Volume 5, #1, January, 2009

The Semaphore

North County Model Railroad Society (NCMRS)

The Editor apologizes: The normal publication schedule for this popular newsletter is one week prior to the monthly meeting. This issue didn't meet its schedule. So (by way of an announcement) the January meeting took place on January 31, in its usual location. The next meeting will be held in the same place on Saturday, February 27, at 10 A.M.

Work Schedule

Thursday and Saturday are work days at the club. There are plenty of tasks to perform.

Visitor Schedule

Thursday 3 - 8:00PM
Saturday 9:30AM-4PM
(11:00AM meeting day)

Upcoming Operation Date

Tuesday, February 10
Setup time 1:00 pm
First Departure 4 pm
Last Departure 7 pm

Table of Contents

President's Message, by Dick Miller	1
Masthead	2
NMRA Achievement Program Golden Spike Award, by Roger Gredvig	2
Standard Gage, by Dan Conway	3
The Editor Responds	3
Steam Locomotives in the East: Strasburg RR, by Dan Conway	4

President's Message by Dick Miller

Looking Ahead

It looks like 2009 will be a very active year for NCMRS.

The board of directors and the clubs officers will have some new faces this year. The membership voted for Al Cuevas, Phil Schneider, and yours truly to serve as directors for the coming year. The officers which were appointed by directors include; President, Dick Miller; VP, Lyle Lodwick; Treasurer, Nick Ruddick, and Secretary, Burt Gray. Thanks to all of you for agreeing to serve on the board. A special thanks to those of you who have severed in some board capacity for three years and more

There are already a lot of items on our 2009 "To Do" list and I expect more items will be added as the year progresses.

We plan to be more active in the way we recruit, keep and, involve new members. For me, understanding our new member's interests and getting them involved in some aspect of the club is Job One.

A project to develop a signaling system for our railroad will continue into the New Year. I expect this year the Signal Team will offer a formal plan as to how we might proceed with hardware and software for a main line signaling system. Should we make the decision to proceed with signaling, this will be a very big and involved project.

The towns of Dixon and Russell on Peninsula C will continue to be developed in the New Year. We are working on six new buildings including three high rise buildings for Dixon and one new industrial building for Russell. We are planning to provide interior lighting on some of these new buildings as well as other buildings on the layout

We are in the process of developing a track plan for the new peninsula (Peninsula E) in the new expansion area. The first priority is to establish where the tracks will enter and exit through the wall between Peninsula D and E. By year end I expect we will have agreed on a track plan for this new peninsula and started construction of the bench work.

Once the entry points between D and E are established we can complete or revise the track work on Peninsula D and begin serious scenery and electrical work on that peninsula.

We have a computer software program called Decoder Pro which as I understand it simplifies the job of configuring complicated DCC decoders by providing screens on which you can select the various options and values you want. It sounds like a very useful program to me. We are looking for someone to adopt and master this program and then instruct the rest of us in its use.

In the training area we are, we are planning to formalize our DCC throttle and layout checkout procedure.

If you are interested in getting involved in any of the items on our long "To Do" list speak with the various committee chairs and get on board. We are trying to break the 70/30 rule which says that 70% of the work at the club is done by 30% of the membership.

Merry Christmas and All aboard
Dick Miller
12/24/08

NMRA Achievement Program
Golden Spike Award
by Roger Gredvig

Many modelers take a look at the full requirements for a Master Model Railroader and figure it's too hard, so why try. It's true, the MMR is a difficult accomplishment to achieve. It is meant be. But the AP program also has many levels of achievement, all designed to start you off with the basics, and then progress as far as you feel comfortable. The initial level is the Golden Spike Award. Here are the requirements, along with some common misconceptions explained.

1. Rolling Stock (Motive Power & Cars)
Display six (6) units of rolling stock (Scratchbuilt, craftsman, or detailed commercial kits).

