is often a layout tour, but we do much more than show pretty pictures. We use an interview style to pick the builder's brain: What worked? What didn't? What's realistic to accomplish based on their experience?

We show the layout room itself, not just the layout, because context matters. We extract every bit of learning and insight so

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you can replicate what worked and avoid their mistakes.

Other months, the cover story might be a deep-dive locomotive detailing tutorial, a step-by-step structure build, or a scenery how-to. It's mentorship in magazine form.

The **Secondary Story** follows the same approach, giving you a second smaller feature with practical takeaways.

Finding the hidden gems

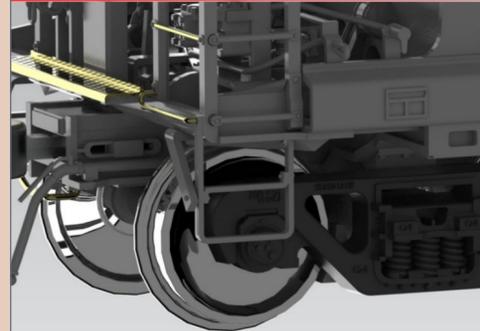
YouTube is packed with modeling content, but finding the truly valuable stuff means sifting through hundreds of videos – time most of us don't have.

Savvy Modeler Online solves that by curating hidden-gem videos – high-quality content from creators who don't have massive followings yet.

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Staying informed without the bloat

Our **Hobby News** section is comprehensive without making your eyes cross. We provide images and details on every new product, but keep the writing concise. We also include historical sidebars – for example, if new F units are announced, we'll explain how the F unit was developed and what features each prototype had, so you can use that information to inspire your own modeling projects.

At the back, you'll find **a full list of upcoming hobby events** in North America, plus prominent events in the UK and Australia. It's a practical reference section that helps you stay informed and plan ahead.

Looking forward

Our **Coming Next Issue** spread gives you a preview of what's ahead – one page for *MRH* and one for *Running Extra*. It's a teaser, yes, but also a promise: we're already working on next month's content.

The final analysis

Every section exists because we're trying to solve a problem or meet a need. We're thinking about what will make your hobby time more productive and connected to the larger community of modelers.

MRH and *Running Extra* are written by modelers for modelers. We understand the pain points because we've experienced them ourselves. That's why we search forum threads, hunt for

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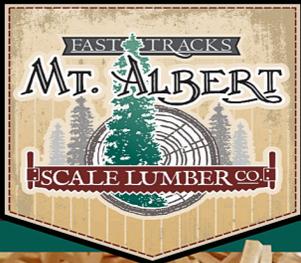


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hidden YouTube gems, and interview layout builders about what didn't work – not just what did work.

Because at the end of the day, this hobby is about people. It's about the satisfaction of solving problems, learning new skills, and creating something meaningful with your hands and imagination.

If we can help make that journey easier, more rewarding, and more connected to the community of modelers around the world, then we've accomplished what we set out to do.

Thanks for being part of this community! On to this month's issue ...



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★ LAST ISSUE LIKES

Most liked articles in [February 2026 issue](#) of *MRH* are:

- 1st** Electrical Impulses: DCC installation tips and tricks
- 2nd** Sammy Carlile's Santa Fe Hereford Sub
- 3rd** Publisher's Musings: Thoughts on powering frogs

Most liked articles in [February 2026 issue](#) of *Running Extra* ...

- 1st** Limited Modeler: Ballville layout build progress
- 2nd** Ah-Hah moment: Remove a loco shell with guitar picks
- 3rd** Green Harbor locomotive facilities

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In

MRH**RUNNING
EXTRA**

March issue ...



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	Getting Real: Modeling military loads TONY THOMPSON
	Model an SD38-2M from an undec Athearn THOM DRIGGERS
	3D printing: Slicing with resin JAMES REGIER
	Ah-Hah Moment: Cool small modeling hammer JOE FUGATE

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**THIS
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Model Railroad Hobbyist | March 2026

Compiled by **JOE FUGATE****Getting proper skin tones**

MRH forum member **JerryRGS** (Jerry B.) asked the forum members for suggestions on how to get the best skin tones on figures.

Several approaches were offered, with one of the more impressive responses posted by porthos (Kris M.) as a series of photos of his figure painting work, an example of which is posted above. These are O scale figures and they're still in process, but nevertheless amazing work.

To see what other examples have been posted, visit the thread!

View the full thread on the MRH website

▶ **MRH'S MONTHLY GREAT MODELER POSTS**[MRHMAG.COM](#)[INDEX](#)[TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)



1. MRH forum member **rangeleybranch** (Colin K.) asked about how to get static grass to stand properly – ultimately getting this final result.

Static grass gyrations

MRH forum member **rangeleybranch** (Colin K.) was wondering how to get static grass to stand properly:

“My first time experience with static grass was a bit of a flop – quite literally. I think my \$30 low voltage grass applicator might be to blame. I'm not sure I'm sold on static grass.”

Colin then says, “After a few more false starts with static grass and my cheap flyswatter applicator, I went ahead and ordered the WS Static King (with wall wart) and am impressed at the overall experience. Here's a roster shot of MEC 566 sitting pretty surrounded by freshly installed static grass [1].”

Visit the forum for more details on the before and after transformation of Colin's static grass efforts.

[View the full thread on the MRH website](#)

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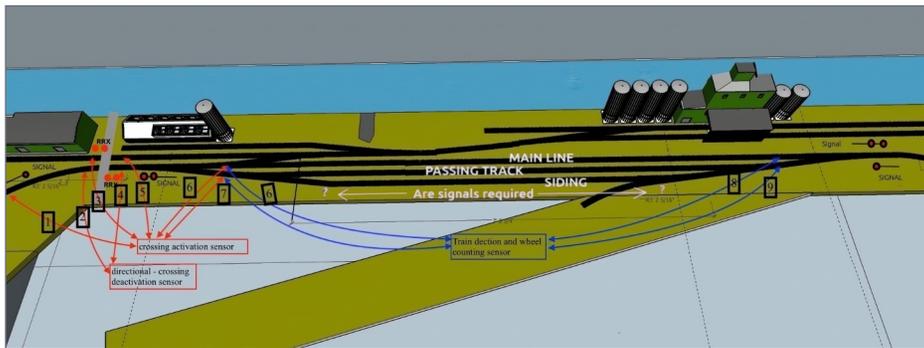
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2. *MRH* forum member **EGRX** (Eugene G. posted) this diagram of an area on his layout and asked about how to best add signals to it.

Advice Signaling your layout

MRH forum member **EGRX** (Eugene G.) kicked off a thread asking about adding signals to [2] above:

“The two single head search light signals, on either end of the town, control the routing of trains through the town. Green indicates continuing on the main and yellow the divergent route is set ... are routing signals required on the double ended siding?”

Member **cv_acr** (Chris V.) says, “The HUGE question is, 1) are you wanting realistic signals or just switch indicators and 2) which railroad are you representing? You posted a Canadian signal chart [on this thread] but if you're modeling an American railway the signal rules will be different (and there are several different variations of this chart for different US railroads and regions).”

See the full thread for the complete in-depth discussion on signaling options for this track arrangement.

[View the full thread on the *MRH* website](#)

Recent photo fun thread

These images posted on a recent *MRH* forum Photo Fun thread focuses on some cool big steam shots.

[View list of recent Photo Fun threads](#)

3. *MRH* forum member **gmpullman** (Edmund T.) posted this photo and commented, “Inches to spare.” This appears to be a replica of a Pennsylvania Railroad Class Q2 Duplex, a massive non-articulated freight loco with a 4-4-6-4 wheel arrangement.



4. **Mark Mathu** says, “A Baltimore and Ohio articulated Yellowstone Class EM-1 pounds across the Sandsoft River bridge with a heavy coal drag, the big locomotive digging in for the long climb up the grade to Hillsboro.” Mark took this photo of Dan Christiansen's train on on the North American Prototype Modelers HO scale layout. ☑



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Let's talk about OPs

by JOE FUGATE

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Model Railroad Hobbyist | March 2026

Before you draw that dream track plan

YOU'VE GOT THE SPACE. YOU'VE GOT THE BUDGET. You've been collecting locomotives and rolling stock – and now you're ready to build that dream layout you've been thinking about for years.

Stop. You're about to make a decision you can't easily undo, and may be missing critical insight you need, especially if you've never done any serious operations on a layout.

Before you draw a single line on that track plan, before you commit a dollar to benchwork or a foot of flex track, you need to do something that might feel counter intuitive: Go operate on someone else's railroad.

How do you get some ops experience under your belt? Find a club. Attend an ops session. Show up at an open house where they're actually running trains, not just displaying them.

Get your hands on a throttle and a switch list and spend time learning what a real railroad crew does.

Here's why: many modelers design layouts in a vacuum. They draw beautiful flowing curves and intricate track arrangements that "look cool." Then they build and scenic the layout only to discover too late that their railroad doesn't actually *do* anything interesting.

The track is scenery, not machinery. There's nothing to accomplish, no sense of *transporting* freight and people.

1. On my Siskiyou Line 1 (SL1), we liked to use two-person crews, which makes it easy to accommodate guest operators as shown here. Being a guest operator is a great way to get valuable insight into how railroads work.



Real railroads don't route track the way they do because it looks cool. Each and every piece of track has a purpose and makes running the railroad easier to do.

You can't learn what makes operations more realistic by reading about it. You have to experience it.

You need to be three moves deep into a switching puzzle and suddenly see how the track arrangement provides the solution. You need to know what it's like when a passing siding is six inches too short and see what it takes to get that traffic over the road anyway.

You need to understand why a facing-point spur is frustrating and why you need a runaround track. You need to feel the satisfaction of a crew efficiently getting a job done – and the frustration of a track arrangement that fights you at every turn.

When you do serious operation on a layout that does ops well, something clicks. You start seeing track differently – not as lines on paper, but as tools that allow you to transport goods, move things more efficiently, and get work done more effectively.

That experience will be worth much more than any track planning book you could ever read when it comes time to develop a satisfying layout track plan.

Next time: Where to find these ops opportunities, and what to look for when you get there.

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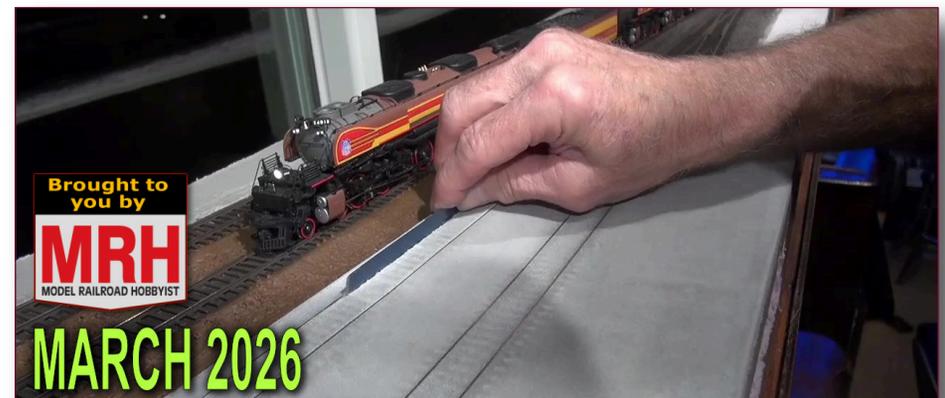


Model Railroad Hobbyist | March 2026

KEN PATTERSON COVERS THIS MONTH:



- BLI's HO SCALE UNION PACIFIC BUSINESS CAR #101
- LAYOUT CONSTRUCTION: REBUILDING THE LAYOUT PART 4
- UPCOMING PRODUCTS FROM BACHMANN



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WHAT'S NEAT with Ken Patterson
Layout rebuilding, part 4

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KEN CONTINUES HIS LAYOUT RECONSTRUCTION SERIES WITH LAYING-IN PARKING lots, roads, and a control panel. Broadway Limited sent two samples of the new Union Pacific Heritage Fleet business car #101 "Lincoln" in HO scale and Bachmann's Tyler Haney and Matt Stern join Ken to discuss some upcoming products, including the limited edition American Freedom Train trainset.

BLI Union Pacific Business Car #101



1. BLI is releasing new models of the UP Heritage Fleet business car #101, the "Lincoln," in HO scale. Highly detailed, the models replicate the car after an interior rebuild in 2020, including on recent trips behind Big Boy #4014.



2. Fully detailed and lighted, the cars are available with different drumheads and in the pre-2020 version with the name Lone Star. Info: broadway-limited.com

Layout (re)construction part 4



3. Ken was happy with the track laid previously, so he's got trains running on the mainline while he prepares for more work on the section.



4. One thing Ken wanted to do was install some railroad-tie retaining walls where he had vertical breaks in the scenery. Having built the first one slowly tie-by-tie, for the next one he dribbled carpenter's glue on a board that was the right size, and mounted the ties to it.



5. Ken then started creating a paved surface using this favorite method – using ready-mix concrete patch. He admitted wishing he'd covered the retaining wall with masking tape, as he had to clean it up afterwards. Note the stripwood forms along the edge of the area where he's applying the concrete patch.



6. Ken's method of making a paved lot with embedded railroad tracks is to simply cover the area with the concrete patch and smooth it out with repeated passes of a putty knife. He'll sand it even flatter later to get it down to rail height.



7. He used the same method on the access road along the front of the section and the lot past the end of the tracks. He set the depth and profile with the boards temporarily stapled to the front of the section.



8. Continuing down the module, he built more forms with scraps of stripwood and sewing pins for a road crossing the tracks and joining to the front and rear access roads. He cut the heads off the pins later so he could run the putty knife along the tops of the stripwood to level the concrete patch.



9. Ken frequently works through the night – for this task he saw dawn arrive as he finished smoothing out all the concrete patch he'd put down. He then went to bed to give it time to set.



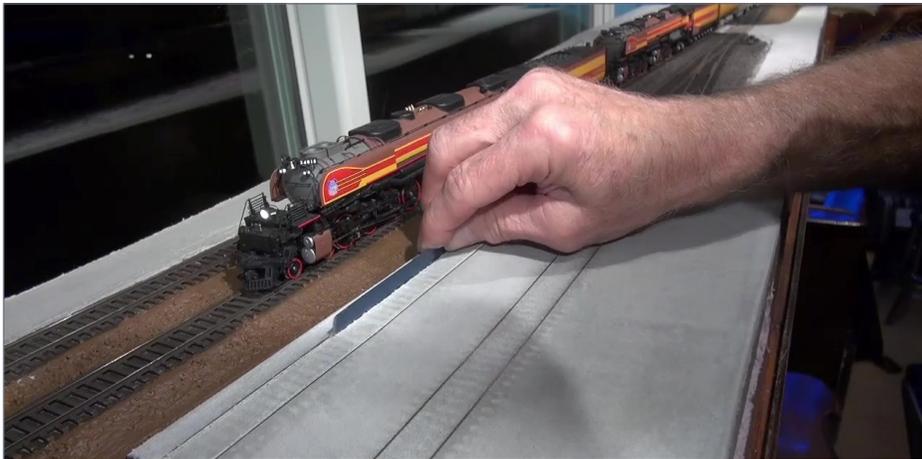
10. When Ken got back to the layout he discovered that he could “sand” the finished surface by wetting it and rubbing it with his fingers. Sandpaper was a lot more efficient, though.



11. After sanding the concrete surfaces, Ken realized that he had a section he could add more concrete patch to for a sidewalk. This time he remembered the masking tape.



12. After cutting the forms away from the set concrete patch material with a hobby knife, he pulled them up and threw them away.



13. Using a hacksaw blade, Ken cut the flangeways into the concrete surface. Yes, the train with the two fantasy paint scheme Big Boys is running past as Ken cuts into the concrete patch material.

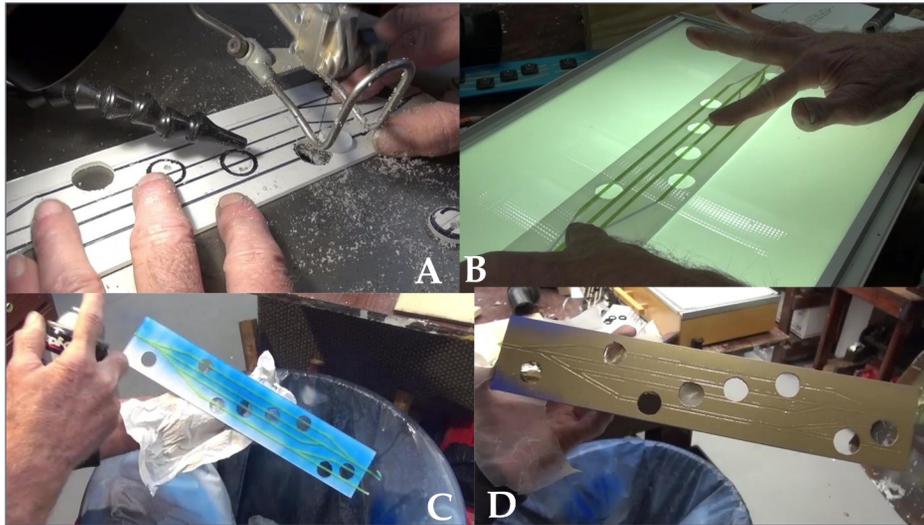


14. To finish up the concrete paving, Ken painted it with a liberal amount of dilute India ink.



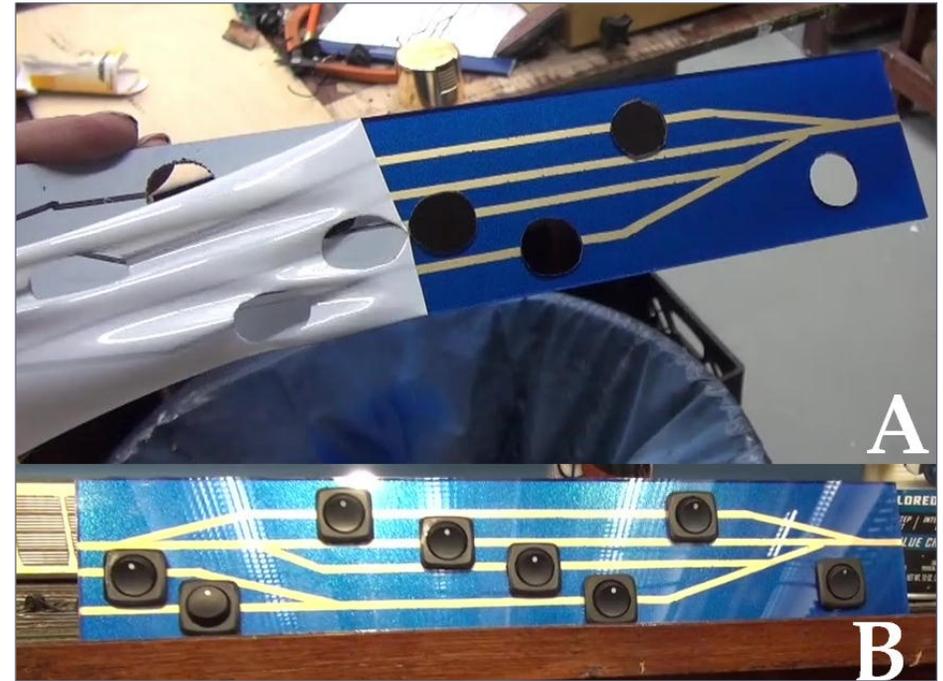
15. The chainsaw came out again, along with a Surform tool, to carve away enough foam to put in an access road on the other side of the tracks.





