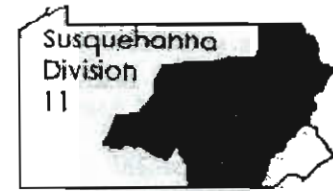

Susquehanna Sidetracks



Serving the Susquehanna Valley, MER, NMRA, Inc.

Official Publication of the Susquehanna Division 11
of the Mid-Eastern Region,
National Model Railroad Association

March 2002
Volume 10, Number 2

We had another great turnout at the division meet in February. Thanks to Jim Clay and Ray Fisher for opening their railroads to the division. I'm sure you will all agree Jim's basement is perfect for building a model railroad. Equally impressive was Ray's N scale layout. It's amazing how much railroad you can fit in a space when using a smaller scale. We look forward to visiting these two railroads in the future to see the progress they have made.

The Division Officers are always looking for new ideas for the division meets. If you have any suggestions or you would like to open up your railroad for the division to visit, please contact one of the division officers.

Next Division Meet Scheduled

The next Division 11 meet is scheduled for Saturday, April 27, 2002 from 1:00 PM to 4:00 PM. For more information and directions, please see page 3.

Division Officer Elections

The following Division

Offices are up for election: Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, and Clerk/Paymaster. The person holding the Clerk/Paymaster position needs to be bonded. Each office will be a two year term. If you are interested in running for one of these offices, please contact Brian Brandt. The name and brief biography of each candidate running for office will appear in a special mailing, along with the ballot. Brian will be appointing the judge of election.

Division Web Site Update

Have you had a chance to visit the Division's web site lately? Mel Agne, the webmaster, is continually adding to it. This is a great place to keep up with what is going on in the division, get information about our upcoming meets, see photos of some of your fellow division members railroads and links to the upcoming MER and national conventions. Be sure to check out the web site at moosevalley.org/nmra/index.htm and as always, your feedback is welcome.

MER Spring Convention

Have you attended a regional convention before or maybe haven't been to a regional convention in a while? The MER Spring Convention, called Richmond Rails, is being held in Richmond, VA June 6-9, 2002. Make plans to attend this convention, which will have layouts, clinics, an auction, rail related activities, modules at the hotel, a banquet, contests, non-rail activities and much more. To find out more about this convention, see the March edition of **The Local** or visit the web site at richmondrails.homestead.com

Down the Tracks

Great Scale Model Train Show
Timonium, MD
March 23-24, 2002
9 AM – 4 PM Saturday
10 AM – 4 PM Sunday
www.gsmts.com

The Rockville Limited
Harrisburg, PA
April 13, 2002
7:30 AM – 3:00 PM
Harrisburg Chapter, NRHS
717-232-6221

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Submissions: The Susquehanna Sidetracks welcomes any model railroad or railroad related material. Members are encouraged to send in articles, letters to the editor, reviews, etc.

Super's Corner – Brian Brandt

Greetings, as I write this, we are on the downhill side of a very mild winter. We had a great turnout at our last meet. Thanks to all who attended. I would also like to thank Jim Clay and Ray Fisher for opening their layouts for us. Both were very impressive on their plans. I was also impressed by Ray's N scale plans. To have a space that large, I can only dream. I hope to see you at Mel Agne's in April.

On the By-Laws issue, there were some problems with the wording and content of the new one. We are going to re-do the whole article. I have asked our Directors, current Officers, and two others to sit on a committee to get the By-laws in a form that is acceptable to all. We will also get input from the Mid-East Region as to direction. I hope to have this completed by the end of April.

We still are open for nominations for the Officers of the Division. Both Jim Atkinson and I have agreed to run again. If there is anyone out there that would like to run for office, please contact me.

We are also working on a label for the newsletter that will have both your membership number, and the expiration date of your membership. I hope we can have this in place by May.

From what I am reading about the Richmond Rails convention, it sounds like a great one. Sadly, I have a prior commitment for that weekend, so I cannot attend. If possible try to go. I have experienced the trials of putting one on, and I think they will appreciate the attendance. I hope to make the next one up in New Jersey.

Remember, have fun with the hobby, I know I am.

Editor's Notes – Scott Turner

Thank you to those who have given me feedback about the newsletter. I would like to hear from all you and welcome your comments and suggestions.

I am always looking for articles for the newsletter. They can be about anything related to model railroading, trains, or even letters to the editor. The length of the article doesn't matter. You can mail or email your articles to me. And remember, any articles you submit and get printed count towards your AP – Model Railroad Author certificate.

