Rochester Model Rails

Dedicated to Quality Model Railroading

Recently completed coaling tower on Ned Spiller's HO scale Danby, Ludlow, and Springfield model railroad. Ned won first place in On-Line Structures at the Lone Star Regional Convention in June.

Designing and Building a Transportable Layout – Part II

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You *Can* Take It With You – Part II

Designing and Building a "Tansportable" Layout

by Ned Spiller, MMR

Electrical

My control system is unlike anyone else's. Since I worked as an engineer for the phone company, I had access to lots of old equipment when we modernized our old switching offices. I enjoy the electrical part of the hobby, and I designed ways to use old 48-volt relays as switch machines, switchboard "keys" (electrical switches) for cab selectors, and cables and terminal blocks for the wiring. I also build an automatic polarity circuit for the reverse loops, and photocell detectors for the underground staging tracks.

In this post-DCC world, I have way too much wiring. Fortunately, I was able to get some 50 pair (100 wire) cable, and some connectors that use wire wrap connections and that can be stacked front to back. On the DL&S, all of the wiring within each module goes to a 50 pair connector with a cable attached. That cable plugs into the back of a similar connector in the next module, like a daisy chain. There is a moveable box under the layout where the cables from the layout modules and from the control panel plug into a cross connect panel. The 48-volt power supply and other control circuits are in the box, and everything gets wired together here.

I use 14-gauge wire for the common rail supply and for the 48 volt feed. These wires I ran between the modules, but left a loop at each joint so the wires could be cut and reconnected.

Another thing to remember – all of the wiring has to be done on top of the open grid so that the crate bottom can be fastened directly to the bottom of the grid.

For anyone with a more "normal" control system, a somewhat different approach can be taken. DCC power and switch machine power could use heavy gauge feeder wires. Just be sure to minimize the connections between layout modules, label all the wires, and leave a loop of extra wire at the module joints that can be cut and reconnected. Low power circuits, such as detectors or signaling systems, could use old plug ended computer cables. Instead of one large control panel, make several small ones and keep as much wiring as possible within one module.

Scenery

My scenery is plaster over hardshell. I made sure the hardshell was well supported on both sides of the module joints. Where there were retaining walls, I made the walls removable or had vertical joints that could be easily repaired after separation. I also provided removable scenery sections where I would need to get at the underground track to reconnect it between modules.

Disassembly

Eventually, the time came to disassemble the layout. After a final run, I removed and packed the rolling stock and structures.

Track

For the visible track, I used a cutting disc in a Dremel tool to cut the rails. For the underground track, I had already cut the rails at the module joints so I slid the rail joiners away from the joint. Where there were turnouts over the joints, I pulled the track nails, cut the rail joiners, and lifted them off. I had one handlaid turnout over a joint. Here, I soldered some scrap rail on top of the turnout rails to hold everything in place, pulled the spikes, and cut the rails on either end of the turnout. I numbered the locations and the turnouts so I would be sure to get the same ones back in the same place.

Electrical

I labeled and cut the 14 gauge feeder wires between modules and unplugged the 50 pair cables between the modules and the control box. On each module, the cables were coiled up and fastened between the grid cross members.

Scenery

I removed any trees over the joints and used a hacksaw blade to cut through the plaster, including the plaster rock castings. I have a stream made with Castin'craft casting resin that crossed over two of the joints. When I cut through the plaster with the hacksaw blade, I also cut through the casting resin stream. I removed or cut through any other scenic elements, such as retaining walls. I also removed the trees from the highest scenery, so that the crates would not be any taller than necessary.

Crates

Using sawhorses to support the sections that did not have four legs, I unbolted the modules and pulled them apart. I worked on the sections one at a time by carrying them outside and sitting them on saw horses. I numbered all of the legs and diagonal bracing before removing them and bundling them together.