16. Ken decided he wanted to get trains running again, so he needed to build a control panel. He does this by (A) cutting the holes for the toggle switches out of the Plexiglas with a scroll saw, (B) applying automotive trim tape as the track schematic to the back of the Plexiglas, (C) painting the back of the Plexiglas a color called Ocean Blue from Dupli color, and then peeling the tape off, and (D) painting over the blue with gold paint.

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17. Then Ken (A) peels the protective cover off the front of the control panel exposing the gold track diagram, and (B) installs the toggle switches.

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18. With the control panel assembled, it's time to cut the concrete paving holding the modules together and get the new one back to the shop to install the control panel and wiring, and finish up with ballasting and other details. Which Ken will show in "What's Neat" for April 2026.

Upcoming products from Bachmann Trains



19. Tyler Haney and Matt Stern join Ken from Philadelphia to go over some upcoming releases from Bachmann Trains, beginning with the limited-edition American Freedom Train trainset and add-on cars. Only 1000 HO scale AFT trainsets featuring the SP GS-4 #4449 will be produced.

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Jim Six: Ballville layout design evolves

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MRH **RUNNING** **EXTRA**



20. The new Grand Canyon Railroad full-length dome car, "Fred Harvey," is an add-on car to the HO scale Grand Canyon trainset.



21. Bachmann also has a new line of pre-weathered HO scale cars coming out, known as the Workhorse Series. This Burlington Northern three-bay hopper is one of the first cars that will be available. Info: shop.bachmanntrains.com

To see the complete video of Ken creating roads, building a control panel, taking a chainsaw to the layout again, and a few other things, as well as more photos of the Broadway Limited passenger cars and what's coming soon from Bachmann, click on the video link at the beginning of this article. ☑



When talking to hobby vendors, please remember to mention MRH.

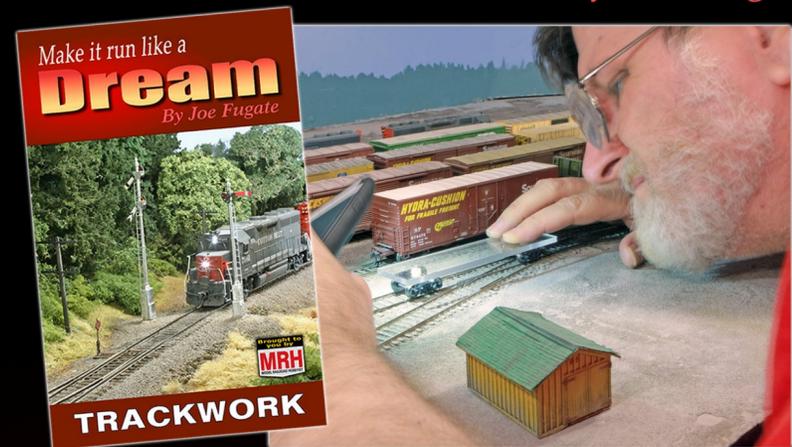
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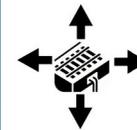
Other books in this series: ROLLING STOCK (available now) and LOCOS (Summer 2026)

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Model Railroad Hobbyist | March 2026



JOE FUGATE SAYS “DEATH TO THE DUNGEON” – NO MORE UNDER-LAYOUT WIRING ...

IT'S ALL TOO FAMILIAR: YOU'RE LYING ON YOUR BACK UNDER the layout, flashlight clenched between your teeth. With a hot soldering iron in one hand, you're trying to trace a short circuit through a wire spaghetti while your neck aches in protest. Your shoulder is wedged against a benchwork

leg. You've been down here for 20 minutes, and you still can't find the problem. Sound familiar?

Here's the uncomfortable truth nobody talks about much: *under-layout wiring is a total pain.*

I mean this literally. It's why some ambitious layout projects stall out once they get past the benchwork stage. It's why that beautiful double-deck empire gets mothballed when its builder hits 65. It's why we spend more time dreading maintenance than we do enjoying operations.

The problem isn't just physical discomfort – though anyone over 50 knows that “just crawl under there for a minute” can mean days of back pain to follow. The real issue is accessibility. When your wiring infrastructure lives in a dark, low-headroom space that requires contortionist skills to access, you've created a maintenance nightmare you may be constantly trying to avoid.

The good news? There are solutions to the “dungeon problem” available. These aren't theoretical concepts – they're proven techniques that some are starting to use on their layouts. Some require planning from day one. Others can be retrofitted to existing layouts. All of them share the goals of *keeping you off your hands and knees and productive.*

Let's explore how to design – and wire – a layout you'll still be able to maintain when you're 70.

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THE ROTISSERIE REVOLUTION



1. Miles Hale first presented his A-Frame-o-Matic on TrainMasters TV back in 2016 as an easy way to work on all sides of a modular section.



2. SP Steve (Steve C.) posted this photo of his module rotisserie on the MRH forum, inspired by Miles' A-Frame.

WIRING MADE EASY AND ACCESSIBLE | 4

The most elegant solution to under-layout wiring is simple: *don't wire under the layout*. Wire it on top of a workbench, then move it into position.

This is a main benefit of the TOMA layout building method we promote here at *MRH Media*. TOMA = "The **O**ne **M**odule **A**pproach." The idea is to build your layout in bite-sized modular sections. At the end of this article, I provide links to more about TOMA.

The rotisserie concept [1, 2] is straightforward: design your layout in modules or modular sections so they can be removed and mounted on a rotisserie so you can pivot, tilt, or completely invert them for wiring, doing tortoise installs, and other maintenance.

Once you're done, move the module section back in place on the layout for normal use.

The rotisserie approach works best for modular layouts, especially those using the TOMA method. It also will work for shelf layouts 24" deep or less, though if your shelf layout is longer than 8-12', you should consider dividing it into manageable sections.

The rotisserie method is best for new construction, and doesn't really work as a retrofit. So let's consider other approaches.

FASCIA-FIRST WIRING

If modular sections are not practical, then the answer is to *move the wiring to where you can reach it: the fascia*.

Traditional layout wiring puts the main bus down the center of the benchwork, underneath the track. With modern DCC and proper wire gauges, there's no electrical reason the bus needs to be in the geographic center of the layout. So why are we still putting it in the least-accessible location?

Moving the bus to the front edge of the layout – right behind the fascia – can be a game-changer. Instead of crawling to the middle



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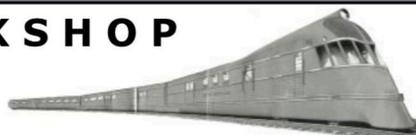
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WIRING MADE EASY AND ACCESSIBLE | 5

of a 24" deep (or deeper) layout, you're working at the front edge where you can reach everything while standing or sitting comfortably on a stool/rolling office chair.

Here's how to implement this:

Top-down feeders: Pre-wire your feeders to the track at the workbench *before* you install it. You're working on the track while you have full overhead access, good lighting, and room to work comfortably. Once all connections are made and tested, install the track.

Drill holes in the roadbed and thread the feeders down through the holes to connection points at the fascia. This way, all connection work happens where you can see what you're doing and working from above – not underneath after installation.

When you need to troubleshoot later, you're working at the layout front edge with the feeders already routed and accessible.



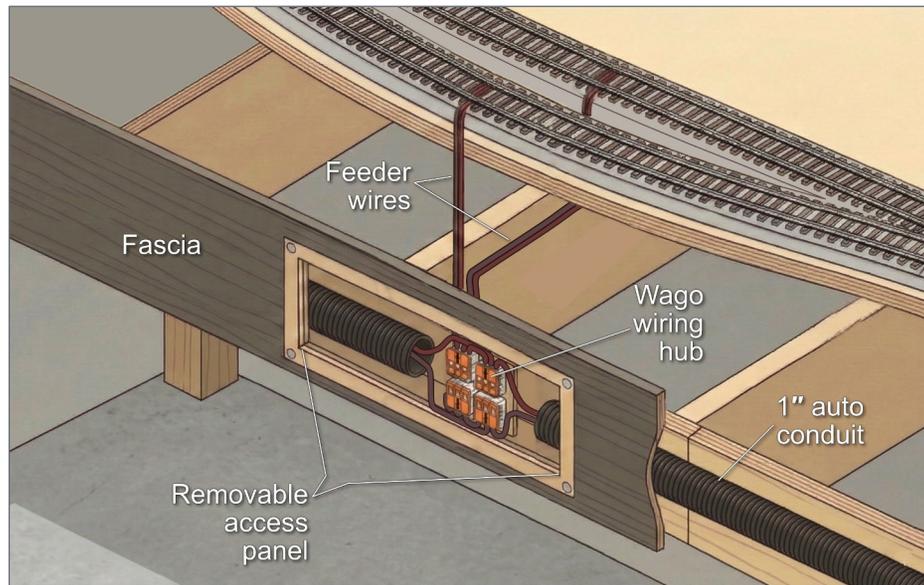
3. Make wiring easier with a removable fascia panel every few feet where you make all your wiring connections. Use magnetic cabinet latches to hold the panel on.

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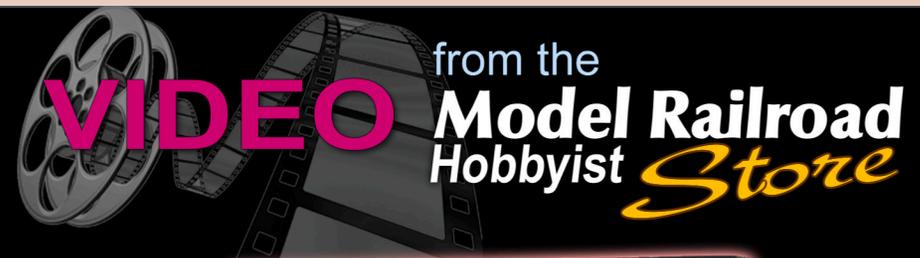
Recessed fascia panels are the professional approach [3]. Instead of a solid fascia, create removable panels (held in place with magnets) that conceal Wago connections (or terminal strips), layout accessory boards, and things like frog juicers. Everything lives in a shallow cavity between the fascia face and along the benchwork front edge.

When you need access, pop off a panel. You're working at waist height with good lighting and both hands free. Sitting in a nice roll-around chair makes this quite comfortable. Use a magnetic cabinet latch kit with magnets and metal plates to make your own removable panels.

Think in terms of a removable fascia panels with feeder connections inside every three to six feet. Track feeders come down from above and connect to WAGOs or terminal strips. The main bus runs horizontally through these panels, connecting each terminal strip in sequence.



4. This diagram shows the basic removable fascia panel and bus-in-a-pipe approach.

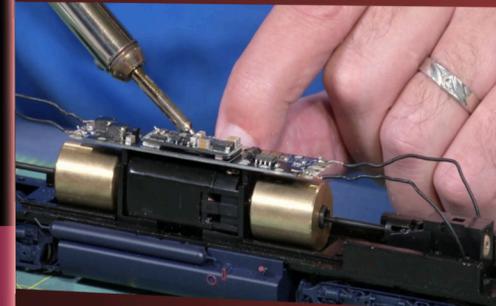


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WIRING MADE EASY AND ACCESSIBLE | 7

If there's a short in the Bakersville yard, you remove the Bakersville fascia panel and troubleshoot right there – in a comfortable rolling chair, with a cup of coffee within easy reach.

The “bus-in-a-pipe” method creates a future-proof wiring backbone along your layout's front edge [4]. Run your main DCC bus through 1" split loom wire tubing (about 72 cents per foot), mounted horizontally just behind the fascia before you install it. This is a one-time installation – either build it in from the start, or if retrofitting an existing layout, it's a single climb underneath to secure the tubing to the benchwork frame.

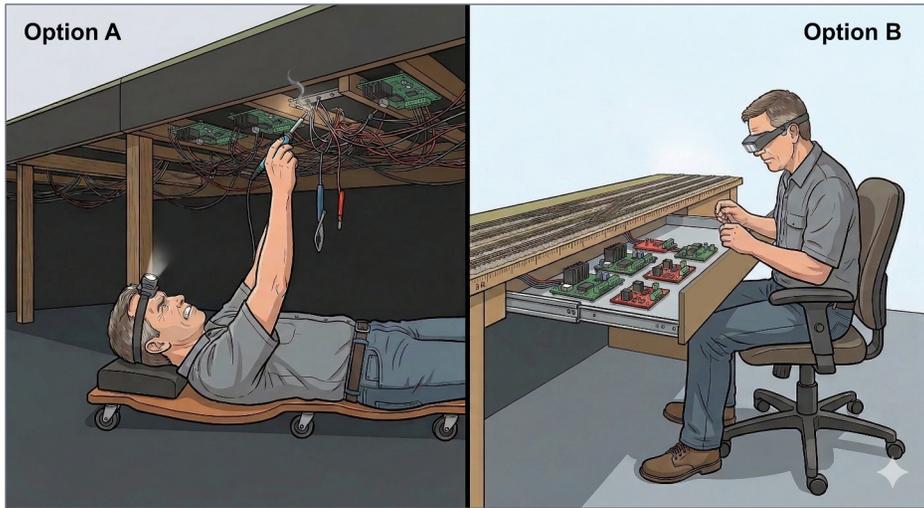
At regular intervals (every 3-6 feet), install connection hubs with magnetic latch cover panels that blend with your fascia. Use magnetic cabinet latch kits with magnets and metal plates to build removable covers that hold securely but pop off instantly when you need access. Behind each cover panel, mount a terminal block where feeders connect to the main bus.

The beauty of this system is flexibility. Wires slide easily through the tubing for future additions – no re-routing, no new holes to drill. Need to add a feeder to the new siding you're building? Open the nearest magnetic panel, slide a new wire through the tubing to the connection hub, and you're all set to wire it up.

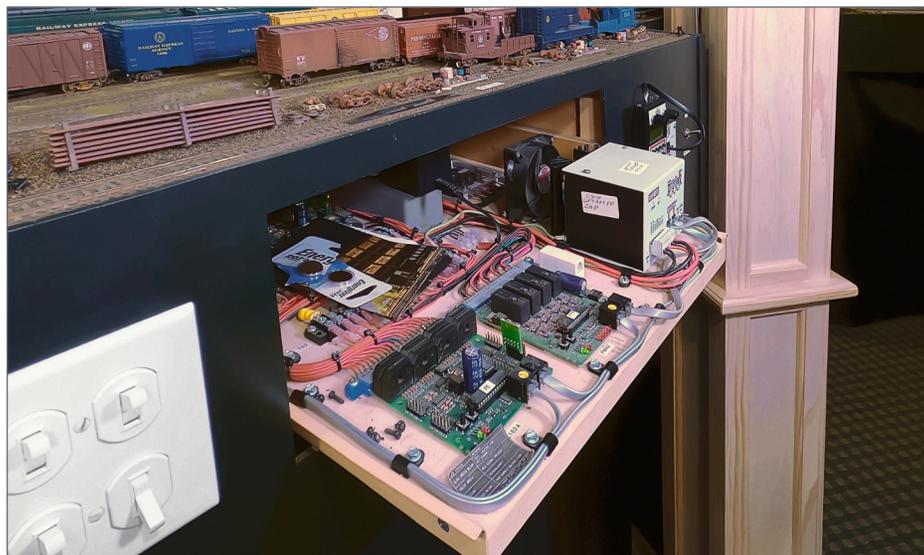
The bus stays organized, protected, and accessible. If you need to troubleshoot a short in the Bakersville yard, remove the Bakersville panel and work at waist height with good lighting and both hands free.

This approach works equally well for accessory buses (switch machines, signals, lighting). If you like, run separate tubing for different systems (the 1" tubing should handle a dozen or more 12-14AWG wires). Everything becomes modular, accessible, and maintainable.

The pull-out drawer method: The fascia-first philosophy extends beyond just wire routing. Mount your DCC boosters, circuit breakers, and power supplies in pull-out drawers installed along the fascia or layout edge.



5. Rather than mount your DCC system electronics down under the layout [A], put it all in a nice pull-out drawer [B] for easy access.



6. Jim Tilley (May 2025 MRH) put his DCC electronics in a pull-out drawer, making access super-easy.

Use standard drawer slides to create drawers that hold your entire DCC system and related circuits. Make sure all wires have plenty of slack – extra service loops – so the drawers pull out smoothly without straining connections. Everything becomes instantly accessible from the front. Need to swap a booster? Pull out the drawer. Troubleshooting a circuit breaker? Pull out the drawer. No climbing, no awkward positioning, no contortions. Just simple, straightforward front-access maintenance

Important note: fascia-first wiring requires more wire than traditional center-bus routing. Budget for it. The extra cost in copper is trivial compared to the time you’ll save over the layout’s lifetime.

ELIMINATE SOLDERING

Even with perfect wire routing, traditional soldered connections can create problems. Soldering under a layout – even at the fascia edge – could mean working with a hot iron in awkward positions. You need both hands, good ventilation, and a stable work surface. It’s doable, but it’s not fun.

The solution? *Eliminate soldering from your under-layout toolkit.*

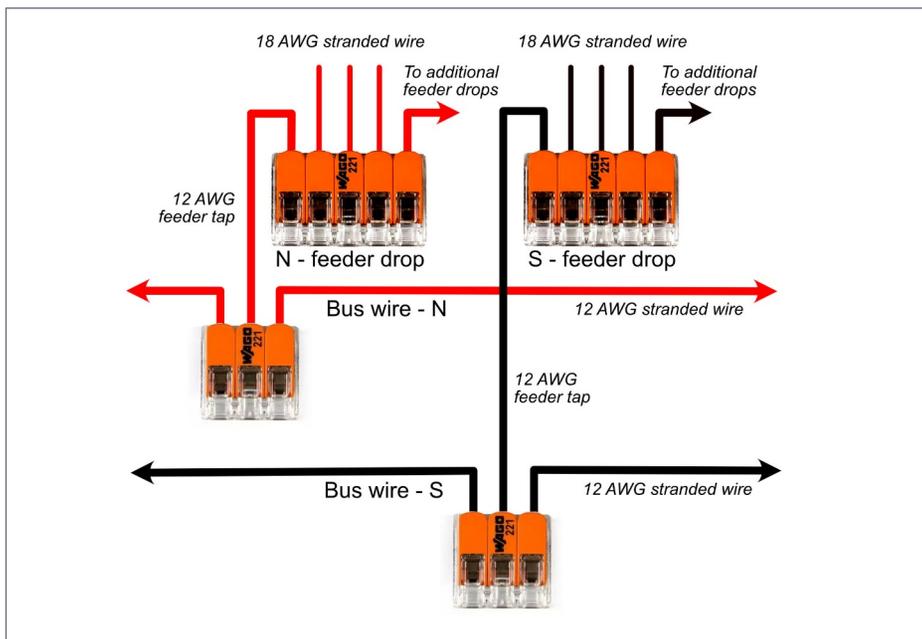
Modern connector technology has reached the point where mechanical connections are just as reliable as soldered joints for layout wiring—and infinitely more maintainable.