Next Division 11 Meet – Saturday, April 27, 2002 1:00 PM – 4:00 PM

Susquehanna Division 11 is pleased to announce the next division meet will be held at Mel Agne's Moose Valley Railroad in HO scale on April 27, 2002 from 1:00 PM to 4:00 PM. Planned activities include a brief division meeting to bring you up to date on the division happenings, a clinic by Mel on "creating a timetable for your railroad", and a chance to run some trains on Mel's railroad featuring Digitrax DCC. We hope that you can join us for an exciting afternoon of model railroading fun. Please feel free to bring a guest!

Description of Mel Agne's Moose Valley Railroad:

Mel Agne's HO Scale Moose Valley Railroad will be hosting the Division at the basement of 48 Oakwood Drive, Delta PA. The Moose Valley is a fictional class 2 railroad set in the 1970's, based on a what if scenario involving the B&O and the South Penn. It is a bridge road between the Chessie System and Penn Central with over 4.24 scale miles of track over the mainline route, 5 yards, massive changes in elevation, and several interesting features including a live load (real coal) loading mine, a rotary dumper, a 4 level helix, operating signals, DCC control, and much more. This railroad, designed for operation, is 10 years old, fills 2 basement rooms, and part of a garage. The scenery is 50% complete, with one room totally done. The basic design is an around the wall track plan with a peninsula. The railroad has 13 tunnels, and cuts through 2 concrete block walls. You can check out the Moose Valley at <http://moosevalley.org/mvrr>, where Mel documents most of what goes on with the railroad. If you go to "the crewroom" part of the web site, you will find tons of information, and pictures from all the operating sessions. Visitors will have an opportunity to run trains and ask questions. Light refreshments will be available. For those not web enabled, feel free to contact the Moose Valley at 717-862-3937. Mel is also the webmaster for Division 11.

DIRECTIONS:

From the Harrisburg or York area:

Take I-83 south to York, and exit at South Queen street. Take Route 74 south approximately 25 miles. Make a left on Rt. 372 East. After about 500 feet, you come to the first intersection on 372. Turn right onto Slab Road. Proceed on Slab to the 4th road on the right, which is River road, and turn right. Proceed on River to Scott drive (about 1 mile), and turn right onto Scott. Stay on Scott (follow the gravel road) to the very end. Scott turns into Oakwood drive at a sharp left turn. Go to the end of Oakwood. Look for the crossbucks and the full size Pennsy position light signal. When parking, please use either of the two leftmost driveways. Entrance to the meeting will be through the first basement **door**.

From the Lancaster or Reading area:

Take 222 South to route 272 South. At "The Buck", turn **right** onto Rt. 372. After you cross the Susquehanna river, take the 3rd left which is Slab road. Proceed on **Slab to the** 4th road on the right, which is River road, and turn right. Proceed on River to Scott drive (about 1 mile), and turn right onto Scott. Stay on Scott (follow the gravel road) to the very end. Scott turns into Oakwood drive at a sharp left turn. Go to the end of Oakwood. Look for the crossbucks and the full size Pennsy position light signal. When parking, please use either of the two leftmost driveways. Entrance to the meeting will be through the first basement door.

Comments from Your Assistant Superintendent and AP Chairman – Jim Atkinson

If you missed our meeting of March 9th, then you missed a good one. First of all we had a great turnout of thirty members. We saw two great lay outs. Both Jim Clay's and Ray Fisher's layouts are in the early stages, but what they've accomplished is quality work. I personally look forward to seeing them both again in a year or so to see their progress.

We are still rewriting our by-laws to meet MER/NMRA requirements at this time. This hasn't been fun process.

As your AP Chairman, please call me to judge your accomplishments or to simply answer questions concerning the Achievement Program. I can't help you, if I don't hear from you. There has been a problem with the AP at the MER level, with extreme apathy. I understand that has remedied recently. I sure hope so.

In the last issue of Sidetracks, I commented about Life-Like needing to manufacture a Budd RDC- I (an all passenger car) to mate with their RDC-2 and RDC-3. Well, the RDC-I is on the way. The new Walthers 46' USRA gondola car is available and there are two improvements over previous models that I want to mention in this ever improving hobby of ours. One the gon comes with knuckle couplers mounted (horn-hook couplers are included separately) and the grab irons are separately formed metal items requiring drilling and mounting. No cast on hand rails on this model. Now if they'd just use metal wheels instead of plastic ones, we'd have a great kit.

This is a great hobby and the advances in the last two decades have been tremendous, affecting every aspect of model railroading. We have beautiful quality die work, great mechanisms, DCC, Super Glue (don't laugh, Super glue is miles ahead of the old anchoring methods), and for the most part the cost is in line with 1960 prices versus dollar value.

The recent issue of Railroad Model Craftsman, had an article on how to install a video camera in a Life Like RDC (HO) on a DCC system. I would like to try it, but I have to figure out how to get a fixed 9-10 volts with a 'standard' control system. My B&W is still in the dark ages; i.e., no DCC.