For each crate, the open grid section forms the base. I cut the sides and ends from 1 / 2" plywood, just high enough to clear the scenery. I used 1x2s in the corners, and fastened it all together with drywall screws. I placed more 1x2s on the inside top edge of the sides and ends to provide a place to screw the top. On the first crate, I made the top and bottom from 1 / 2" plywood, but once I realized how heavy it was, I used 1/8" Masonite for the tops and bottoms of the rest of the crates. The Masonite had less strength, so when I stacked the crates, I laid temporary 1x2s across them so the weight would be supported by the sides, not the top. Even though I was able to manage the heavy modules (with a helper), if I was starting over, I would seriously consider building my scenery using Styrofoam instead of plaster.
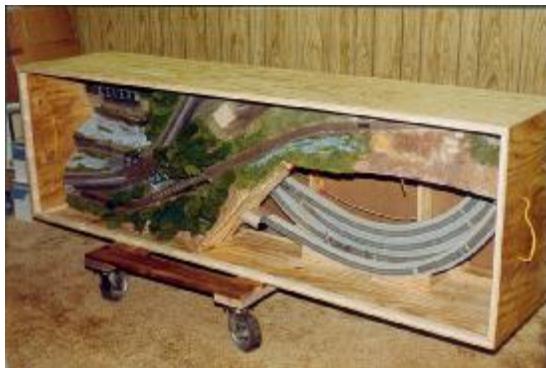
8' Module in crate

4' Module in crate

One of my modules is not rectangular. When I built a rectangular crate around this module, I had room for the control panel, which I braced with scrap lumber.

After the crates were built, I used silicone sealer on the joints to keep out any insects. The final step was to label all the crates with my name, address, and phone number, and to identify which module was in each crate.

Next Issue – Part III

The Move

B R & P Crew Shanty, Caledonia NY

by Lincoln Pinn

Due to various circumstances, I recently found myself in Caledonia, NY, with two hours to kill and little to do. (I had dropped off my wife at a local restaurant for a women's luncheon.) Why not check out the railroad yards west of town?

There are several railroad junctions west of Caledonia, NY.   P & L Junction served the main lines of the Lehigh Valley and the Buffalo, Rochester and Pittsburgh. About a half a mile to the southwest, another junction served the Erie Railroad. The G & W's main purpose was to serve the salt mine in Retsof with many covered hopers of salt being delivered daily.

At the intersection of the Genesee and Wyoming tracks with Rt. 5 and 20, I found this nifty little shanty that appears to be a remnant of the BR & P. I don't know where it really came from, who built it or its original location. But calling it BR & P spikes a nostalgic note so why not? It would seem however that it was used for shelter for train crews. There is a bench inside but it contained no stove for heating.

I had my camera along but no measuring tape or writing materials. Surely Caledonia would have a hardware store and a drug store where I could find them. Think again. The local grocery store can to the rescue. I was able to but a six-foot measuring tape, pad and pencil. Down to only an hour left.

Back to the shanty I drove. Putting on my hard hat to look official I quickly measured the building.   For some reason that always rides in the car's trunk. No one is ever suspicious of you when you wear a hard hat. Down to 15 minutes left – just time to arrive back at the restaurant.

The plans here will enable you to easily make a model for your rail yards. This could be a one evening project. Paint it your own railroad's colors if you like.

See the photos and plans below and on the following pages.
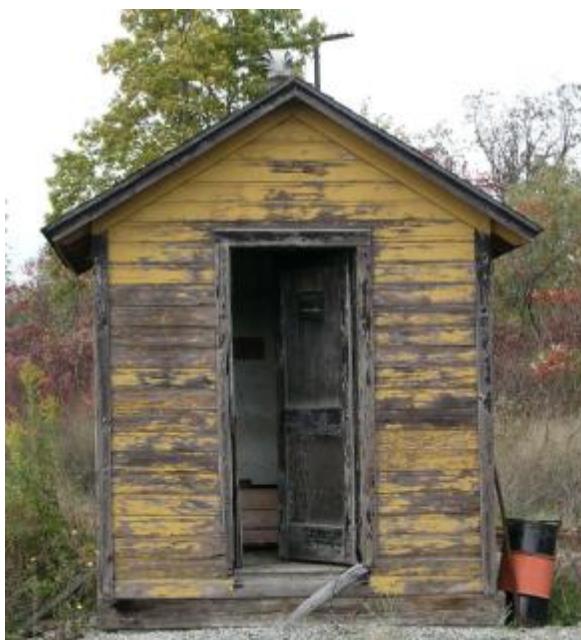
B R & P Crew Shanty, Caledonia, NY