The WAGO revolution has transformed layout wiring over the past five years. WAGO lever-nut connectors (and their clones from other manufacturers) allow tool-free, solid connections that can be made and unmade in seconds. Lift the lever, insert the wire, close the lever. Done. No stripping required for solid wire, minimal stripping for stranded.

I’ve converted entirely to WAGO 221 series connectors for all my layout wiring [7]. Here’s why they’re perfect for our application:

- **Transparent housing:** You can see if the wire is fully inserted
- **Reusable:** Made a mistake? Open it and try again
- **Mix wire types:** Connect solid bus wire to stranded feeders in the same connector
- **Compact:** Small enough to tuck behind fascia panels
- **Rated for our voltages:** Handles DCC track power with ease

The 221-413 (3-port) and 221-415 (5-port) are my go-to sizes. For connecting multiple feeders to a bus drop, the 5-port WAGO is perfect. Buy them in bulk – they’re cheaper than you think when you factor in the time saved.



7. You can use all-WAGO layout wiring in your fascia access panels as shown here.

I stay away from the assortment packs; I prefer to buy bulk packs of 3-port or 5-port WAGOs. The per-unit price is less than the assortment packs.

TOOLS FOR THE INEVITABLE (WHEN YOU HAVE TO GO UNDER)

Let’s be realistic: even with perfect planning, you’ll occasionally need to access the underside of your layout. A derailment might knock a feeder loose. You might need to install that one additional Tortoise. When that moment comes, let’s make it as painless as possible.

Lighting is non-negotiable. If you’re going to work under the layout, you need to see what you’re doing. Forget the flashlight-in-mouth approach – we have better options.

Install **permanent LED strip lighting** under your layout during construction. I’m talking about the adhesive-backed LED strips available everywhere now. Run them along the



8. Get yourself an adjustable back creeper if you need to do much work underneath the layout.

front edge of each benchwork section, and secure them with mounting brackets every three feet or so – if the adhesive doesn't hold, the mounting brackets will.

Power them with a dedicated 12V supply with a switch at the layout entrance. When you need to go under, flip the switch and the entire underside is illuminated.

LED strips run about \$1-2 per foot, so a modest layout could be lit for \$30-50 total. The return on investment comes the first time you need to trace a wire and can actually see what you're doing.

For portable lighting, the latest generation of **LED headlamps** with rechargeable batteries is fantastic.

Ergonomics matter. If you must work on your back under the layout, do it properly.



9. Steve Hubbard posted this photo of a homemade adjustable-back rolling chair for work underneath the layout. The carpeted dolly is only a few dollars, and you can find used car seats with tiltable backs from junkyards for maybe \$20-\$60.

Forget traditional flat mechanics' creepers – they're designed for working under cars, not layouts. Instead, invest in an **adjustable-back mechanics creeper**. These are available from automotive suppliers like Snap-on and Matco for a few hundred dollars, and if you need to spend much time under the layout, sparing your back is worth every penny.

Here's why they're perfect: you wheel yourself under the layout, then tilt the backrest to whatever angle gives you comfortable access. You're not lying flat on your back staring straight up – you can sit at 45 degrees, 60 degrees, or whatever position lets you see what you're doing and reach the work comfortably.

The padded seat and backrest provide real support during extended sessions, and you can position yourself at the right height for typical 48-54" benchwork. You get proper ergonomics, visibility, and the ability to work for more than five minutes without your back aching something awful.

CONCLUSION: THE "STANDING ROOM ONLY" MANDATE

Here's the take-away from this column: *Design your layout for a 20-year lifespan and a 70-year-old back.*

Even if you're building your dream layout at 40, think about whether you'll be able to maintain it at 60. Even if you're spry and flexible now, consider whether you want to spend your retirement years on your back under the benchwork or out in the open and comfortable when maintaining wiring.

The techniques I've outlined aren't just about comfort – they're about sustainability. A layout you can maintain ultimately is more satisfying if you can continue to enjoy it at any age. A layout that requires heroic physical effort for basic troubleshooting is one that will eventually be abandoned.

Most solutions are genuinely cheap – WAGO connectors cost pennies per connection, LED strips are inexpensive, fascia-

mounted “wiring pipes” use standard electrical components. The one real investment is the adjustable-back creeper, but if you value your back, it’s worth every penny.

If you’re planning a new layout, build these principles in from day-one:

- Design benchwork in sections that provide easy access to the underneath
- Route your buses along the fascia in a “pipe,” not wandering down the benchwork center
- Create removable fascia panels for access to wiring centers
- Consider pull-out drawers for your DCC system, boosters, and other circuit hubs
- Use WAGO or similar connectors instead of soldering all your wiring
- Install permanent lighting under the layout if you do need to work under there

If you have an existing layout, consider retrofitting the worst areas. That yard throat where you’re always chasing shorts? Add a fascia-mounted magnetic access panel and reroute the feeders. You don’t have to convert everything at once – tackle the pain points first.

The model railroad hobby is supposed to be fun. Crawling around in the dark with a soldering iron, and fighting with your aging joints is not fun. It’s time we collectively say “death to the dungeon” and embraced wiring practices that keep us upright, comfortable, and focused on what matters: having fun running trains.

Your back will thank you. Your layout will thank you. And 20 years from now, when you’re still operating instead of staring at a mothballed empire, you’ll be glad you planned for accessibility.

Now if you’ll excuse me, I need to go install some WAGO connectors – while sitting comfortably in my rolling chair. ☑

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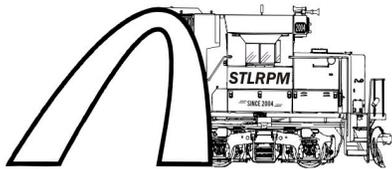
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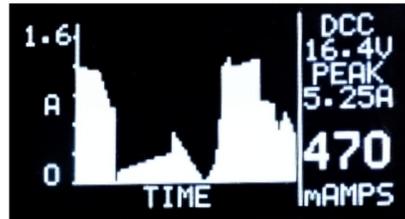
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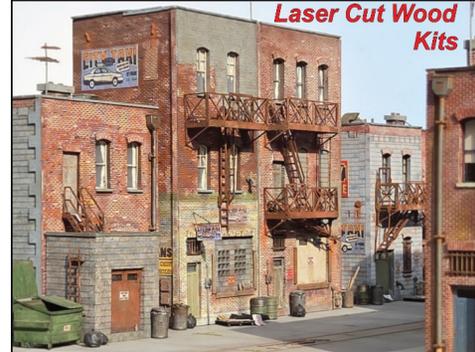
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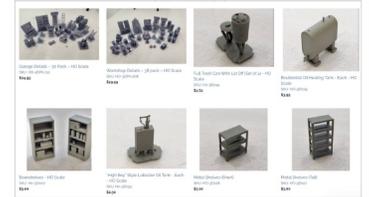
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Steam Power Black	MRH 4916	VMA 71.057	16-44B		
City Black	MRH 4932	VMA 71.051	16-44F		
Weathered (Chamberlain) Black	MRH 4930	ML 30022 VMA 71.054	16-05		
Roofing Gray	MRH 4887 MRH 4901	VMA 71.046	16-04		
Roofing White	MRH 4853	ML 29004 VMA 71.055	16-03		
Graying Black	MRH 4889	ML 29002 VMA 71.055	16-03		
Concrete Red	MRH 4897 MRH 4831	ML 30003 VMA 71.042	16-08		

Floquil / PollyScale Color (approx.)	Model Number	Model Name	Model Color	Model Size	Notes
Tussock	MRH 4695*	VMA 71.056	16-15		
Roofing Orange	MRH 4682*	VMA 71.043	16-09		
Roofing Yellow	MRH 4679	VMA 71.028	16-10		
Roof Brown	MRH 4884	ML 29000 VMA 71.249	16-16a		
Railroad Tea Brown	MRH 4885	ML 30002 VMA 71.029	16-08F		16-08F* Clear finish... 16-08F* Clear finish... 16-08F* Clear finish...
Rail Brown	MRH 4598*	ML 29001 VMA 71.029	16-15a		
Red	MRH 4815	ML 29005 VMA 71.027	16-10Z		
Concrete	MRH 4876	VMA 71.043	16-07*		16-07* Clear finish... 16-07* Clear finish... 16-07* Clear finish...
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THE HARMONY MILL BUILDING IS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT AND VISIBLE structure in the Old Town district of Fort Collins, Colorado [1]. I needed to represent it on my layout, but there were no suitable kits for it, and I did not find available modular brick scratchbuilding materials satisfactory. This is how I used the walls of a Walthers kit to create my own modular brick walls.

THE PROTOTYPE

In 1883, local wheat farmers organized a cooperative to protect their interests, which incorporated in 1884 as the Farmers' Protective Association. In August 1886, the Farmers' Protective Association broke ground for the Farmers' Mill – renamed the Harmony Mill – completing it in 1887.

The engineering was state-of-the-art, built for the heavy equipment of modern milling. The mill was the largest brick building in Fort Collins when completed, surpassed in 1902 when the Great Western sugar beet factory was completed.

The brick walls were built to support themselves, and to brace interior floors. The stone foundation walls were 30" thick, the first floor 20", the second floor 16", and the third and fourth floors 12". This made supports for the walls unnecessary.

The Harmony Mill was completed as the Union Pacific was laying track from Greeley in the east, and the railroad provided a siding for the mill [2]. Business flourished for about a decade, but the Farmers' Protective Association proved better at



1. The Harmony Mill in the Old Town district of Fort Collins, Colorado.

building the mill than managing it, and the mill was shuttered permanently by 1901.

Since its closure, the Harmony Mill has not been a rail customer, though its continued massive presence makes it a signature structure in the town. My model railroad would be incomplete without it [3].

PLANNING A MODEL

There are hundreds of plastic kits to create brick industrial buildings. However, the Harmony Mill was much simpler than most of them, with flat walls.

Several manufacturers make modular kits with brick panels that you can assemble to create custom structures. These include Plastruct, Chooch, DPM, and N Scale Architect.

None of these modular kits is suitable because they have wide vertical "posts" to hide the seams between the brick wall panels. To make these modular brick sets work, I would need to cut these vertical posts away. The masonry Harmony Mill building has no such posts.

The windows created another challenge. The Harmony Mill's windows were built into the masonry, inset a few inches into

openings in the wall. Each window has visible brick faces and mortar seams along both vertical edges.

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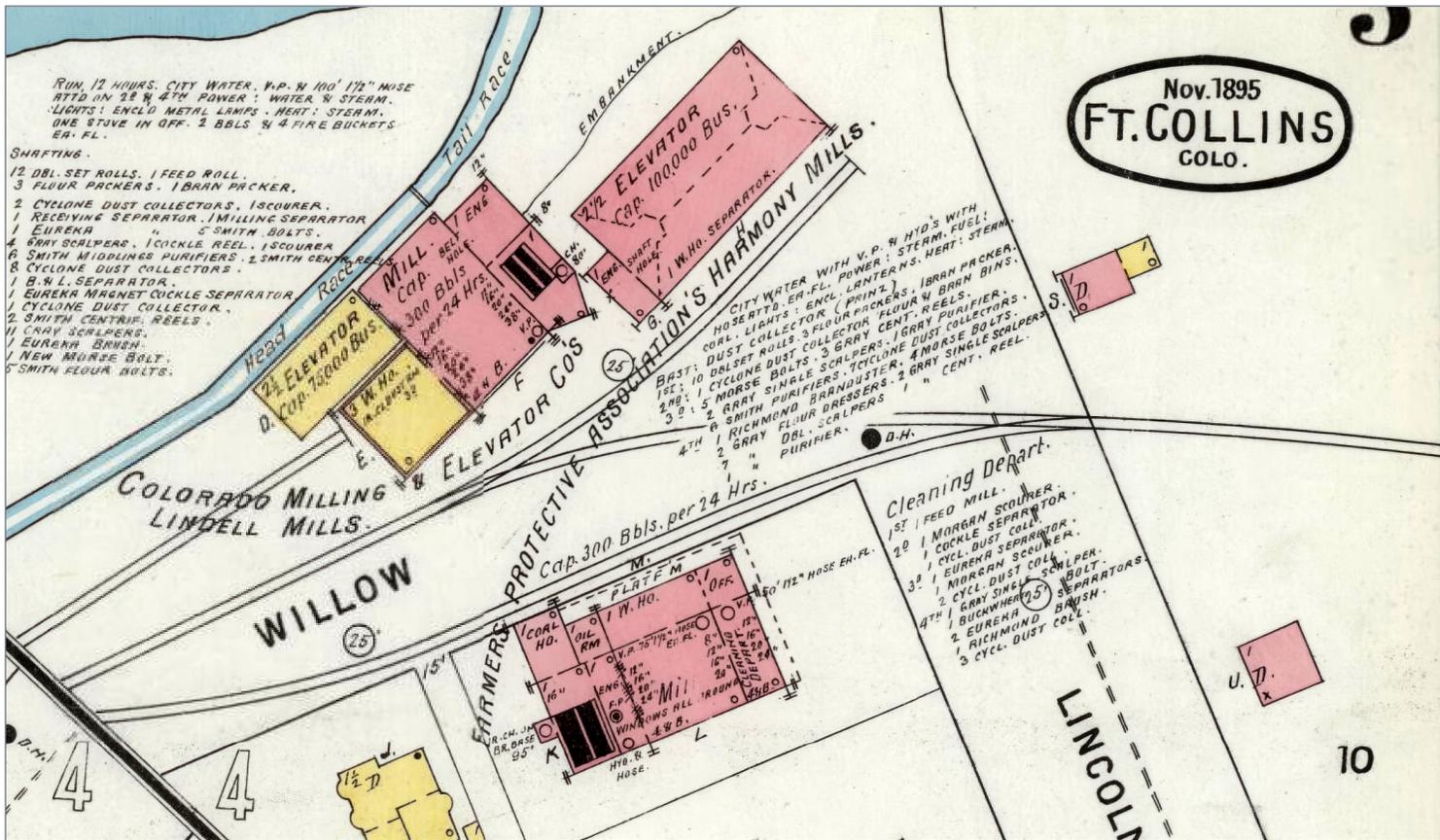


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2. The Harmony Mill building is on the south side of the railroad tracks in this Sanborn Map from November 1895. At the time, the mill had loading platforms for the rail siding, but they no longer exist. Sanborn Map from Library of Congress Archives

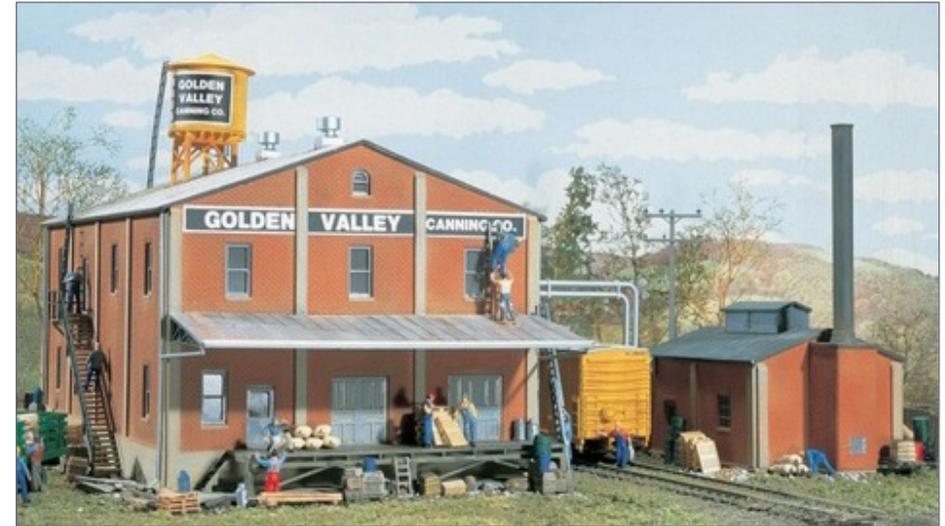
The brick-and-mortar texture on the plastic brick sheets makes achieving a clean-cut along the window and door openings difficult. The mortar lines should be created along all of the cut edges of the window and door openings.

Instead of trying to work with modular brick products, I decided to find a brick building kit with correct window openings. I could then cut the walls into "modular pieces" that would preserve its window openings.

I searched through all of the brands that offered HO brick building kits to try to find one that had window spacing and proportions similar to those on the Harmony Mill. The window size and placement in the Walthers 89-7443 Golden Valley Canning kit was a close match to the prototype [4].



3. The Harmony Mill as it stands today, across the tracks and about 200 feet away from the former Ranch-Way Feeds complex. *Fort Collins History collection photo*



4. The Walthers Golden Valley Canning Co. provided a good start for what I needed. *Manufacturer photo*

The kit was not perfect; the walls in the kit were all divided with simulated concrete. A closer look at the kit revealed the lintels and sills on the kit's walls are brick, but those on the prototype are solid stone. It would be possible to cover the brick lintels and sills with strips of 0.010" styrene, but they would look like overlays, not solid stone. A compromise would be to paint them stone gray, but I opted just to leave them "brick."

The windows themselves were about the right size, but just two-pane. The Tichy Train Group 8052 6/6 Double-Hung Masonry windows had correct proportions and number of panes. The Tichy windows were about 1/64-inch smaller than the openings in the kit's walls, but the slight gaps could be filled with thin beads of cement.

MAKING MODULAR WALL PANELS

I used the walls of the Walthers kit for my project [5]. The walls all included smooth portions to represent vertical bracing and a

concrete foundation. To make the modular panels, I used my razor saw to cut all these smooth portions away, as well as cut the peaked roof portions of the end walls.

I first needed to make the walls square and equal. I used the height of the long side walls as my standard wall height. Then, using a black marker – a pencil would work, too – and a straight edge, I drew a line across the peaked portion of the end walls, marking it for removal [6].