I did get to those car kits that I mentioned last newsletter. They are now finished and in service. A couple of them are those laser cut type kits. If you've never tried one, I highly recommend that you do. They are a dream to build (structures or cars) and look terrific.

I hope to see at Mel Agnes for another great meeting.

A "Get-Away" for the Susquehanna Division 11 Meeting By Bill Fraley

My normal Saturday morning routine is 1 1/2 hours of tennis at the Hershey Racquet Club. I've been the Captain of our group for over 20 years, but when I received the January 2002 Susquehanna Sidetracks newsletter, I felt like I needed a break, and I really wanted to go do some model railroading. So, I arranged to have a substitute play for me and off I went to see the trains.

While I do model in a minority S scale, I still enjoy all types of model railroading and especially enjoy the great fellowship of the modelers'. It seems that modelers have a different agenda; some like just running trains, others like building them and others like train operation. There are so many facets to this hobby that to be able to do them all would be nearly impossible.

The nearest one could get to the pinnacle of this hobby would be to do the NMRA Achievement program and become a Master Model railroader. This seems to scare a lot of model railroaders, but when I visit layouts, in most cases; they already could qualify for three or four Achievements awards.

When I first visited Jim Clay's model railroad he lived in another home. But Jim, tiring of all the duties that a homeowner has, decided that owning a nice Condo where someone else does the outside work would give him more time to model railroad. (Sounds good to me!)

Jim is modeling Pennsylvania Railroad's Cumberland Valley Branch and with all the beautiful bench work that Jim has in place, this is really going to be a great operating pike. It was also very nice to meet all the Division members in attendance and they were all very cordial to me. It made me feel at ease and for that I was grateful.

One gentleman, whom I had just met several weeks prior to the meet, Ray Fisher, was ogling Jim's layout thinking of all the operation possible. Ray is a master at setting up operations on a model railroad and simulating circumstances that could happen on your pike that could make you run another route. When we got to Ray's layout this all came into play, because Ray's N Scale pike is being set up with operation in mind.

Ray planned his Mechanicsburg and York Railroad on modular bench work and covered it with drawings of where the entire track went and how the railroad would operate. The all card files were already in place. Quite frankly, I believe that Ray could come into any of our homes, look over our model railroad, and come back later with a complete operation for your or my pike, in hand.

I garnered a lot of tips from this meet, met a lot of nice fellows and listened to many ideas on how to improve my model railroad. So, if I may, I'd just like to say again, "Thank You!"

MER Fall Convention – October 4-6, 2002 – Cherry Hill, NJ

The New Jersey Division is proud to announce...



MER Fall 2002 Convention

October 4-6, 2002

Clarion Hotel

Cherry Hill, NJ

Clinics, Layout Tours, Auction, Door Prizes
Homasote Plant Tour
Railfan Trip to Cape May aboard RDC's
Banquet featuring speaker Steve Barry of *Railfan & Railroad*

<http://home.earthlink.net/~mikemcnh/boxcar/fall02.html>

Latex Molds by Bob Martin

Back in the early 1980's I was working on scenery on the first Central Pennsylvania Railroad (CPRR) and needed about 20 feet (12" = 1' feet) of retaining wall between 2" and 3" high. That worked out to 40 commercial retaining walls. I don't remember the cost but I know it was more than I wanted to spend. I also needed rock castings and don't believe they were available commercially. I had recently heard or read about making rubber molds for making plaster rock castings. I gave it a try, it worked pretty well and I wound up with my 20' retaining wall costing 1/40th of the price I would have paid for commercial pieces. Actually, I would not have saved that much because I would not have bought 40 commercial pieces. From there, I went on to use the same method for making rock castings, vehicles, barrels, crates, boxes, tree stumps, gondola and flat car loads and even a junk yard; all from commercial castings. This reduced the financial outlay for many of the detail parts needed for the layout substantially and resulted in savings of hundreds of dollars over the years.

When I come across a commercial part that I need (OK, want) for the layout, I buy *one*. If the piece fits into the layout and if it's conducive for making a mold I then consider it a pattern and get out the liquid latex rubber. I use Woodland Scenics brand because it's readily available at most hobby shops. I have used other brands with equal success. Always open the jar in the hobby shop before purchase to make sure it's fresh. No matter what the pattern is, I don't wash it. I've found that the release agent on the piece, which sometimes causes problems when painting if the piece isn't washed, helps to release the cured mold from the pattern.