by Lincoln Pinn
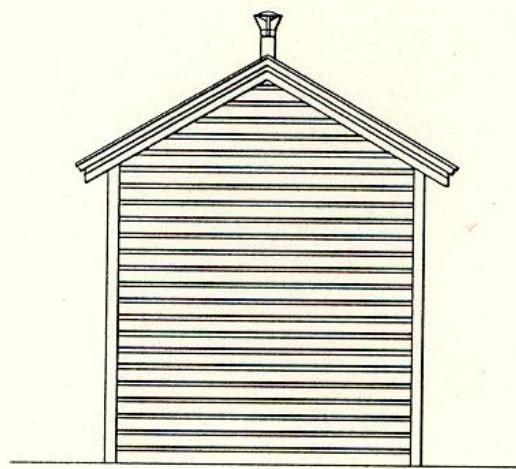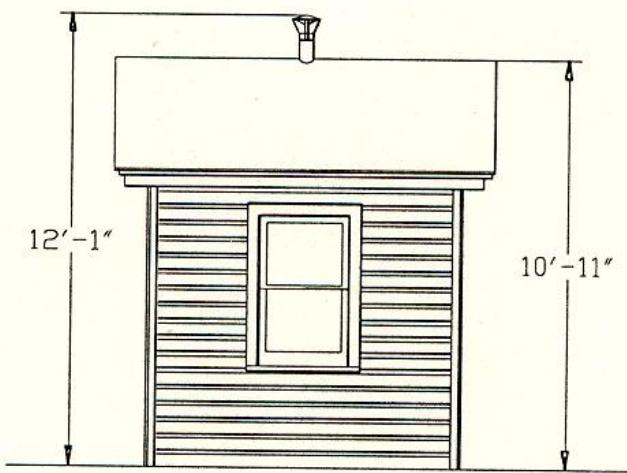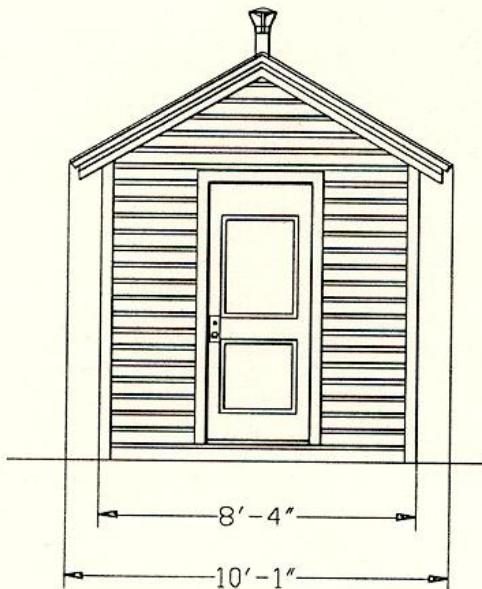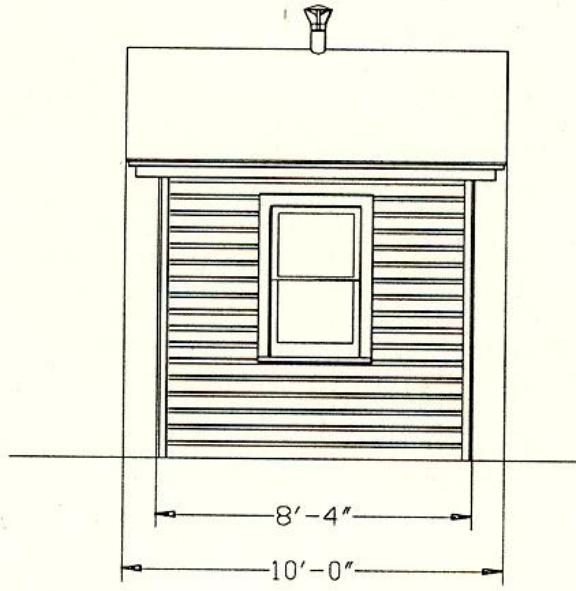
Sociology of Model Railroading