I next needed to remove the foundations and the vertical support pillars to create uniform, two-story brick modules. I clamped the walls to a table to make it easy to cut them away with my razor saw [7].



5. Only the kit's four brick walls were required for the project. I used the height of the long side walls to determine the height of the modules.



6. Using a felt marker, I marked the lines I needed to follow with my razor saw to cut of the peaks on the end walls so they would match the height of the side walls.

I began by removing the vertical support pillars at the ends of the walls. I then sawed the foundation portions away from the walls, creating long foundation strips. I set these aside for later.

Finally, I sawed along the edges of each remaining support pillar. This created 14 two-story, all-brick wall modules.

With the initial cutting complete, I laid out the modules on my workbench to determine which modules to use, and where to use them. I placed them to represent a four-story building that was seven modules wide. I held them together with masking



7. I clamped each of the walls to the workbench to get clean, straight cuts while sawing off the foundation and support pillars.



8. I laid out the wall modules side-by-side.

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9. Cutting the top seven panels in half gave me 14 one-story panels.

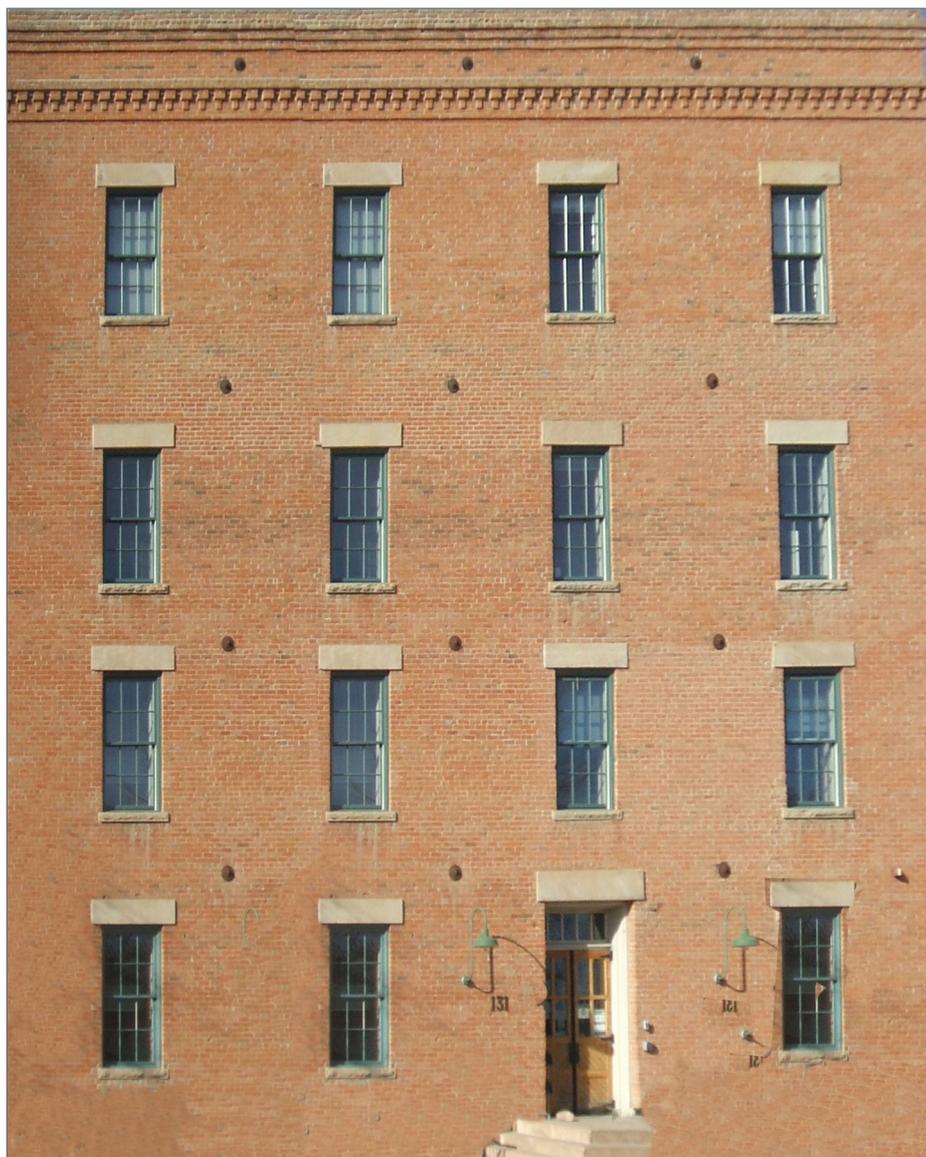
tape [8] so that I could swap individual modules around without disturbing the others.

I quickly learned that the two-story panels would not work as they were, especially for the upper levels. Each modular section of each story needed an opening for a window or a door.

I cut the seven upper-level modules in half, creating 14 single-story modules for the third and fourth floors [9]. I relegated the windowless modules to my spare parts bin. Although the Walthers kit did not provide enough windows for an exact replica, I could now rearrange the windows to make a reasonable facsimile.

SIGNATURE, NOT MONOLITH

Now that I had a set of panels to work with, I could take another look at sizing the building for proper fit on my layout. I



10. The southwest elevation of the Harmony Mill. I used the door to scale a print for HO.

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photographed the southwest elevation of the Harmony Mill, and printed it in full HO scale [10]. The scale image was very useful to determine compression for the model.

The Harmony Mill stands about 200 feet away from the former Ranch-Way Feeds complex. Looking at photo [3], it stands about three-fourths as tall as the Ranch-Way buildings. Comparing my scaled photo of Harmony to my representation of the Ranch-Way complex, I found it was slightly taller [11] – much too tall to look right.

I decided to make the wall three stories tall, with four windows per story. I rearranged the modular pieces accordingly. Though consistent with the prototype's window arrangement, this made the building proportionally too wide [12].



11. The scaled photo of Harmony was too tall to look right next to the elevator's silos.

By using three stories with the long wall three windows wide, the proportions were close enough to the Harmony Mill to produce a credible replica. My structure sits on a triangular site so, with the front (long) wall three panels wide, a two-panel-wide wall on the left and a single-panel wall on the right, the building filled the available space.

ASSEMBLING THE MODULES

With the modular wall placement worked out, the next step was assembly. I used a cabinet maker's rectangular file to smooth all four edges on each of the panels. This was critical because each seam had to fit as perfectly as possible [14].

I laid the pieces face-up on a sheet of glass covered with wax paper for assembly, and worked with one panel at a time. I



12. The three-story height was an improvement, but the four window panels made the building too wide.

applied a thin bead of Liquid Cement for Plastic Models along one edge of a panel, then pressed it down on the glass. I then pushed the next panel down while the glue was still wet, and rubbed the two panels back and forth to spread the cement.

I repeated the process until all the panels were assembled [15]. The glue remained flexible for several hours, providing opportunity to make final adjustments.

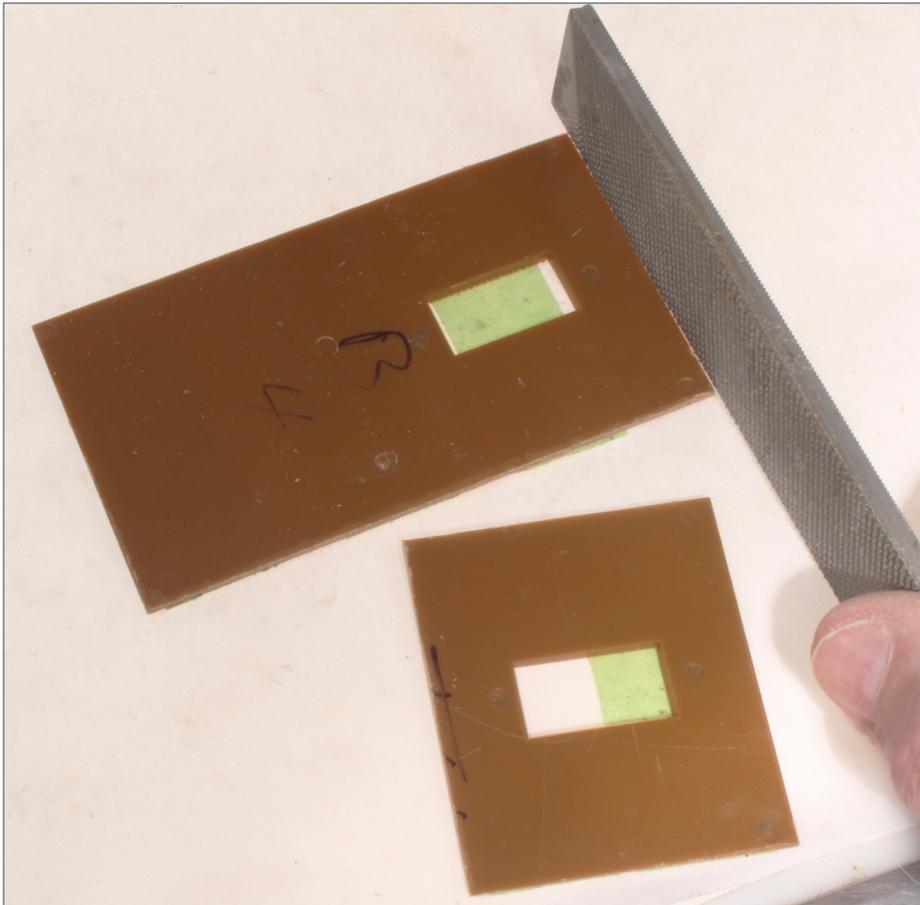
There was a small bead of cement visible along most of the joints. After allowing the cement to dry for about 48 hours, I used a fine-tooth cabinet file to gently file the glue beads flush with the surface [16].



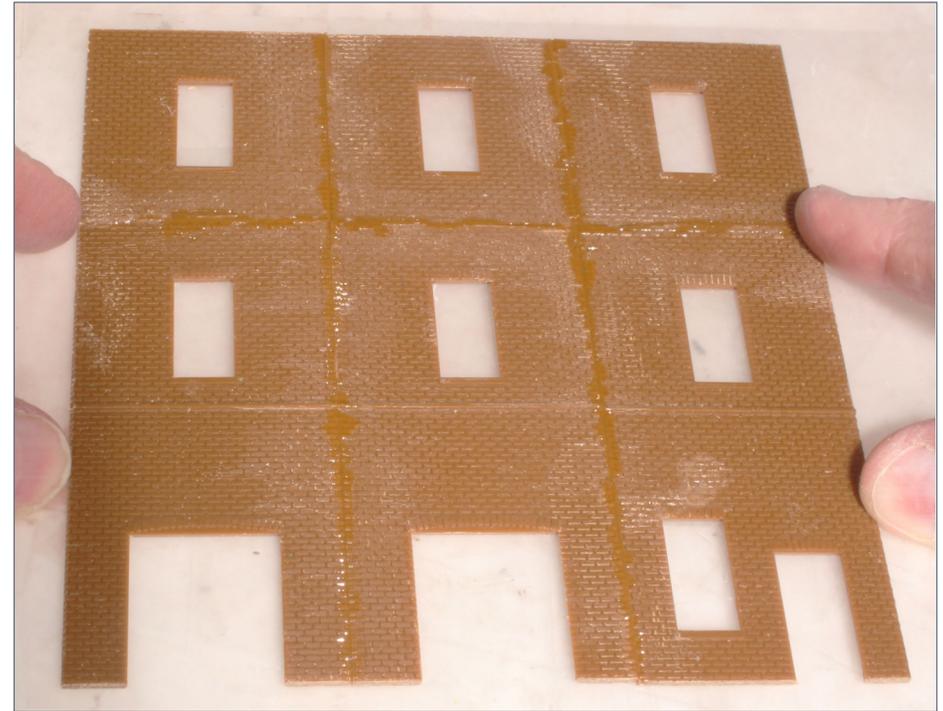
13. Making the wall three panels wide significantly improved the proportions.

After the joints were smoothed, I filled any remaining gaps with Testors Contour putty and allowed it to set overnight [17]. Once the putty had dried completely, I sanded it smooth and cleaned it up with a wire brush and a file [18-20]. After these steps, the joints had all but disappeared.

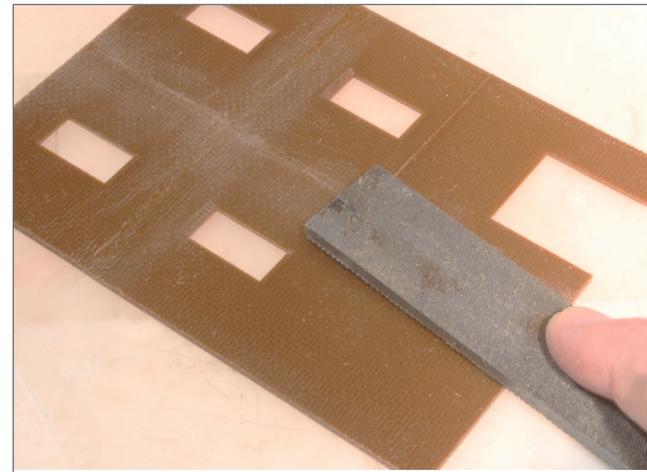
I planned to join the side walls to the front wall with butt joints. This left the smooth vertical edges of the front wall exposed. I used the sharp edge the half-round jeweler's file to continue the mortar seams around the wall's vertical edges.



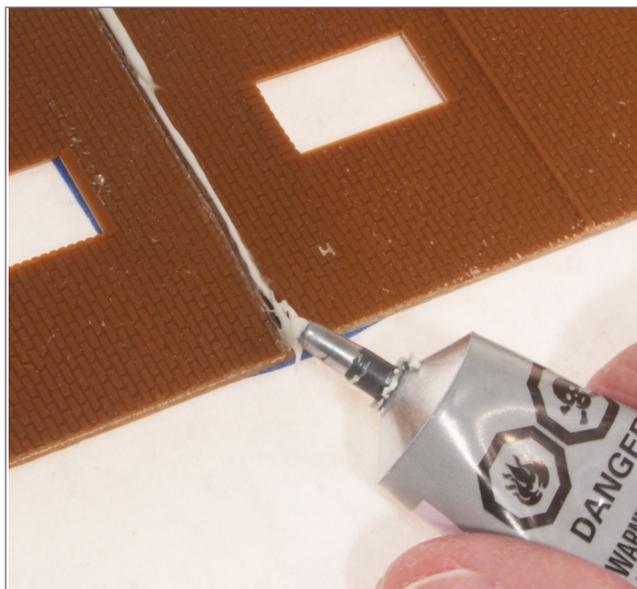
14. Filing the panel edges smooth.



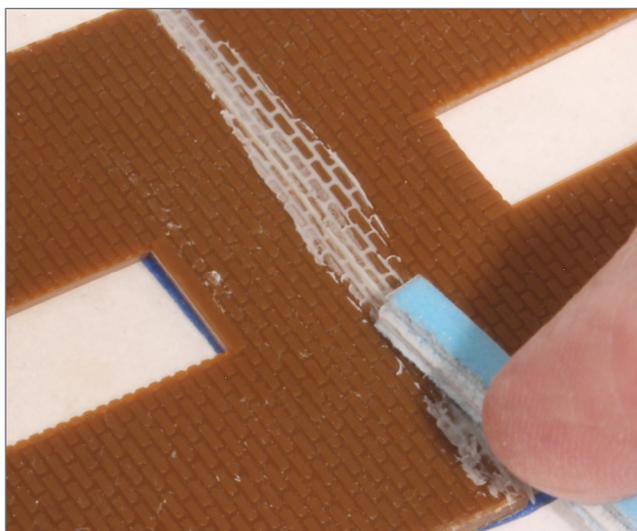
15. The panels are glued together. There was a bead of cement visible along most of the joints.



16. Filing the joints flush.



17. Puttying the gaps.

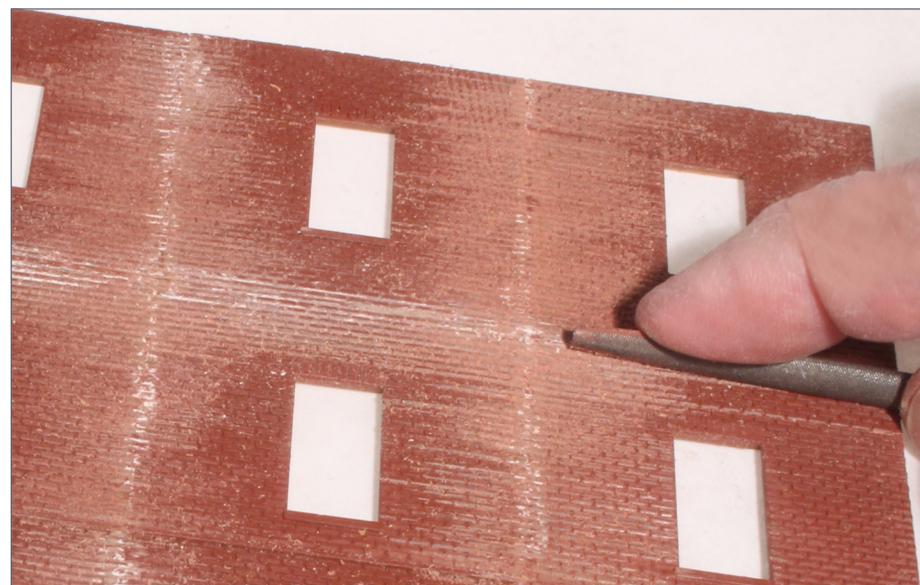


18. Sanding the putty smooth with a sanding stick.

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19. I used a file cleaner – other stiff wire brushes will work as well – to gently scrub the areas along the seams. With light pressure, the brush removed only the softer putty, leaving the bricks intact.



20. The sharp edge of a half-round jeweler's file cleaned any dried cement or putty from the mortar seams.

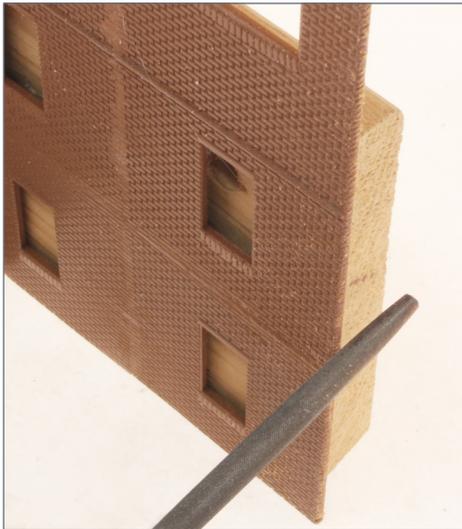
BLENDING THE BRICK

After completing the wall construction, the next step was to paint and weather the brick. I used aerosol Ace Red Oxide Primer for the basic color, then fogged-on Brown.