Notice that the requirement is to "display" them. Nowhere does it say that they must earn a minimum number of points in judging - just that they must be displayed. (In the quarterly contests at your division meetings, for example. Or even having them set out on your layout, or a table in your basement counts as "display").
These models need to show a little more effort than a "shake the box" kit. For example, by itself a freight car kit straight out of the box, is not enough to qualify. However, by painting and decaling it, adding a little detailing, perhaps some weathering, etc., you'll have a qualifying model in no time!

2. Model Railroad Setting (Structures & Scenery)
Construct a minimum of eight (8) square feet of layout.

Again, there is no requirement about how good or how elaborate your layout must be - just that you must "construct" it. On the other hand, you may have trouble convincing someone that a loop of track nailed to a piece of green painted wood constitutes a "layout" . . . How much is 8 square feet of layout? Well, a typical module is 4 feet by 2 feet, and would easily satisfy this requirement.

Construct five (5) structures (scratchbuilt, craftsman, or detailed and commercial kits). These structures may be separate, or one or more of them may be part of a single scene.

The same comments apply here about the type of kits. The idea is to show that you can do more than glue a simple plastic kit together. Painting or weathering are good things to consider. Remember that "structures" aren't just buildings. Things like bridges and trestles also fall into this category

3. Engineering (Civil & Electrical)
Three (3) types of trackage are required (turnout, crossing, etc.). All must be properly ballasted and installed on proper roadbed. Commercial trackage may be used.

This requirement sounds a lot harder than it is. First, notice that last sentence about commercial trackage; you don't have to hand-lay anything - you can just install a store bought turnout. "Types of trackage" can be just about anything: turnouts, crossings, and grade elevation (a change in elevation of the track) are all examples of "types of trackage". Also, note that the three types DO NOT have to be different. For example, just having three simple turnouts will qualify. The "proper roadbed" requirement can be met by laying the track on a raised roadbed, (such as cork) and ballasting it. The purpose of this requirement is to show that you understand roadbed profile, drainage, etc.

All installed trackage must be properly wired so that two trains can be operated simultaneously (Double-track main, single-track main with sidings, block or command control, etc.).

This requirement can also be easier than it sounds. Notice the option for a single track main with sidings. This means that as long as you can cut power to the sidings individually, you can run one train, park it on a siding while you run another, then park it and run the first again. This meets the requirement.

4. Provide one additional electrical feature such as powered turnouts, signaling, turnout indication, lighted buildings, etc.

Don't read more into this than is there. A powered turnout can be something as simple as an Atlas turnout with a switch machine. Think in terms of anything that runs off the 'Accessories' terminals of a power pack and you 're half way there.

One other thing to remember: Not all of these requirements need to be met on the same layout (or piece of layout). They don't even need to be met in the same scale! If you want to build G scale rolling stock, an N scale Model Railroad setting, and an HO scale layout for trackage and wiring, go ahead. The Golden Spike Award is an easy way to begin your skill-building process. Call the AP or Contest Chairman to start on the AP trail.

Why is Standard Gauge 4 Feet 8 ½ Inches Between Rails?
by Dan Conway

The following is adapted from something I found on the internet. I had heard this theory before, and I don’t know of any other explanation, so this may be true.

The United States and Canada adopted as “standard gauge” for railroads a track separation of 4 feet 8 1/2 inches . (“Narrow gauge” railroads are, obviously, narrower, usually 3 feet between the rails. In the early days of railroad construction in North America, some railroads were built as “broad gauge”, but they were converted to standard gauge or abandoned.)

Why was 4 foot 8 ½ inches used? Because that's the way they built railroads in England, and the US railroads were built using locomotives imported

from England.

Why did the English build their railroads with that gauge? Because the first rail lines were built by the same people who built the pre-railroad tramways, and that's the gauge they used.

Why did they use that gauge? Because the people who built the tramways used the same jigs and tools that they used for building wagons.

Okay! Why did the wagons have that particular wheel spacing? Well, if they tried to use any other spacing, the wagon wheels would break on some of the old, long distance roads in England, because that's the spacing of the wheel ruts in the roads.

So who built those old rutted roads? The first long distance roads in Europe (and England) were built by Imperial Rome for their legions. The roads have been used ever since.