Part 5 – Modelers' Meets

(Abridged Edition)

by John Bruce

The phrase "prototype modeler" has considerable resonance and prestige in the model railroad hobby. It came to currency in a grassroots movement in the mid-1970s as modelers became dissatisfied with the low quality and poor selection of the commercial products that were available to the hobby at the time. By the mid-1970s, many railroad technical and historical societies were well-established and publishing research on railroad equipment that was much more thorough than what had been available. *Extra 2200 South*, a specialty magazine publishing detailed information on contemporary locomotives, provided much more information on locomotives' technical features, history, and variety than the mainstream hobby magazines.

There was a general sense that those mainstream magazines were neither encouraging improved products from the hobby industry (who were their advertisers), nor publishing material that suggested that improvements might be made to existing products on an aftermarket basis, again presumably because it might offend advertisers to imply that their products were less than perfect. But it might even be going too far to impute commercial motives to the editors for their complacency, since complacency alone was probably a sufficient explanation. The magazines were also, it was felt, giving insufficient attention to railroads in interesting parts of the country, such as the Rocky Mountain states and California.

A Massachusetts hobby dealer named Bob Longo began to meet the wish for more complete, region- and railroad-specific information by publishing a series of newsletters with names like *Western Prototype Modeler* and *Southwestern Prototype Modeler*, each issue of which stressed various aftermarket detail improvements and technical enhancements that could be made to models then on the market, or information that would allow a modeler to build models for which no commercial product was available. In 1977, he combined the newsletters into a new, full-size magazine called *Prototype Modeler*, which continued to innovate in providing articles that covered interesting subjects in a more detailed and complete way than the mainstream hobby press, which at the time was producing a bland, predictable, and generally superficial product.

At the same time, groups of modelers began to meet in informal groups that called themselves "prototype modelers' meets". In part reacting to the perceived organizational rigidity and complacency of the National Model Railroad Association (NMRA), which had accomplished nothing of interest for some years, the groups deliberately avoided formal organization. Anyone could announce a meeting and declare, should she be so inclined, that it was a "prototype modelers' meeting".

The impulse motivating the "prototype modeler" movement was anarchic, iconoclastic, and innovative. In some ways it presaged the same impulses that generated the computer revolution in the 1980s, a sense that useful information was worth distributing widely regardless of institutional constraints, a willingness to work hard and take risks to support worthwhile innovation, and a certain subordination of individual ego to the general purpose. If the existing magazines wouldn't publish the challenging and exciting material informed readers wanted, they'd start their own magazine. If the NMRA's existing activities couldn't support modelers who wanted an organization that would help them achieve their goals of getting innovative, challenging, and exciting products, they'd start their own anarchic activity to achieve those ends.

Bob Longo died within a few years of starting the magazine, which then passed through various hands, declined, and finally ceased publication in the late 1980s. In the meantime, the NMRA made its peace with the "prototype modelers" -- though given the anarchic style of the original groups, it's difficult in hindsight to determine with whom and on what authority this could have been done -- and the informal "prototype modelers" were then given separate meeting rooms for their use during NMRA national conventions (This was an enormous public-relations coup for the NMRA, allowing it to seem more innovative and flexible than it has ever actually been).

The new magazine, however, convinced other publishers that a market existed for additional hobby magazines. The interest in more accurate, more representative, better-quality, and more highly detailed model equipment convinced manufacturers that a market existed for new models to higher standards, and in fact the movement was probably a major factor in the phenomenal increase in product quality, accuracy, and variety that's taken place over the past 30 years. Within a fairly short period of time, the "prototype modelers" acquired more prestige than was probably good for the movement -- assuming the goal of such a movement (on a Weberian rationalistic basis) would be the continuous improvement of the hobby environment, rather than the introduction of any particular generation of products, or the publication of any particular magazine with any particular content.