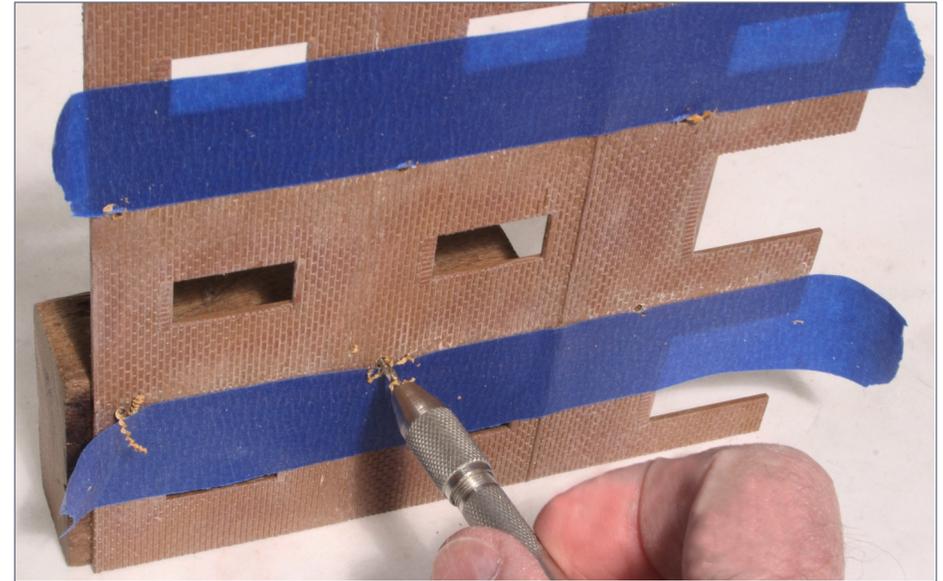
The weathering is PanPastel 28207 Neutral Gray Tint to accent the mortar lines, then 27401 Burnt Sienna Extra Dark and 27805 Raw Umber for the brick faces. Finally, I used an airbrush held at an acute angle to the surface to "miss" the indented mortar lines but fog light patches of brick red onto the brick surfaces, to blend the horizontal and vertical panels' seams so the wall looked like a single solid panel.

The walls of the prototype have anchor bolts that attach to the interior floor beams. I used masking tape to locate the center between each vertical row of windows, and used a no. 49 bit to drill holes for screws on each interior floor [22].

The windows and doors should be recessed slightly, and this was best done before joining the walls, so I could lay them flat. I laid the walls on the wax paper backside-down, and ran a thin bead of Aleene's Thick Tacky Glue along all four edges of each



21. Filing mortar lines into the smooth edges of the front wall.



22. With the center points between the windows marked with masking tape, I drilled bolt holes.

door and window. Then I set each one in place [23]. Any excess glue was picked off with the pointed tip of a compass.

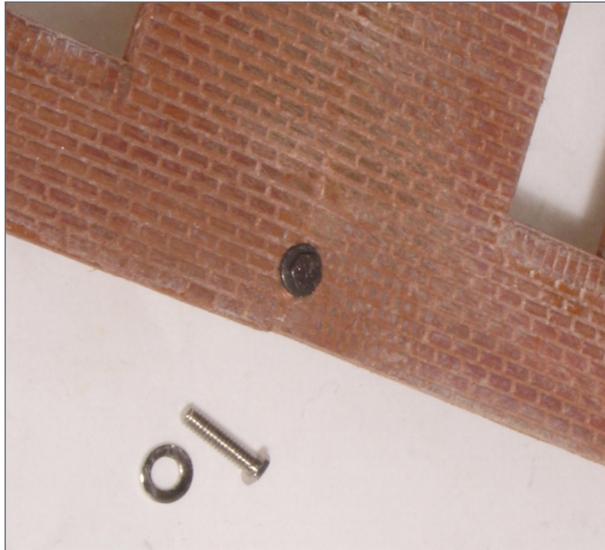
With the windows in place, I was ready to set in the anchor bolts for the floor beams. I used #1-72 brass washers and 0-80 hex head screws for this step [24].

After painting and weathering the wall, the final step before assembling the building was applying the building's foundation. I used the original plastic foundation strips, lowered by 1/32" top-to-bottom. They were cemented to the bottom edges of the walls, inset 1/64" from the brick face.

This 1/64" inset would later allow strips of Busch Printed Weathered Cardboard Wall Panel (7443) to fit flush with the walls to represent the building's stone foundation. I cut four strips from a Busch Natural Stone Walling card (no. 7443) with the exact height of and 1/2" inch longer than the foundation strips.



23. Gluing the windows in place.



24. Adding the screws and washers to represent the floor beam bolts.

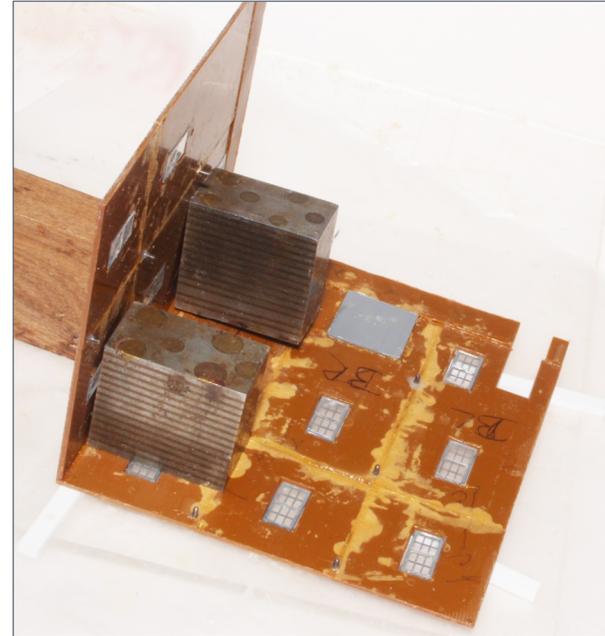
ASSEMBLING THE BUILDING

With the walls complete, I was ready to assemble the building. I used thick liquid cement for plastic to make the corner joints, and braced the corners with scrap hunks of steel from a machinist's shop that also provided weight [25]. There are several options of clamp-on corner braces that also could be used.

Each wall joint, as well as the joints between the walls and roof were reinforced with strips of 0.125" x 0.250" styrene. To cut the roof, I traced the outline of the walls on a piece of 0.020" plain sheet styrene to fit just inside the tops the walls. I used a single 0.125" x 0.250" strip across the bottom of each wall to leave the base of the building open.

The Harmony Mill's cornice is brick [26], but I found it too complex to model. I opted for simple wood cornice trim instead.

I installed the trim after the walls were assembled, and cut each piece to fit. The trim is in three layers, with a 0.010" x 0.250"



25. Gluing the walls together.

strip against the top of the brick, with only the bottom 1/16-inch attached to the wall, and 3/16-inch protruding above the top of the wall [27].

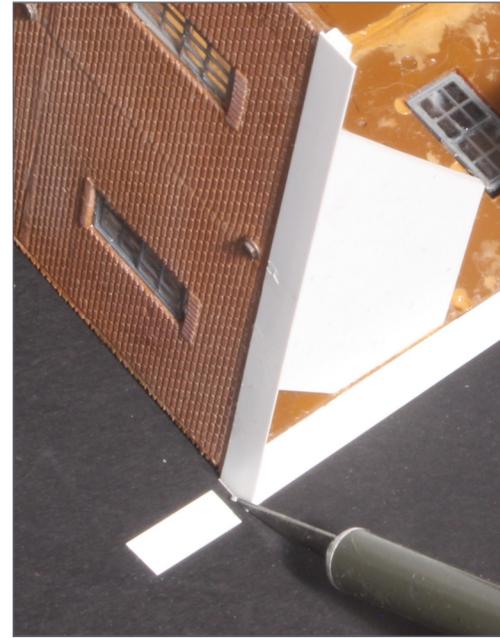
A strip of 0.010" x 0.156" was attached 0.050" from the bottom of the 0.250" strip. An HO 2 x 12 strip was the final piece, with its top edge parallel to the original 0.010" x 0.250" strip.

Once the cornice trim was complete and the cement had set, I masked it using Microscale Micro Mask liquid masking [27]. Masking the brick was important, and I would recommend this step even if painting the trim with a brush. I applied the fluid to cover about 1/8-inch of the white trim, and let it dry overnight.

I covered about 1/8" of the dry masking fluid with masking tape, and protected the building with a paper towel sealed with the tape. I used a hobby knife to slice along the edge of the color-separation line between the trim and the brick walls [29].



26. The prototype's elaborate brick cornice. *Historic Structures image*



27. Building up the cornice. This is the first layer.



28. Masking the brick before painting the completed cornice trim.

I worked carefully to slice exactly where I wanted the two colors to separate — if you slip and make a mistake, stop and apply another coat of liquid masking and let it dry. I then used pointed tweezers to gently pick at one edge of the dried liquid masking to peel it away from the trim.

I sprayed it with the brick color. When the paint dried, the tape and paper towels were peeled away. The remaining dried liquid masking was peeled from the model using pointed tip tweezers.

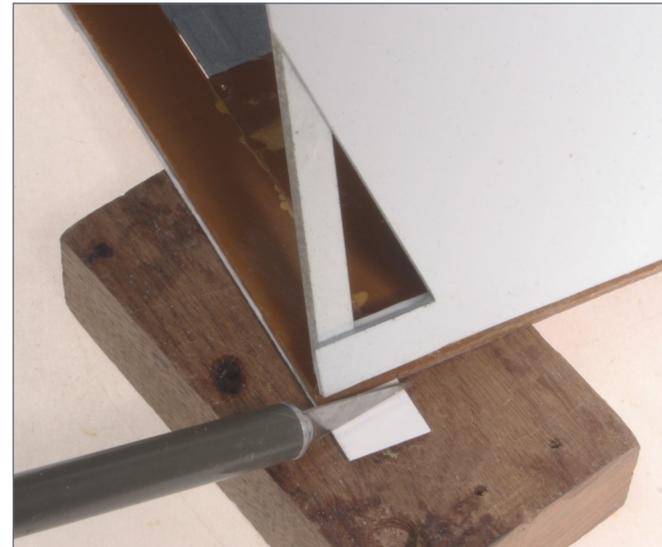
The foundation on the Harmony Mill is stone and the Busch 7443 Printed Weathered Cardboard Wall Panel. The Mixed Stone Surface was a near perfect match. I glued it to the foundation with Aileen's Thick Tacky Glue. I started with the front wall, and worked my way around to make the corners a tight fit.

I then trimmed the extra material away [30]. Finally, I secured the stone foundation strips to the building with clothespins and Popsicle sticks as the glue dried. This ensured a secure, wrinkle-free connection [31].

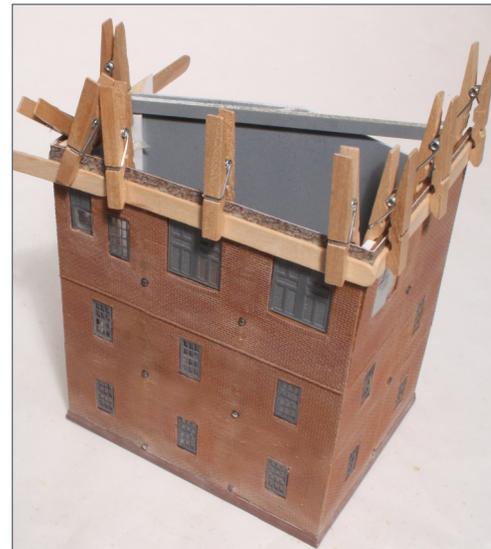


29. The building is now completely masked for painting the cornice trim. I still needed to clean the dried liquid masking away from the cornice pieces.

When the glue had dried, I weathered the corner edges of the foundation with PanPastel Burnt Sienna Extra Dark powdered pastel chalk to cover the thin white edges of the Busch card stones.



30. Trimming the Busch Mixed Stone Surfaces strip to fit after application.



31. The foundation cardboard trim is secured for drying.



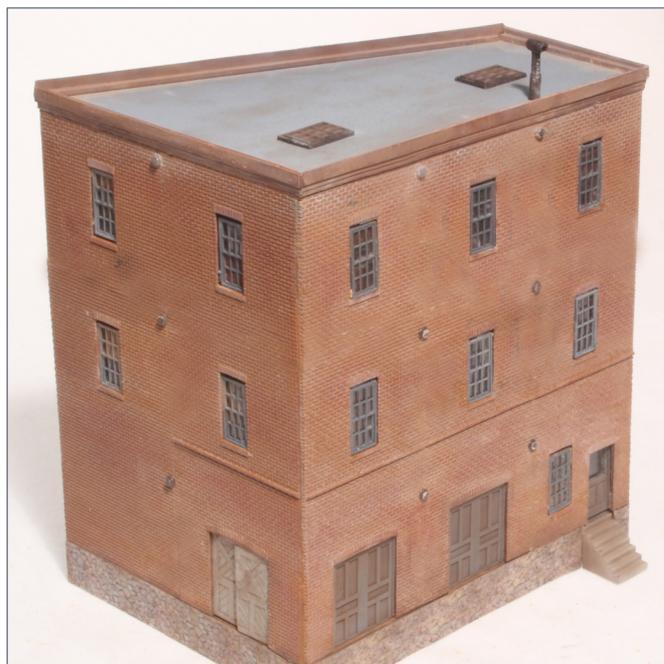
In the 1950s, the Harmony Mill had a visible smokestack that was similar to the SS Ltd. HO #2005 Chimney Kit. I used a stack from an old caboose model. I used two of the windows from the Walthers kit to represent the skylights on the roof [32, 33]. There were no visible electric cables or water downspouts on the Harmony Mill in the 1950s, so no other details were needed.

The final step was to place the model in its home on the layout. Situated next to the Ranchway-Feeds complex, the Harmony Mill model provides a signature piece for Fort Collins.

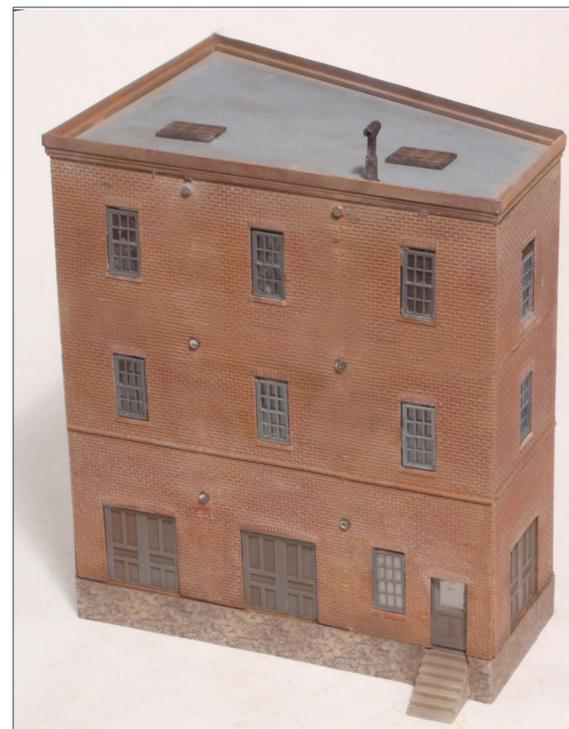
BILL OF MATERIALS

Busch (from Walthers www.walthers.com):

189-7443 Printed Weathered Cardboard Wall Panel—Mixed Stone Surfaces



32. The weathering and roof detail are in place.



33. Another view of the completed Harmony Mill building. The building's angular shape is evident in this view.

Evergreen Scale Models (evergreenscalemodels.com):

389 0.125" x 0.250" strips internal braces

269-107 0.010" x 0.156"

269-109 0.010" x 0.250"

269-8212 HO scale 2x12

269-9513 0.020" plain sheet 6 x 12-inch

Scale Structures Ltd.:

HO #2005 Chimney Kit - 3 Vent Pitched Roof Tenement House

Tichy Train Group:

8052 6/6 Double-Hung Masonry windows

Walters (www.walters.com):

89-7443 Golden Valley Canning kit

Woodland Scenics:

785-893 Hob-Bits(R) Brass Washers – #1-72

785-866 Hob-Bits(R) 0-80 Hex Head Screws - Brass, 1/4" Long

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ROBERT SCHLEICHER



Robert was editor of *Railmodel Journal* for 19 years and, prior to that, editor of *Model Railroad-ing* magazine. He has also

authored over a dozen model railroad books including the *Tyco Model Railroad Big Book Of Model Railroad Track Plans* and three books for Lionel. Bob has been a consultant to several manufacturers and helped to kick-start the Railroad Prototype Modelers concept. He is modeling the standard gauge Colorado & Southern in northern Colorado circa 1959 in HO scale. ■



34. The completed model in place on my layout.

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Ryobi Foam Cutter



1. The Ryobi USB Lithium Hot wire Foam Cutter Kit includes everything here. The tips are interchangeable without requiring tools. *Manufacturer photo*



Model Railroad Hobbyist | March 2026

JEFF PALMER REVIEWS A CORDLESS FOAM CUTTER AND ACCESSORIES ...

ON A RECENT TRIP TO HOME DEPOT, I saw the new Ryobi USB Lithium Hot Wire Foam Cutter Kit and accessories on display. I was about to take the plunge and buy a foam cutter for some projects I'm working on.

I've been helping several friends rework track and scenery on their layouts. The scenery work involved shaping foam board and reworking scenery in already-detailed areas in some cases. I had been using a utility knife, a kitchen carving knife, and a tethered hot knife.



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While these tools work well, I wanted a better way to carve foam. I kept running into the problem that all the cutters had long cords or needed extension cords. I wanted a compact tool I could easily use anywhere on the layout. Corded tools are clumsy and a pain around existing scenery.

The Ryobi USB Lithium Hot Wire Foam cutting tool fits the bill. It runs off a battery – no cords! It’s lightweight and easy to wield, and comes with its own carrying case.

There I was, standing in front of a tool that answered my needs, and the tool junkie in me took over. I went home with my new Ryobi tool!



2. The cable is plugged into the battery’s USB C socket.

When I got the foam cutter home, the exploration began. The kit I bought came with a 2Ah (amp-hour) lithium battery. The battery was not fully charged. It was late, so I plugged the USB C charge connector into the battery [2] and the USB end [3] into the charging socket in my bathroom, and went to bed.

The battery was still charging the next morning, but had finished by the end of breakfast. I made a mental note to look for a fast charger.

To load the battery, unscrew the battery cap on the bottom of the handle with a half-twist. Slide the battery into the handle with the RYOBI label up. Replace the battery cap and half-twist close [4].



3. The USB cable will plug into any standard USB connector to charge the battery.



Just to test things, I clicked the ON/OFF button without any cutting head or tip attached. The HI indicator and the battery light came on briefly, and then turned off [5]. The unit will not turn on without an attachment.