And the ruts in the roads? Roman war chariots first formed the initial ruts, which everyone else had to match for fear of destroying their wagon wheels. Since the chariots were made for (or by) Imperial Rome, they were all alike in the matter of wheel spacing.

So the United States standard railroad gauge of 4 feet, 8 1/2 inches derives from the original specification for an Imperial Roman war chariot. And why 4 feet 8 ½ inches? The Imperial Roman war chariots were made just wide enough to accommodate the back ends of two war horses.

The Editor Responds

Careful readers of this journal may recall that last month an alternative explanation was put forth: that 4'8 ½" is the separation between the neck and the ankles of damsels in distress.

Which explanation do you prefer? That involving (a) beautiful young things; or (b) horses a——?

Let us know. We will publish the survey results!

Steam Locomotives in the East: Strasburg Railroad
by Dan Conway

My wife and I and friends from Colorado took a week-long trip around Maryland and Pennsylvania in the fall of 2008. October is a beautiful time of year in those states, with the trees turning their fall colors. Our trip focused on two railroads featuring operating steam locomotives, and two railroad museums. This article covers the Strasburg Railroad and the Pennsylvania State Railroad Museum. A separate article will cover the Western Maryland Scenic Railway and the Baltimore and Ohio RR Museum.

The Strasburg Railroad in Pennsylvania is a short line connecting Strasburg to the old Pennsylvania Railroad (now Amtrak) mainline at Paradise, Pennsylvania. The railroad, the oldest operating short line in the US, bills itself as the "Railroad to Paradise". It is 4 miles from Strasburg to Paradise, and a round trip takes about 45 minutes. The trains roll slowly through the beautiful Pennsylvania Dutch countryside, where farmers still use teams of horses for plowing and harvesting.

The Strasburg Railroad operates 4 steam locomotives and 14 wooden passenger cars, all restored to their original glory, including the only operating wooden dining car in the US. The first class cars have overstuffed individual seats that swivel, making the trip extremely comfortable.

Our train was pulled by locomotive number 90, a Baldwin 2-10-0 built in 1924. Leaving the Strasburg depot, built in 1882, the loco ran backwards while pulling the train through the countryside. At Paradise, a series of spring-loaded switches allows the locomotive to leave the cars on the mainline, run around them on a siding, and couple to the other end of the train, so as to run forwards while pulling it back to Strasburg. The spring-loaded switches allow these movements to be made without the need for anyone to throw a switch by hand.

In addition to train rides, the Strasburg Railroad offers tours of its shops. A shop employee takes small groups through one of the few railroad shops in the US still capable of boiler repair and major restoration projects on locomotives. When we visited, the boiler, frame and wheels of a Long Island Railroad 4-6-2 locomotive were in the shop for major restoration work. A Rio Grande Southern narrow gauge steam engine and tender were also being restored in the shop.

The Strasburg Railroad shops have a high reputation, and museums and other tourist railroads use these facilities for maintenance and restoration work of all kinds. During a later visit to the Baltimore & Ohio RR Museum in Baltimore, Maryland, I noted a plaque on a restored car saying the work had been done in Strasburg.

Pennsylvania State Railroad Museum

Just across the road from the Strasburg Railroad station and yard is the Pennsylvania State Railroad Museum, with a large collection of locomotives, rolling stock and railroad artifacts. A huge building encloses numerous locomotives on display, mostly from the former Pennsylvania Railroad, but also from other lines. Featured is an old Virginia & Truckee locomotive, built by Baldwin in the early 1900s. It is in the Pennsylvania State museum because the Baldwin locomotive works were located in that state. A nearby museum yard has several locomotives and cars in an outdoor display, including a GG-1 electric locomotive and other notable engines, steam and diesel, as well as a collection of cars and maintenance-of-way equipment.

All told, Strasburg, Pennsylvania is well worth a visit, especially in the nice fall weather of mid-October, when the days are still warm and sunny, but the cool nights have started to give color to the trees and forests. It is a popular place, and advance reservations for train rides are recommended. You can get information at:

www.strasburgrailroad.com.

Photographs follow on the next two pages.

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