Since the original "organization" was essentially anarchic and the result of loosely coordinated independent efforts, no one can say what its objectives were for sure -- but if I'm as competent a spokesman for an anarchic group as anyone else, I would say that its objective ought to have been a continuous state of mind, that of seeking challenge and excitement in the hobby, regardless of personalities or prestige.

To that extent, the "prototype modeler" movement has fallen somewhat short of its original task, or at least its original potential. But every movement loses its original spontaneity after a time, and the "prototype modeler" movement is now about 30 years old. In addition, every movement has its hangers-on and heavy-breathers, and as the initial excitement has dissipated, the tendency toward distracting secondary effects like ego-tripping and pedantry has increased.

A "prototype modeler's" meet is now a highly ritualized, predictable event, with participants bringing large numbers of models to display on thigh-height tables covered in white linen in hotel ballrooms. These are remarkably poor conditions to view or discuss small-scale models, but there is no move to improve or innovate in this area -- such a move would now likely be resisted as not what participants were used to. "Clinics" or presentations on various subjects are given in adjoining meeting rooms. The clinics vary widely in quality, and they are frequently disrupted by attendees pursuing questions on obscure details, in an attempt to one-up the presenter. Ordinary good manners in such cases are clearly a secondary consideration.

The biggest problem is that the "prototype modeler" movement appears to see itself as separate from an "operation" movement in the hobby. Highly accurate models are often constructed without the intent of actually running them -- significantly, facilities for running the models on display at a "prototype modelers'" meet are frequently not provided; they just sit on the white linen. In this respect they more closely resemble static military models than operable railroad models. The modelers who are most prolific at building highly detailed railroad models often do not build layouts on which to run them -- they focus exclusively on the essentially static models of equipment.

Finally, a major focus of the "prototype modeler" movement has become e-mail lists, and many of the lists suffer from the leadership failures outlined in the previous section. The anarchic, egalitarian nature of successful e-mail lists would complement the nature of the movement -- but the potential absence of the leadership qualities needed to ensure success in e-mail lists is a potential ingredient for failure. Another factor is the disruptive conduct of some attendees at in-person meets, as well as the personality issues that might be expected from people who take such a movement too seriously. Humility and good humor are qualities in short supply, as the movement currently exists. The tendency to subordinate ego (in whatever minimal way) to the group purpose that was present in early phases of the movement is less evident now.

If this means that "prototype modelers" don't always have a fully-developed sense of proportion in approaching a hobby that ought, after all, to involve running the models in a more fully-realized miniature environment, on the other hand, the continuing minimalist style of the organization has allowed it to avoid self-destruction on schismatic or organizational issues.

A welcome recent trend in "prototype modeler" meets has been the presence of modular layouts, so that equipment can be seen in operation as part of an overall picture, as well as the innovation of using higher-level tables, rather than standard hotel banquet hall-style tables, to exhibit models.

On the other hand, an unanswered question is the eventual impact that high-quality, moderately-priced commercial models will have on the movement. The movement got started during a period when the best models available were, by current standards, clunky. Now it's possible to buy models off the shelf in the $100 range that have a level of detail and execution that modelers would likely have spent hundreds of hours (and indeed, hundreds of dollars in detail parts) trying to achieve only a few years earlier. Does this leave open the possibility that modelers can redirect their time and effort toward areas that need greater attention?