4. Inserting the battery.



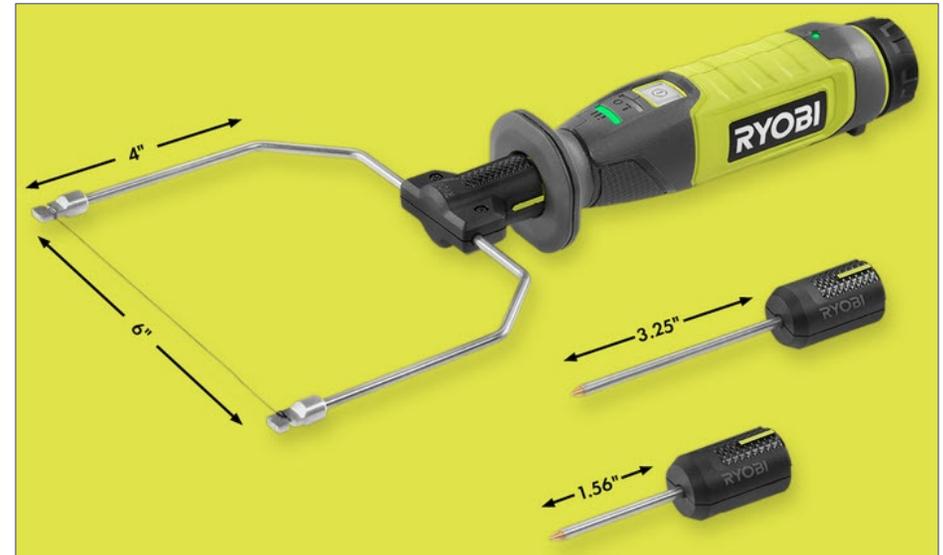
5. The tool has several helpful LED indicators. The top indicators show whether the tool is powered on with high or low heat, and the bottom indicates battery state. *Manufacturer photo*

I attached the hot wire tip and turned the cutter on. It took about two minutes for the HI indicator to stop flashing, which meant the wire had reached maximum temperature.

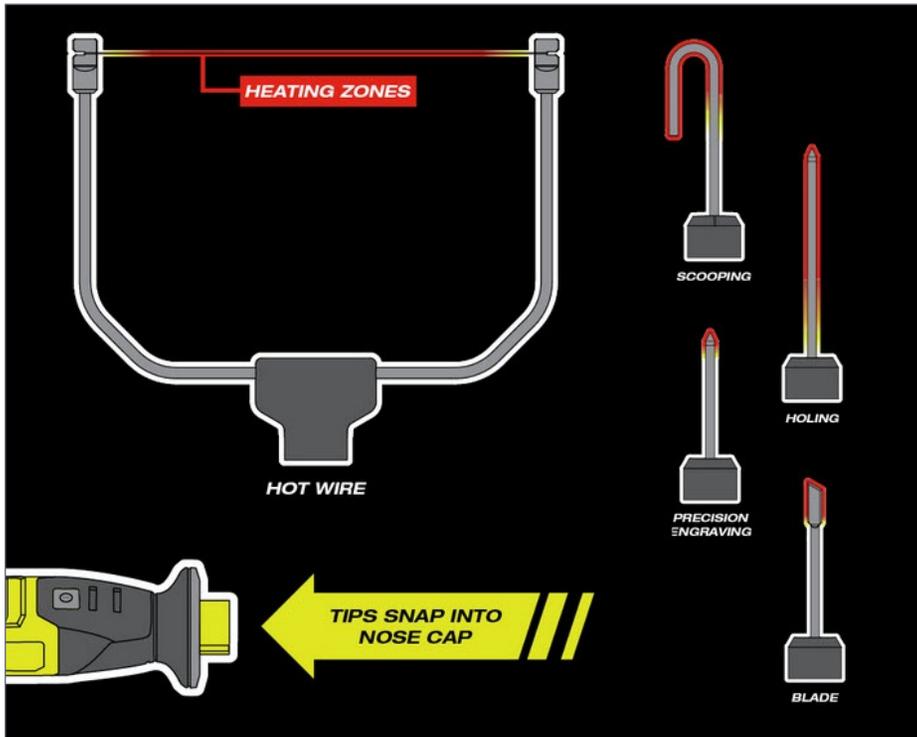
I turned the unit off and let it sit for about 30 minutes, and turned it on to the LO indicator by tapping the power button twice, and got the same results. Not bad, but the hot wire was ready to cut after about 30 seconds. It was the same with the two knife blades included – the holing tip and the engraver tip [6].

In my research for this article, I found a chart showing the heating zones of the various heads [7]. The hot zone for the wire was obvious to me, but not for the holing and engraving tips. This chart also introduced me to two other tips that are available as a separate package – the scooping and blade tips [8].

It was time to get to work. I've been helping Charlie Kirk with Lloyd Keyser's layout. Recently, Lloyd had decided he wanted to



6. From top to bottom, the hot wire, the holing tip, and the precision engraving tip all have similar warm up times. *Manufacturer photo*



7. The heating zones for the various tips. *Manufacturer photo*



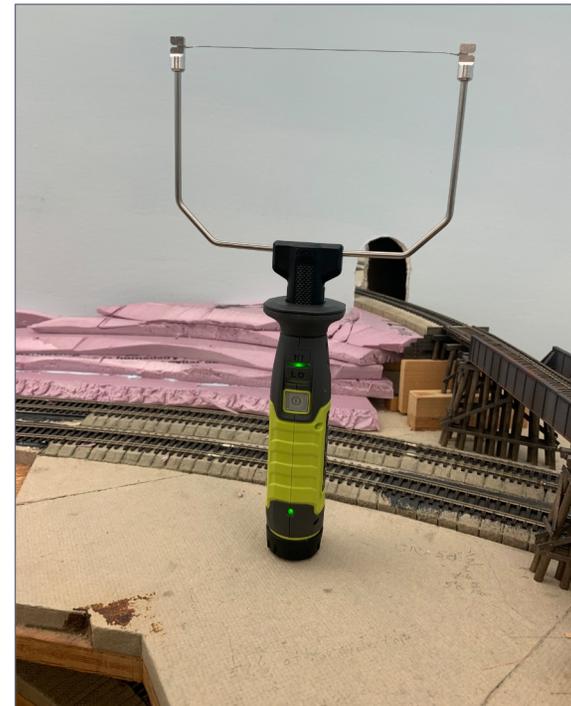
8. The scooping tip and blade tip are sold as a separate package. I see potential for the scooping tip for carving gullies, and the blade tip for cutting rock faces. *Manufacturer photo*

add some scenery to his layout, and he wanted to start in three separate areas.

While the three areas present a logistical problem for a tethered hot knife, it wasn't an issue for the Ryobi. Lloyd's layout is famous in the Dallas area for fantastic operations. The pressure was on to modify existing scenery without messing up any trackwork or structures. The Ryobi was up to the task.

The layout is set in rural Ohio in the 1950s, so we were creating rolling hills, not mountains. But shaping rolling hills proved to be more challenging.

It is more time-consuming and delicate than the rough exterior of a mountainside, whether dirt or rock. This challenged the 2Ah battery. Ryobi 3Ah batteries were on sale, so I bought a couple along with a quick charger [10].



9. The Ryobi was up to the task of modifying foam in place without interfering with other layout elements. Here I had carved my first hills with the tool.

Yeah, I know, it's spending more money, but this was still cheaper than buying another vendor's hot knife or hot wire that might lack the convenience of being able to swap the tips. Only Ryobi offers the freedom to change the tool's function by swapping the head.

Adding the 3Ah battery allows me to work all day, doubling my work time. If one battery runs out, having the extra allows me to keep on working while it's recharging.



J. Regier

OTHER USB BATTERIES BENEFITS

The tool discussed here is one of many in Ryobi's expanding line of USB lithium battery tools. The batteries in this line are interchangeable.

The USB C port makes them compatible with most USB chargers. These include the faster, higher-amp chargers you may have for your laptop or tablet.

Aside from powering the tools, these batteries can also serve as portable power banks. You can use them as a mobile charger for a smart phone or tablet.



10. Two 3Ah batteries and a rapid USB lithium charger. *Manufacturer photo*

Over the years, I've bought many tools. Some did not work out as well as hoped. Others, like the Ryobi USB Lithium Hot Wire Foam Cutter, are worth every penny spent. It was like buying five tools for the price of one.

At this writing, I have not had the opportunity to work with the engraving tip or the scoop, but I see carving ravines and rocks in my future.

One last note: use a piece of hardwood molding as a guide when cutting a straight line. Hardwood has a lower resin content than pine, so it is less likely to burn with occasional contact with holing or hot wire heads. ✓

JEFF PALMER



Jeff spent 50 years developing software, and 25 years as a college professor. As a modeler, he has an interest in logging and mining (narrow gauge). He loves structures and scenery.

About two years ago, he completed his NMRA Master Model Railroader

(MMR) qualification. ■



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Modeling realistic roads and sidewalks

YouTuber Paul B. of **Conrail Butler Branch** covers how he models realistic roads and sidewalks using an inexpensive material: poster board from Dollar General.

In this 13 minute video, Paul demos building up layers of poster board to get the road to climb up to track level at railroad crossings. He emphasizes using lots of paint along the edges to seal the cardstock against scenery moisture. We also recommend you paint the back as well for the most thorough seal. Clever use of material! ☑



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MARCH NEWS

column



Model Railroad Hobbyist | March 2026

RICHARD BALE AND JEFF SHULTZ
REPORT THE LATEST HOBBY
INDUSTRY NEWS ...



INDUSTRY NEWS

Chuck Hitchcock, a well-known Santa Fe modeler and author, passed away on Saturday, February 14, 2026, at the age of 89. A resident of Prairie Village, Kansas, Chuck modeled the Santa Fe, beginning with Lionel Trains as a child and moving up to the Santa Fe Argentine Division, the Santa Fe Argentine Industrial District Railway, and the Santa Fe Ottawa Junction Railway, all of which were featured in the modeling press between 1983 and 2022. He was chairman of the 1984 NMRA convention in Kansas City and involved in operating groups such as Pro Rail and Prairie Rail. His professional employment included 30 years in commercial insurance, over 25 years teaching Dale Carnegie classes, and serving as General Manager of the National Lubricating Grease Institute. He is survived by his wife Jennifer, two children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Lionel, LLC will be acquired by Round 2, a subsidiary company of Praesidian Capital that has many different modeling brands in its portfolio. Reportedly the combined Round 2 and Lionel will be called the Lionel Brands Group, containing such brands as

THE LATEST MODEL RAILROAD PRODUCTS, NEWS & EVENTS

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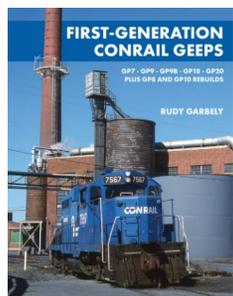
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AutoWorld, AMT, MPC, MiniMetals, and Johnny Lightning. In addition to model trains, Lionel also sells diecast model racing models under the Lionel Racing brand and has an exclusive license for NASCAR diecast models.

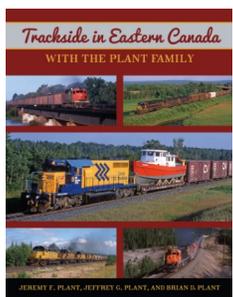
Info: www.lionel.com

NEW PRODUCTS FOR ALL SCALES



Available for preorder from **Garbely Publishing** is *First-Generation Conrail Geeps* by Rudy Garbely. Covering the GP7, GP9, GP9B, GP18, and GP20 locomotives inherited from its six predecessor railroads, the book also covers the rebuilding programs that resulted in the GP8 and GP10 locomotives. A limited-edition hardcover book, it will be approximately 200

pages in length and feature hundreds of rare photographs. Preorders are due by December 1, 2026 with an expected publication date of March 2027.



Also from Garbely Publishing is *Trackside in Eastern Canada with the Plant Family* by Jeremy F. Plant, Jeffrey G. Plant, and Brian D. Plant. Covering eastern Canada from the Halifax and Cape Breton in the Maritimes across Quebec to the Canadian Shield of northern Ontario, over 150 scenes depict everything from Alco powered mainlines to

remote mining railroads. The 80-page softcover book includes photos from the 1970s through the early 2000s. Preorders are due May 1, 2026, with an expected publication date of June 2026. Info: store.garbelypublishing.com

P&D Analytics Inc. has published *N Scale Arduino Enhanced Layouts: For Other Scales Too!* By Paul and David Brandt. The



book explores layout enhancement options using Arduinos through six projects of increasing complexity, including signals, interlocks, and a DCC command station.

Info: www.amazon.com/Scale-Arduino-Enhanced-Layouts-Scales-ebook/dp/B0GLH8S2QK

HO SCALE PRODUCT NEWS



Accurail's February announcements begin with a special run of the 2-Bay ACF covered hopper decorated to celebrate the American Semiquincentennial (250th

anniversary). The car has a "NEW" date of 7-26. The silver painted car will be available by May 1st, 2026. Other cars in the February announcement are scheduled for production in the June 2026 timeframe.



A three-car set of Great Northern 40' double sheathed wood boxcar kits features a new paint scheme featuring

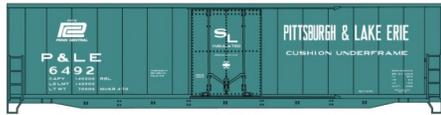
the Glacier National Park herald and car numbers 9125, 9164, and 9176. If ordering from the Accurail website, single cars will be selected randomly from the three-car set. The car bears an "STC" date of 4-25.



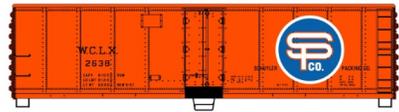
Also, part of the February announcement is a 3-bay ACF covered hopper decorated for Canadian Pacific with a SOO

reporting mark. It has a "New" date of 12-95.

A 50' insulated welded steel boxcar with a plug door is decorated for the Pittsburgh & Lake Erie railroad, with a "BLT"



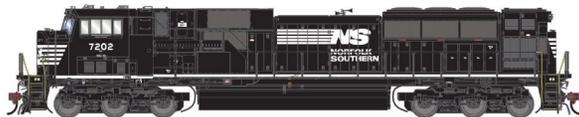
date of 10-64. The model will feature low ladders and brake wheel, as well as roller bearing trucks.



The last model in the February announcements is a 40' hinged door steel reefer with WCLX reporting marks and a Schuyler

Packing Company logo. The car's "BLT" and "NEW" dates match with 5-57 for both. All Accurail car kits are equipped with Delrin wheelsets and appropriate trucks.

Info: accurailinc.com



Athearn's March/April announcements include the Genesis EMD SD80MAC

diesel locomotive in two prototypical and several Legendary Liveries paint schemes. On the prototypical units there is road number specific detailing. Prototypical road names: CSX and Norfolk Southern. Legendary Liveries: Burlington Northern, Wisconsin Central, Guilford, Chessie System, and Great Northern. Non-sound DC units include a 21-pin NEM socket, and sound-equipped units include a SoundTraxx Tsunami2 decoder and dual cube speaker.

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J. Shultz

SD70ACu LOCOMOTIVES

In 2014 Norfolk Southern purchased over 100 SD90MAC locomotives formerly owned by Union Pacific (UP) that were owned by Progress Rail. Beginning in 2016, Norfolk Southern's Juniata shops rebuilt 106 of the locomotives as the SD70ACu, replacing or overhauling all major components. This included the 710G3C prime mover, some of which were also upgraded to 4,500hp from the standard 4,300hp. The Siemens inverters were replaced with Mitsubishi equipment, and the original cabs were replaced with Ultra Cab II isolated cabs with AAR-style control stands. Four additional locomotives were rebuilt by EMD Muncie. In February 2021 approximately 40 units with persistent issues were sold to Progress Rail, many of which were later sold to Ferromex. An additional 20 units were traded to Progress Rail in 2022 for ten newer SD70ACe locomotives. Between 2018 and 2019, Canadian Pacific (CP) contracted Progress Rail in Kentucky to upgrade 60 out of service CP SD90MAC locomotives to SD70ACu units, purchasing an additional two former UP SD90MACs for conversion as well. Five of those locomotives were repainted into military inspired schemes to commemorate the armed forces and D-Day. ■



Next in line is the Genesis EMD SD70ACu, available in Ferromex, Norfolk

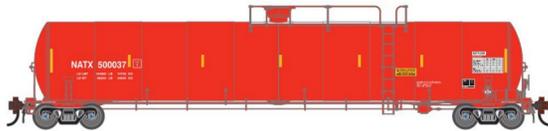
Southern, and three Canadian Pacific schemes. Road name specific details are installed, such as rock guards for the windows on the Ferromex units and nose mounted headlights on the Canadian Pacific locomotives. Non-sound DC units include a 21-pin NEM socket, and sound-equipped units include a SoundTraxx Tsunami2 decoder and dual cube speaker.

A new run of Genesis F units includes F7A and F7B units in Santa Fe warbonnet, F3A and F7B in Erie Lackawanna, F9A and F9B in



Burlington Northern, F7A and F7B in DRGW/Rio Grande, and F3A, F7A, and F7B in Conrail. The models feature road name and

number specific features. Sound equipped units include SoundTraxx Tsunami2 sound/DCC with dual cube speakers, non-sound/DCC units are equipped with 21-pin NEM sockets for a suitable DCC decoder.



Finishing up the Genesis line for March/April is the UTC 33k LPG tank car in HO scale. Road

names in this run are Chevron Phillips Chemical Co. (CPCX), Enbridge Energy (MDPX), General Electric Rail Services (NATX), Procor (PROX), Tinity Industries Leasing (TILX), and Union Tank Car Co. (UTLX). Each road name is available in a three-pack as well as two single cars with separate numbers for a total of five numbers available. Of note, each road name is also a different color car – CPCX is a light gray, MPDX is black, NATX is red/orange, PROX is white, TILX is yellow, and UTLX is blue.



In the Athearn line is a run of EMD SD40-based locomotives. Road names on the straight SD40s are

Chicago & North Western, EMDX Leasing, Montana Rail Link, NdeM, Pan Am Railways, Union Pacific, and undecorated. Modernized SD40s include the Norfolk Southern SD40-2R, the Southern Pacific SD40R, and Wisconsin & Southern's SD40M-2. Many have road number specific details such as specific horns, dynamic brakes, plows, and ditch lights. Sound equipped units include a SoundTraxx Economi decoder with a single cube speaker. Non-sound units include a 21-pin NEM DCC socket.

In steam from Athearn is a 2-8-0 Consolidation locomotive with either an oil bunker or coal pile tender depending on the road name. 2-8-0s with oil tenders are Southern Pacific and Santa Fe,



coal tender road names are Denver and Rio Grande Western, Pennsylvania, Western Maryland, Central of

Georgia, Canadian Pacific, and Louisville & Nashville. Eras for the locomotives range from 1888+ for the Pennsylvania to 1940+ for Western Maryland. As an Athearn-level product, sound-equipped models will include a SoundTraxx Economi decoder. Non-sound units will have a 21-pin DCC socket.



Freight cars in the Athearn line for March/April include a new model, the 40' ARLX steel ice reefer. Produced for Armour & Company beginning in

1948, the 40-ton cars have 4' swing doors that are only 6'-4" tall. 1,000 cars were built by GATC and 1,000 by ACF. Only 1/8th of the cars built (254) were still in service in January 1965. Both styles of car will be produced, with the primary spotting feature being a cast trust plate in the upper-left corner of the ACF car sides. Along with the As-Built paint scheme, the cars will be produced in a post-1953 paint scheme featuring 36" letters and in a Chicago Great Western scheme, representing the 11 ARLX reefers CGW acquired in 1961 for company ice service.



This run of the Athearn FMC 4700 cu. ft. covered hopper features several Primed for Grime paint schemes, including Northwestern

Oklahoma Railroad (NOKL), ATHX Leasing, Webb Asset Management (WAMX), and Caney Fork and Western Railroad (CFWR). Standard FMC 4700 cu. ft. covered hoppers will be available in Procor (UNPX), PLM International (PLMX), and Burlington Northern (FWD).



The final Athearn rolling stock in the March/April announcement is the ACF 2970 cu. ft. two-bay covered hopper. Roadnames for this car are BNSF

Railway, Conrail, Southern Pacific, St Louis & San Francisco, and Western Maryland. Additionally, a scheme for the freelance Copper State Railway has been announced as a Legendary Livery.

Orders for all Genesis and Athearn models in this announcement are due April 24, 2026, with an estimated arrival of July 2027.

Info: www.athearn.com



A run of HO scale beer can tank cars has been released by **Atlas**. A 10,000-gallon tank car, they were developed to haul very dense liquids. Two versions of the model have been produced, one with angled ladders and a standard gravity output on the bottom and one with rounded ladders and a steam

jacket output. New Barber S-2-A trucks have been tooled specifically for this model. Reporting marks for this run include Texaco (TCX), Hercules (HPCX), and GATX in both plain and with Cargil, Detrex, and General Molasses liveries.

Info: shop.atlasrr.com



Now in stock from **Bachmann** is the Norfolk & Western Class J 4-8-4 locomotive #613.

The model includes SoundTraxx Econami DCC/Sound, an all-metal chassis, detailed cab backhead, and a see-through frame.

Info: shop.bachmanntrains.com

ClassOneModelWorks.com is now taking pre-orders for an HO scale model of the Bethlehem Steel Corporation NTTX 5-unit articulated container spine car. For a limited time two 48' containers are included as a pre-order bonus. Offered in 14



different paint schemes including as-delivered, aged paint, with and without anti-skid, and with ATSF logos or with the logos painted out, the models will negotiate 18" radius curves except with adjacent 48'

containers. To use 48" containers, a minimum radius of 22" is required and 24" is recommended. The full five-unit car is 34.75" in length.



Additionally, **ClassOneModelWorks.com** has announced 3-packs of 20' and 40' corrugated CIMC containers in 21 different companies or paint schemes each.



Info: classonemodelworks.com



Digicom Designs has released a new PDF for a paper model of an HO scale Frozen Food Express 53'

Reefer Trailer. The modeler prints the PDF on heavy cardstock with a color printer and cuts and assembles the model.

Info: www.digicomdesigns.net/product-page/ho-frozen-foods-express-53-reefer-trailer



HomeShops, in partnership with **Rapido Trains**, is taking preorders on the Rapido

website for freelance model paint schemes on Rapido CF7, GP38, and RS23 models in HO scale. Road names for the CF7 with Square Cab are Michael Ostertag's Farlin Terminal Railroad, and Radisson McGuire's Alabama Central. Two road



numbers are available for each paint scheme. Road names for the GP38 are Brian Banna/Matt Martin's Copper State Railway and Chris Palmieri's Natchez Trace and Orient. Three road numbers are available for both paint schemes, and an unnumbered Natchez Trace and Orient model will be available as well.



Road names for the RS23 are Joe Loggans' Arkansas Valley, John W's Kara Terminal, Thomas Gasior's Splitrock Mining Co., and Daniel Archer's West Falls Northern. Two road numbers are available for each paint scheme. All paint schemes are available in both DCC/Sound and DC/Silent versions. Info: homeshops.net
Info: rapidotrains.com/ho-scale/homeshops.html
All artwork and graphics are courtesy of Rapido Trains



Kadee's February car of the month is a 40' PS-1 boxcar decorated for Western Pacific. Road number 20813, it has a built date of 1951 with a repaint/reshop date of 8-1966. It features a 7' Youngstown door. Info: www.kadee.com



Kaslo Shops has announced two new 3D-printed boxcar kits, the Canadian Pacific HK-46 and HK-46a insulated boxcars, built by National Steel Car (NSC). With an internal capacity of 3377 cu. ft., the cars were constructed between 1959 and 1960, with some cars

remaining in service into the 1980s. The kits include etched detail parts, a one-piece 3D-printed body with 6' plug door, underframe, 3D-printed detail parts, car weigh, and an etched metal running board. Trucks, couplers, paint, and decals are not included.

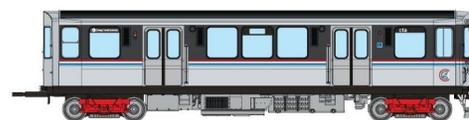
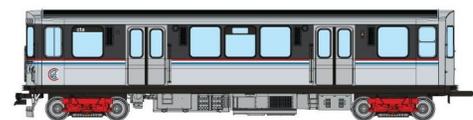
The model should be available soon from **3D Central** for US-based modelers.

Info: www.kasloshops.com

Info: 3dcentraltrains.com



Rapido Trains has announced three new paint schemes for the SW9 switcher in HO scale: Cambria & Indiana Bicentennial "Spirit of 76", followed by the Soo Line "Twin Ports" and Canadian National's post-1954 Maple Leaf logo scheme. The models are en route from the factory and will be released with the other first release road names and schemes in March/April. The Soo Line models will be available only in a two-pack.



Also announced by Rapido are 2-car unpowered sets of the previously announced Chicago Transit Authority Budd 2600 series 'L' cars. Available for preorder in three CTA schemes as well as painted but unlettered, the cars are fully detailed and included operating interior lighting and optional DCC/Sound. The unpowered cars will couple and run with the powered car sets.

The Rapido FL9 is ready to go into production with a pre-order date of April 15, 2026, so Rapido has decided to add new versions, paint schemes, and road numbers. New road



numbers for the New Haven FL9s are 2002, 2005, and 2038, with the HEP version adding 2014 and Metro North 2007 and the steam generator

equipped version gaining Penn Central 5059, Conrail 5059, and Metro North 5038 and 2030.

Info: www.rapidotrains.com

All artwork and graphics are courtesy of Rapido Trains



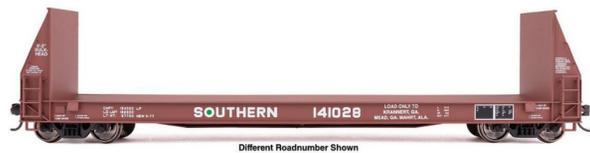
Walthers February announcements include a run of the EMD SW7 locomotive. Road names in this release are Central RR of New Jersey,

Chicago Burlington & Quincy, Erie, Illinois Central Gulf, Louisville & Nashville, Maine Central, and Undecorated. Each paint scheme comes in four numbers, with two numbers being standard DC models and two numbers equipped with ESU sound and DCC.



The models are of a Phase II SW9 and feature either a single headlight or a retrofitted dual beam vertical headlight, depending on road name. The undecorated kit is also available in DC or with ESU sound and DCC and includes both single and dual beam headlight housings. A horn is not included with the undecorated kit. Expected delivery of the SW9s is Winter 2026.

Chicago Burlington & Quincy, Erie, Illinois Central Gulf, Louisville & Nashville, Maine Central, and Undecorated. Each paint scheme comes in four numbers, with two numbers being standard DC models and two numbers equipped with ESU sound and DCC.



Also in the February announcement is a 50' SIECO pulpwood flatcar. Built by the

Southern Iron and Equipment Company (SIECO), the cars were in use from the 1960s through the early 2000s. Road names in this run are Maine Central, Seaboard Coast Line, Southern, and undecorated. Multiple numbers are available for each road name and Walthers states that this is a one-time run of these road numbers. Delivery is expected in Summer 2026.



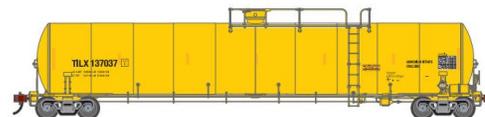
The final Walthers rolling stock announcement for February is the 40' 1937 modified AAR boxcar.

Featuring a scale 10'-6"

interior height, 5-5 Dreadnaught ends, 6' Youngstown doors, and a Murphy panel roof, road names in this release are Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe; Chicago & Eastern Illinois, Chicago, Burlington & Quincy; Duluth, South Shore & Atlantic; Illinois Central, Rock Island, Western Pacific, and undecorated. These models are expected to arrive in Summer 2026.

Info: www.walthers.com

N SCALE PRODUCT NEWS



A Genesis release from **Athearn** in N scale for March/April is the UTC 33k LPG tank car. Road names in

this run are Chevron Phillips Chemical Co. (CPCX), Enbridge Energy (MDPX), General Electric Rail Services (NATX), Procor (PROX), Trinity Industries Leasing (TILX), and Union Tank Car Co. (UTLX). Each road name is available in a three-pack as well as two single cars with separate numbers for a total of five numbers available. Of note, each road name is also a different color car – CPCX is a light gray, MPDX is black, NATX is red/orange, PROX is white, TILX is yellow, and UTLX is blue.

Info: www.athearn.com



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Aurora Miniatures International has announced several new N-scale models recently. The 66' NSC lowside gondola

was previously released by Aurora in HO scale, and Aurora states that they will release all the prototypical paint schemes in a single production run. Road names announced are TTX/GNTX, Canadian Pacific/CPKC, and BNSF.



Also in N scale is a Gunderson/Greenbrier 7550 cu. ft. 60' Plate F boxcar. Body styles will be based on production variations from 2003 to 2022. Ten authentic paint schemes, six "stand-in" paint schemes from similar cars, and five "data only" schemes are planned.



Another new N scale gondola, the Greenbrier 2791 cu. ft. 52' lowside gondola, will feature over 15 authentic paint schemes.



All of the Aurora announcements feature 100-ton roller-bearing trucks with 36" metal wheels and N scale AuroraJanney couplers. Preorders

are not being taken for any of the announcements, they will go on sale when they arrive.

Info: na.auroraminiatures.com



Bachmann has released a model of the Norfolk & Western Class J 4-8-4 in three road numbers,

#602, #608, and #611. Equipped with SoundTraxx Econami Sound/DCC, a see-through chassis, and detailed backhead, the

N scale model features a completely hidden drive train and gear drive.

Info: shop.bachmanntrains.com



With the Tennessee Valley Railroad Museum's recent announcement that it will be repainting Mikado #4501 into the Southern Railway

passenger livery used in excursion service in 1966, **Broadway Limited** is adding this scheme to the previously announced run of N scale USRA light Mikado locomotives now on pre-order.



J. Shultz

EMD E-UNITS

The EMD E-units were generally dedicated passenger locomotives, beginning in 1937 with the EA/EB for the Baltimore & Ohio, the E1A&B for the Santa Fe, and E2A&B for the Union Pacific. Featuring two sets of A1A trucks, the E-units used two 12-cylinder prime movers, one for the two traction motors on each truck. The EA/E1/E2 were equipped with two Winton 201-A V12 diesels producing 900hp each. The E3, E4, E5, E6, and E7 used two EMD 576 V12's producing 1000hp each. The E8's 567B-12 prime movers produced 1,125hp each and the E9's produced 1,200hp each. Visually the EA, E1, E3, E4, E5, and E6 models resembled each other with a sharply slanted nose. The E2 featured a more bulbous nose and the E7, E8, and E9 shared the bulldog-nose with the F-units. Other identifying features included the windows along the side of the locomotive body, with the E3, E4, E5, E6, and E7 having square windows (Union Pacific locomotives had round portholes), and the E8 and E9 round portholes. The E5s were produced only for the CB&Q and featured a stainless steel fluted carbody.





A new production run of EMD E7, E8, and E9 locomotives in N scale has also been announced, with some road names available as A-B sets. All road names and numbers will be available in both Paragon4 DCC/Sound and DC-only Stealth versions. BLI has partnered with select retailers for some of these models. Order deadline for the EMD E-units is April 30th, 2026, with an estimated delivery date of Fall 2026.



Road names for the E7 are Milwaukee (E7A), Pere Marquette (E7A), Seaboard Air Line "Citrus Scheme" (E7A, E7A&B), Southern (E7A), Union Pacific (E7A, E7B, E7 A&B). Lowell Smith/Railsmith exclusive: Louisville & Nashville (E7A), Southern Pacific "Golden State" (E7 A-B, E7B),



Pioneer Trains exclusive: Chicago & Eastern Illinois (E7A), Chicago, Burlington & Quincy (E7A), Chicago & North Western (E7A) and Midwest Model Railroad exclusive: Kansas City Southern (E7A).



Road names for the E8/E9 are ATSF (E8 A&B, E8A, E8B), Canadian Pacific (E8A), New York Central (E8A/E7B, E8A), Rock Island (E8A – The Rocket and Bicentennial), Southern Pacific (E9A) Wabash (E8A). Lowell Smith/Railsmith exclusive: Kansas City Southern (E8A), Preamble American Freedom Train (E9A). Pioneer Trains exclusive: Metra (E8A).



Finally, BLI has announced a new production run of N scale 4-6-2

USRA Light and Heavy Pacific locomotives. Available in DC-only Stealth or Paragon4 DCC/Sound/Smoke, the order deadline for both locomotives is April 30th, 2026, with an estimated delivery date of Fall 2026.



Road names for the USRA Heavy Pacific are: Canadian National, Central of New Jersey (Blue Comet), Great Northern, Southern, Christmas 2026, and Unlettered.



Road names for the USRA Light Pacific are: Atlantic Coast Line, Baltimore & Ohio, Milwaukee (Chippewa Scheme), Reading and Northern (light blue), Union Pacific, and Unlettered. Info: www.broadway-limited.com



Digicom Designs has released a new PDF for a paper model of an N scale Frozen Food Express 53' Reefer Trailer. The modeler

prints the PDF on heavy cardstock with a color printer and cuts and assembles the model.

Info: www.digicomdesigns.net/product-page/n-frozen-foods-express-53-reefer-trailer



Home Shops has released a series of seven freelance railroad boxcars based on the Atlas N scale USRA rebuilt steel 40' boxcar. Road names in the release are Cat Mountain, Delta Lines, Ohio Southern, St. Louis County, Miami Valley, Virginian & Ohio, and Virginia Midland.



The Atlas cars include an opening door, Andrews trucks, and AccuMate couplers.

Info: homeshops.net

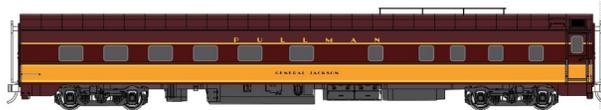


Railsmith is taking deposits for a special run of a BLI 2-8-2 Mikado locomotive decorated as SP&S #539. The second-to-last operating SP&S steam locomotive, #539 is being offered

in both DC-only (Stealth) and Paragon 4 sound/smoke/DCC. If enough requests are received, a second road number might be added to the run to facilitate double heading. Shipping is currently planned for the 4th Quarter of 2026.



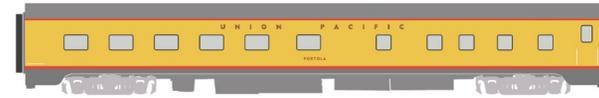
As part of the Norfolk Southern Office Car Special series, Railsmith has announced the OCS sleeper *Hollins College*, NS#10. Originally the Western Sunset on the Wabash (see below), it entered Norfolk Southern's OCS fleet in 1984. It is planned for the 1st quarter of 2027.



General Jackson was built by Pullman-Standard in 1942. Railsmith's version of this car utilizes the Western Series Sleeper car and is expected in the 1st quarter of 2027.

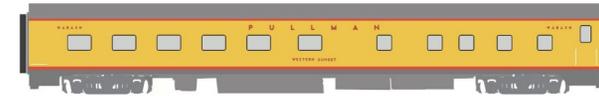
Railsmith has announced several upcoming models in N scale. In the Union Pacific Heritage Fleet collection are the UP

Part of the Illinois Central Panama Limited, the sleeper lounge



Heritage Dorm 'Columbia River' and the sleeper

'Portola'. While both cars have been modified over the years, these cars are based on the 12-4 sleeper car they were originally built as.



Another 12-4 sleeper car, the Western Sunset

was built for the Wabash railroad for service on City of Portland and the City of St. Louis, eventually also serving on the San Francisco Overland. For this reason, it was painted in the Union Pacific harbor grey and yellow passenger scheme.



Finally, Railsmith has announced Amtrak #6411, a model of a fluted coach that was originally built for the New York Central and

was acquired by Amtrak from Penn Central.

Info: lowellsmith.net

NEW STRUCTURES & SCENIC SUPPLIES



ABR Model Works has released a collection of HO scale 3D-printed details called Street Details 1. Consisting of 61 separate items, it includes street bollards, a newspaper dispenser, single and double parking meters, parking lot bumpers, trash cans, park benches, cigarette disposal receptacles, a bike rack, payphones, mailboxes, fire hydrants, and fire department wall hose connectors.



A separate Park Details 1 pack is 11 items including trash cans, picnic tables, park benches, a bike rack, cigarette disposal receptacles, and water pumps. The items in both detail packs are also available separately.

Info: abrmodelworks.com



Athearn has announced a 40' drop sill parcel trailer as part of its March/April new product announcements. Four different United Parcel

Service (UPS) schemes have been announced, along with an undecorated parcel trailer.

Info: www.athearn.com



Berkshire Valley Models has released a model of a Country Barn in N scale. A former American Model Builders kit, the model measures 4.25" L x 3.25" W x 3.35" H.

Info: berkshirevalleymodels.com



FOS Scale Models has announced a new line of unpainted, 3D-printed figures and monuments in HO scale, Humanity to Scale. Beginning with 29 figures and figure sets, the collection includes "Lunch for Five," "Horseshoe Inspection," "The

Welder," and "Sharing Lunch with Willy." O scale figures will be available soon.