Next Issue – Part 6

Model Railroad Clubs

John Bruce's Model Railroad

Los Feliz and North Western Railroad

www.trainweb.org/lfnwfan
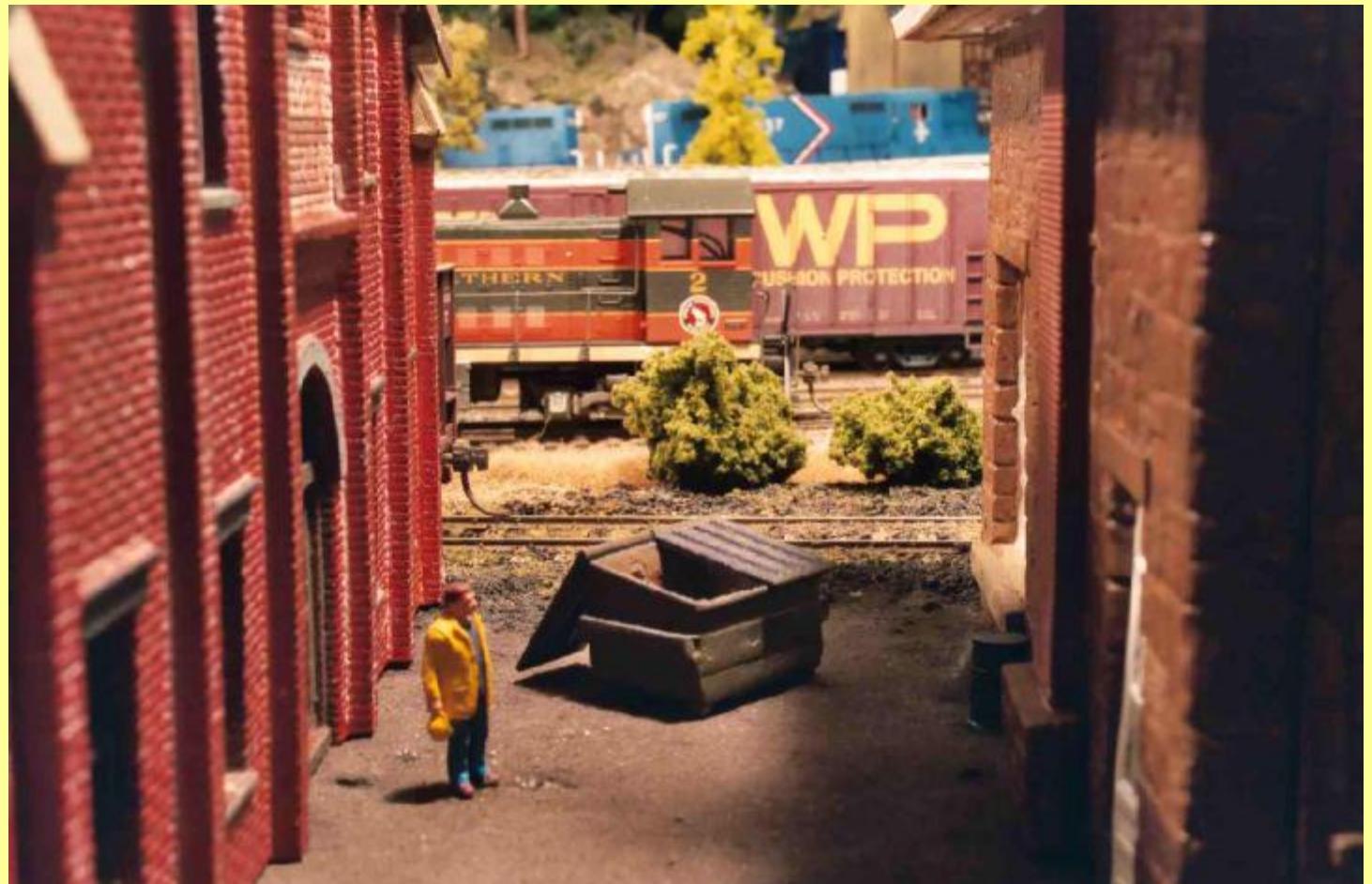
Ask Doctor Dick (The Scenery Doctor)

OCRR@frontiernet.net

Jimmy writes:

I would like to improve my train room's general appearance and also make my layout look more detailed and complete. What do you suggest?

Doc:

Jimmy - great question. I have just been doing that to my train room so here are some suggestions.

Paint the Walls Blue

If you have not already done this, painting the walls blue gives a nice finished look to the train room and looks good when taking images of your layout. I have used paint form *Home Depot*, a light blue called Billowing Clouds.

Paint the Floor

If your model railroad is in the basement and the floor is concrete, painting the floor with basement floor paint is an easy way to give the room a finished look. Cheap yard-sale small rugs on top of the floor also gives a nice effect.

Complete the Fascia

Create a fascia all around your layout and paint it a dark color like black. Remember you want the visitors to look at the layout, not at a brightly painted fascia board. Also, clean up under the layout.

Add Detail

Finish those "almost finished areas" on your layout. Take the time complete the scenery by adding ground foam, trees and bushes. Add detail such as figures, debris, etc. Add more trees to those areas that you always knew needed more trees.

Organize the Mess

For those areas that are adjacent to the layout, organize the junk. Toss out items not needed and organize the rest. Organize items based on tasks, for example, put all your track laying items in one place so they can easily accessed when you go to lay track. Keep all your molding supplies - molds, plaster, etc. in one location.

Resurface Streams and Ponds

As mentioned in the last issue, those areas made with *EnviroTex* may need to be re-coated after many years of dust, wear and tear.

Dust Off General Scenery and Re-Do

Clean those old areas and re-coat with fresh ground foam.

Future Articles

*Video Review –
The Last Steam Operated Sawmill*

Leo Adamski's MARY – LAND RR

Modeling Keuka Lake - Hammondsport

Modeling a Civil War RR

Hiding that Basement Pole

Visiting the Cass Scenic Railroad

Video Review – Photo Mural Backdrops

*Visiting the Brunswick, MD,
Railroad Museum*

Any interest in an

Index ?

for the first 34 issues of the

Rochester Model Rails

e-mail OCRR@frontiernet.net

Don't Forget to Visit

www.railroadmuseum.net

Coming Next Month ……

**Modeling the Bath and Hammondsport
Railroad – An Update**

Sociology of Model Railroading – Part 6
Model Railroad Clubs

Green Frog Productions Video Review –
Scratch Building Structures

Ask Doctor Dick – *the Scenery Doctor*

Train Events - *Updated 2005/2006 Calendar*

Rochester Model Rails

Recommended Train Events for 2005/2006

Updated 8-29-05

August 31 - 3	**Dearborn, MI –** 25th National Narrow Gauge Convention – Silver Anniversary
September 10	**Holley, NY –** Ridge Road Station, Ridge Road West, - Train Races
September 15	**Rochester NY** – NRHS meeting, "Forty & Eight Club, University Ave., American Orient Ltd."
October 9	**Rush, NY –** RIT day at the New York Museum of Transportation
October 13	**Rochester, NY** – NRHS meeting – Forty & Eight Club, University Ave., "New York's Bridges" by Jim Stewart
October 15 – 16	**Bowmanville, Ontario, Canada -** Model Railroad Show, Bowmanville High School
October 16	**Rochester, NY –** RIT Model RR Club Show and Sale**,** 10am to 3:30pm
October 22	**Canandaigua, NY –** NMRA, NFR, Lakeshores Division Meet, Canandaigua Fire House, Program starts at 9:00am, registration at 8:30am, $4.00 non-NMRA members.
November 5- 6	**Syracuse, NY –** Train Show and Sale at the NY Fairgrounds, 10:00am
November 13	**Batavia, NY** – Batavia Train Show and Sale, Batavia Downs
November 17	**Rochester, NY** - NRHS meeting – Forty & Eight Club, University Ave., *Rochester Transportation* by Donovan Shilling
November 19 – 20	**Hamburg, NY –** Train Show, Erie Country Fair Grounds
November 31	**Syracuse, NY** - 31st Annual CNY Train Fair, NYS Fairgrounds
December 15	**Rochester, NY** – NRHS meeting, Williamsport, PA in the Late Steam Era" – by Bill Bigler
January 28 – 29	**West Springfield, MA –** Amherst Railway Society Big Railroad Hobby Show, Eastern States Exposition Grounds, Memorial Avenue. Info: www.AmherstRail.org
July 1 –2	**Galeton, PA** – Bark Peelers' Convention, PA Lumber Museum
August 21 – 26	**Durango, CO** - 26th National Narrow Gauge Convention
November 4- 5	**Syracuse NY** - Train Show and Sale at NY Fairgrounds