Info: fosscalemodels.com/collections/humanity-to-scale



Frenchman River Model Works has released the Downtown Book & Flower Shops in HO scale. The two brick buildings, one two story the other a single-story structure, consist of resin castings for the walls and details, roofing material, laser-cut window glazing, lumber, and other detail parts. The two-story Book Shop is approximately 1 5/8" W x 3 1/16" D x 4 1/4" H. The flower shop building is 1.75" W x 1.875" W x 2" tall. A cooler for the

back of the flower shop makes that structure approximately as deep as the Book Shop building. The exterior covered stairwell is also available separately.

Info: frenchmanriver.com



Inter-Action Hobbies has released the Hickey's Diner Truck and Flo's Diner kits in O scale. The HO scale versions of the kits were described in the *January 2026 MRH News*.



Also in HO and O scale, Inter-Action has released a rowboat kit that builds into two 15 foot boats including interior seating, paddles and oarlocks.



Exclusively in O scale is a workbench including 64 individual laser-cut hand tools including pliers, crescent and open wrenches, paint brushes, hand saws, hammers, hatchets, and axes.

Info: www.interactionhobbies.com



Mine Mount Models is now shipping Novakoff Travel in HO scale. The 4.5" D x 2.75" W x 5.5" H building is constructed of laser cut materials, curved shingles, rolled roofing, resin detail parts, and Tichy doors. Flowers not included.

Info: minemountmodels.com



miniprints has introduced "Mainline Minis," a series of transition era railway workers in N, HO, S, and O scales. The first sets are Gandy Dancers, which includes three figures holding lining bars; Driving Spikes, which has two figures swinging spike hammers; and Section Gang, which has two figures carrying a section of rail with rail tongs. The figures can be ordered painted or unpainted.



Also new from miniprints is a REA baggage cart in HO, S, and O scales. The optionally-painted 3D-printed cart includes three pieces of luggage.

Info: miniprints.com



Monster Modelworks has announced a new S scale kit for a Brick Pumping Station. It replicates a 1903-built Rutland Railroad Pumping Station located in Alburgh, Vermont. The kit consists of 3D laser engraved American Bond brick walls and corner pieces, 3D laser engraved

shake shingle siding, laser-cut peel & stick windows and asphalt roofing, 3D-printed water pipes, and other detail parts. Dimensions of the finished kit are 6.125" W x 6.75" L x 4.7" H.

Info: www.larkspurlaserart.com



Pre-Size Model Specialties has released a new O scale Dressed Stone Double Track Bridge Pier PS655, which works with the PS653 Dressed Stone Double Bridge Abutment and the PS654 Dressed Stone Abutment Walls. Dimensions: 8" W x 2 1/4" D x 4 3/4" H.

Info: www.pre-size.com



Silver Spike Designs has released a 1950s Electromatic Tamper. First developed in 1958 by the Tamper Corporation, the model consists of a frame, roof, and wheels. Available in O, HO, and N scale. N scale includes two tampers.

Info: silverspikedesigns.com



A new Cornerstone Amtrak Rural Station in HO scale has been announced by **Walthers**. Measuring 22

7/8" long by 4 15/16" deep, the kit includes a concrete platform, safety fencing, station signs, non-functioning platform lights, and an enclosed waiting area.

Info: www.walthers.com



New from **ZYX Creative** are two new tunnel portals in HO, N, and Z scales. The Santa Fe Tunnel 2 on Cajon Pass portal includes the block retaining walls, optional exposed liner, and is dated 1913.



The D&RGW Nolan Tunnel portal features a peaked portal and is dated 1912.
Info: zyxcreative.com

NEW DECALS, SIGNS, AND FINISHING PRODUCTS



Black Cat Decals has released a new decal set for CPR #298195 H Steel double-door 40' box car, BLT 1928.
Info: www.blackcatdecals.com

Monashee Laser Engineering has released three new sets of N scale Saskatchewan Wheat Pool decals. The first set, DEC4-N, reflects lettering and the logo found on Saskatchewan Wheat Pool elevators from the 1970s until 2007. Set DEC5-N is a representation of the logo and lettering found on elevators



between 1953 to the mid-1970s, with some elevators using the paint scheme into the early 2000s. Set DEC6-N is an accurate depiction of the lettering on elevators from 1923 to 1953.

Info: www.monasheelaserengineering.ca

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RUNNING EXTRA



! BRIEFLY NOTED AT PRESS TIME ...

The **Atlas** Spring 2026 catalog for HO and N scale has been released. Announcements include a new Master SW9/1200 locomotive in N scale, as well as new paint schemes or road numbers for N and HO scale Master GP40 locomotives, RS-1 locomotives, F89J flat car, and Coalveyors. Also in N scale are Greenville 100-ton hoppers, Russell Snow Plow, and Bay Window caboose. In the N scale Trainman line new paint schemes and road numbers will be available on the 90-ton hopper and 50' 6" boxcar. New paint schemes will be available on the N scale 1997 Ford pickup truck. In HO scale a Master model of the Trinity Hourglass autorack and a 2007 Ford Expedition SUV are new, and new paint schemes and road numbers have been announced for the HH660 locomotive and 3- and 6-bay cylindrical covered hoppers in the Master Line. In the HO Trainman line the PS-2 covered hopper, C&O cupola caboose, and 50' 6" boxcar have also been announced with new paint schemes and road numbers.

Info: shop.atlasrr.com

Walthers March announcements include the WalthersProto GP60, WalthersMainline 73' Greenville 7000 cu. ft. woodchip hopper, WalthersTrack code 83 30-, 45-, and 60-degree crossings; a modern yard tower and farm detail set from CornerStone, and a tower mounted yard light from SceneMaster.

Info: walthers.com

Details on all of the Atlas and Walthers announcements will be included in the April 2026 *MRH* News.

Lowell Smith/Railsmith has announced that pre-orders for the N scale Rock Island Golden State E7 locomotives and the N scale SP&S 2-8-2 Mikado are falling short of those needed to go to production. The pre-order period for the SP&S Mikado is April 10th and the Rock Island E7 is April 25th.

lowellsmith.net ■

SELECTED EVENTS



Model Railroad Hobbyist | March 2026

MARCH

Please submit your event information, including website, to model-railroad-hobbyist.com/contact/News_event-product_announcement

Ongoing Online and In-Person

ONLINE, Zoom & YouTube, Wednesdays at 7pm Eastern. New Tracks Modeling Live Weekly

Info: newtracksmodeling.com

YouTube: www.youtube.com/channel/UCMAVhPb5pjdkAYTdXLceJA

[VhPb5pjdkAYTdXLceJA](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCMAVhPb5pjdkAYTdXLceJA)

ONLINE, Zoom, Second Tuesdays, 8pm Eastern. "Off the Beaten Track" featuring Narrow Gauge layouts, clinics, and manufacturers.

Info: groups.io/g/NNG

ILLINOIS, CALEDONIA, Monthly Meetings of the Rock River Valley Division, Midwest Region. Paulson's Agriculture Museum of Argyle, 6950 Belvidere Rd. See Events page on website for dates.

Info: rrvd-nmra.com

March – April 2026

AUSTRALIA, SYDNEY, April 18, 2026. Sydney RPM. Concord Community Centre, NSW.

Info: sydneyrpm.com

CANADA, ALBERTA, CALGARY, April 25-26, 2026. Supertrain. Olympic Oval at the University of Calgary, 288 Collegiate Blvd NW.

Info: www.supertrain.ca

CANADA, ONTARIO, HAMILTON, April 18, 2026. 2026 Steel Town Railway Prototype Modelers Meet. Eva Rothwell Centre, 460 Wentworth St.

Info: steeltownrpm.wordpress.com

CANADA, ONTARIO, KITCHENER, March 15, 2026. Kitchener Model Train Show. Marshall Hall, 426 Bingemans Centre Drive.

Info: www.facebook.com/KitchenerModelTrainShow

CANADA, ONTARIO, PRESCOTT, April 11, 2026. 3rd Annual Prescott Model Train Club Model Train Show. Leo Boivin Community Centre, 444 Prince Street.

Info: www.facebook.com/PrescottRailroadModelClub

ALABAMA, GADSDEN, April 11, 2026. Coosa Valley Model Railroad Association 39th Annual Spring Train Show. Mary G Hardin Center for Cultural Arts, 501 Broad St.

Info: www.facebook.com/events/1324022532563856

COLORADO, DENVER, April 11-12, 2026. Rocky Mountain Train Show. National Western Complex, 4655 Humboldt St.

Info: rockymountaintrainshow.com/Default.aspx

FLORIDA, LARGO, March 21, 2026. Regal Railways Model Train Show. St. Jerome Church, 10895 Hamlin Blvd.

Info: regalrailways.com

GEORGIA, CARTERSVILLE, March 14-15, 2026. The Piedmont Division Model Train Show. The Clarence Brown Conference Center, 5450 GA HWY 20.

Info: themodeltrainshow.com

GEORGIA, MACON, March 27-28, 2026. Central Georgia Railroad Prototype Modelers. Lundy Chapel Church, 2081 Forest Hill Rd.

Info: centralgarpmp.com

GEORGIA, POOLER, April 11-12, 2026. Coastal Bluffs 37th Annual Model Railroad and Train Show. Pooler Recreation, 900 S Rogers St.

Info: www.facebook.com/events/1275566837941026

ILLINOIS, MACHESNEY PARK, March 21-22, 2026. Rock River Valley Train Show, Harlem High School, 9229 N Alpine Rd.

Info: www.facebook.com/TheRRVDNMRA

INDIANA, FRANKLIN, March 28, 2026. Indy South Train Show, sponsored by the Pacific & Eastern Model Railroad Club.

Johnson County 4-H Fairground, 260 Fairground Street

Info: www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61567675147560

INDIANA, NAPPANEE, March 21, 2026. 21st Annual Elkhart Model Railroad Club Nappanee Train Show. Claywood Event Center, 13924 N 1100 W (County Line Road).

Info: emrrc.com

INDIANA, PERU, April 18, 2026. Circus City Train Show (fmly The Miami County Train Show). Peru Jr/Sr High School, 401 N. Broadway.

Info: www.facebook.com/groups/1946702859448332

KENTUCKY, LOUISVILLE, March 21, 2026. 36th Train Show and Sale sponsored by Division 8, MCR, NMRA. Holy Family Parish Saffin Center, 3938 Poplar Level Rd.

Info: div8-mcr-nmra.org/train-show

MICHIGAN, MUSKEGON, April 25, 2026. Annual Hobby Expo and Train Show, sponsored by the Muskegon Railroad Historical Society. Cardinal Elementary School, 2310 Marquette Avenue.

Info: mrhsonline.wordpress.com



MICHIGAN, TAYLOR, March 15, April 12, 2026. Taylor Town Train Show and Sale. 22525 Ecorse Rd.

Info: www.instagram.com/taylor_town_train_show

NEBRASKA, DESHLER, April 25-26, 2026. Spring Creek Model Trains – N Scale Free-mo Weekend. Thayer County Activity Center, Race St. and 4th St.

Info: www.springcreekmodeltrains.com

NORTH CAROLINA, HICKORY, March 27, 2026. 24th Annual Hickory Train Show. Hickory Metro Convention Center, 1960 13th Ave SE.

Info: newtondepot.org/event/24th-annual-hickory-train-show

OHIO, FINDLAY, March 22, 2026. Findlay Spring Model Train Show. Northwest Ohio Railroad Preservation, Inc. 12505 County Road 99.

Info: www.nworrrp.org/spring-model-train-show.html

OHIO, SYLVANIA (Toledo Area), April 18, 2026. 2026 Spring Railroad Modeler Meet. Sylvania Senior Center, 7140 W Sylvania Ave.

Info: smm.ncrnmra.org

OKLAHOMA, TULSA, March 13-15th, 2026. 2026 Layout Design and Operations Weekend, presented by the Indian Nations Division of the NMRA. Locations: Various around Tulsa

Info: ldopsigmeet.tulsanmra.org

OREGON, ALBANY, March 28, 2026. Winterail – 48th Anniversary Railroad Photography Exposition & Collectibles Sale. Russell Tripp Performance Center, Linn Benton Community College (LBCC), 6500 Pacific Blvd, SW.

Info: www.winterail.com

PENNSYLVANIA, MALVERN, March 19-22, 2026. RPM Valley Forge, The Desmond Malvern, a Doubletree by Hilton, One Liberty Blvd.

Info: www.rpmvalleyforge.com

SOUTH DAKOTA, SIOUX FALLS, March 21-22, 2026. Greater Sioux Falls Model Train Show, presented by the Dakota Southeastern Division, NMRA. Grand Ballroom, Sioux Falls Convention Center, 1201 N West Ave.

Info: dakotasoutheastern.org/event/greater-sioux-falls-model-train-show-march-22-2026-sioux-falls-sd

TEXAS, NEW BRAUNFELS, April 25-26, 2026. New Braunfels Train Show, 375 S Castell Ave.

Info: newbraunfelsrailroadmuseum.org/nbrrr

TEXAS, DALLAS, March 28-29, 2026. World's Greatest Hobby on Tour. Dallas Market Hall, 2200 N Stemmons Fwy.

Info: greattrainshow.com

TEXAS, GALVESTON, April 25-26, 2026. RailFest: Model Train Rally. 1932 Union Station Train Depot, 2602 Santa Fe Place.

Info: galvestonrrmuseum.org/railfest

WEST VIRGINIA, LOGAN, March 20-21, 2026. St. Albans Chesapeake & Ohio Modelers (SACOM) Modelers Weekend. Chief Logan State Park Lodge, 1000 Conference Center Dr.

Info: www.sacomrr.org/2026/01/17/modelers-weekend-2026-schedule

Future 2026 by location

CANADA, BRITISH COLUMBIA, BURNABY (Vancouver), May 22-24, 2026. Online Kickoffs April 30, May 14th. Railway Modellers Meet of British Columbia. 3rd Floor, West Mall Centre, Simon Fraser University.

Info: railwaymodellersmeetofbc.ca

ARIZONA, MESA, June 3-7, 2026. Santa Fe Railway Historical & Modeling Society Annual Convention. Includes RPM on June 5-6. Delta Hotel By Marriott Phoenix Mesa, 200 North Centennial Way.

Info: sfrhms.org

CALIFORNIA, LOMITA, May 30, 2026. Southern California N Scale Meet. Calvary Assembly of God-Lomita (Gymnasium).

Info: socalnscale.com

MASSACHUSETTS, SPRINGFIELD, May 29-30, 2026. New England/Northeast RPM. The Sheraton Monarch Hotel, One Monarch Place.

Info: www.nerpm.org

MICHIGAN, KALAMAZOO, May 15-17, 2026. The New York Central System Historical Society Convention and Annual Meeting. Delta House by Marriott, 2747 South 11th St.

Info: www.nycshs.org/nycshs-2026-annual

MICHIGAN, TAYLOR, October 11, 2026. Taylor Town Train Show and Sale. 22525 Ecorse Rd.

Info: www.instagram.com/taylor_town_train_show

NEW JERSEY, BURLINGTON TWP, May 9, 2026. Burlington Train Show. Burlington Lodge #32, 2308 Mt. Holly Road (Rt. 541).

Info: www.facebook.com/StrasburgModelRailroadNJ

NORTH CAROLINA, CHARLOTTE, May 2-3, 2026. RPM Carolinas: School of Railway Prototype Modeling. 9140 Arrowpoint Blvd, Suite 140.

Info: www.facebook.com/groups/1895473627515807

OREGON, PORTLAND METRO, June 20, 2026. Railroads in the Garden Summer Tour, presented by the Rose City Garden Railway Society. Booklets available online, at local hobby shops, and some garden centers beginning May 1st, 2026.

Info: rcgrs.com

OREGON, TIGARD, May 13-16, 2026. Oregon Rails 2026, the 2026 Pacific Northwest Region NMRA annual convention. Embassy Suites By Hilton Tigard-Portland, 9000 SW Washington Square Road.

Info: oregonrails2026.com

PENNSYLVANIA, HAMBURG, September 18-20, 2026. Anthracite Railroad Modelers and Model Railroad Meet XIV. Reading Railroad Heritage Museum, 500 South 3rd St.

Info: www.facebook.com/groups/624611144335704

TENNESSEE, CHATTANOOGA, July 27-August 2, 2026. 2026 Scenic City Express, NMRA National Convention. Chattanooga Convention Center, 1 Carter St.

Info: www.nmra2026.org

TENNESSEE, JOHNSON CITY, May 29-30, 2026. Johnson City Railroad Experience Big Train Show. ETSU Mini-Dome, East Tennessee State University Campus.

Info: johnsoncityrailroadexperience.org/big-train-show

VIRGINIA, FISHERVILLE, May 3, 2026. 2026 Annual Shenandoah Valley Model Train & Railroading Show. Augusta Expo, 277 Expo Road.

Info: www.acrrm.org/events/2026trainshow ■



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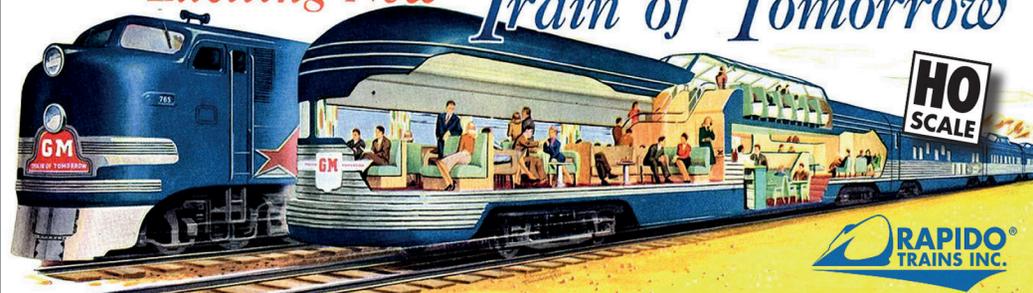
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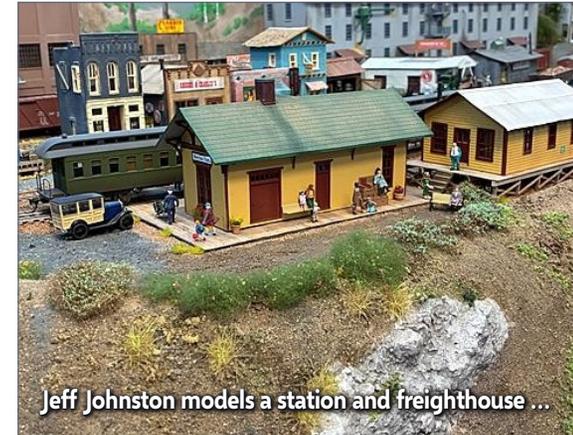
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