Here's the step by step process and, the supplies you'll need in addition to the liquid latex rubber. First, find a piece of wood about 2 or 3 inches bigger on all sides than your pattern. Next, find a cheap throwaway 1" paint brush. One with bristles, not a foam brush. You'll also need some gauze, a cup of water, and the indispensable paper towels. Now you're ready to start. First, sit the pattern on top of and centered on the piece of wood. Next, open the container of latex rubber. Be prepared, it doesn't smell too nice. Now, hold the pattern tight against the wood, using one finger on the top of the pattern, and brush a light coat of latex on to the pattern. I start at the bottom edge and go around the perimeter of the pattern making sure to put a lip about 1" wide on

the wood. Then, continue holding the pattern tightly against the wood base and brush a thin coat of latex over the entire pattern. Next, remove your finger from the top of the pattern, unless you want to become part of the pattern (not recommended), and gently brush the latex on to the pattern where your finger was. Be careful to not move the pattern. Put the brush in a cup of water until the next step. Set pattern aside to dry for 12-24 hours. Sometimes it dries faster but be sure it's dry before you touch it. After one use, you'll be able to tell if it's dry by looking at the color.

After the first coat is dry, take the brush out of the water, wipe it off, and brush another thin coat of latex rubber on to the pattern. Allow to dry and repeat the process. You now have three coats of latex on the pattern. If you're using a large, or an odd shape or if the mold will receive a lot of use, the next step is critical. Once again, brush on a thin coat of latex. Then, while the latex is still wet, cover the pattern with gauze being sure to also cover the lip on the wood. Next, brush another coat of latex on to the gauze and set aside to dry. After the pattern is dry, I usually brush on another thin coat of latex rubber.

I allow the pattern to sit and cure for two or three days. Then, using a hobby knife with a new blade, I cut around all sides of the pattern leaving about a 1/2" lip. Now for the fun part. Gently, but firmly, remove the rubber mold from the pattern. Pull it, tug it, roll it, but DON'T cut it. It will stretch but it will go back to its original shape and it will come off.

You should now have an exact negative rubber mold of you pattern. At this point, I usually sprinkle some baby powder on the new mold because I've found that new molds tend to stick together. Powder prevents this from happening.

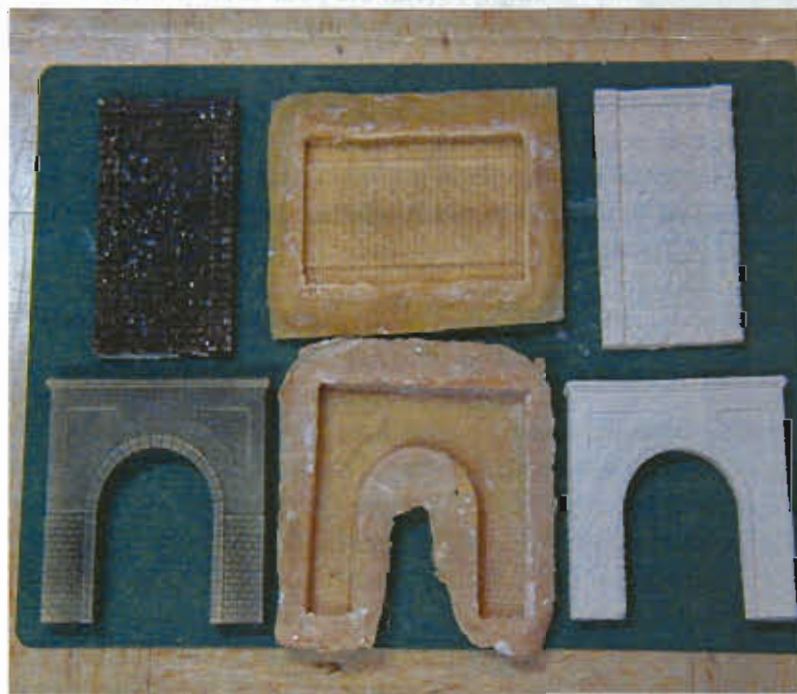
Now you're ready to save some money! First, you need some plaster. I use #1 casting or molding plaster, which is also the same stuff I use for making hard shell scenery. I buy it in 80 or 100 pound bags for around \$16-\$18 a bag at a local building supply store (not Lowes or Home Depot type stores). Next, you need a couple measuring containers (I use 8 oz. plastic cups), a container water, a clean flexible plastic bowl preferably with a round edge bottom (stay out of the kitchen-you'll get caught), mixing spoons or spatula's, lot's of newspaper, paper towels, and, of course, your new mold(s).

Let's make a casting. First, mix a batch of plaster and water. Sprinkle the plaster into the water; don't put water into plaster. I start with a ratio of one part plaster and one part water. Always use separate cups. The ratio may vary depending on the brand and age of the plaster and the relative humidity when you mix it. For the same reasons, I can't tell you how long to mix or what the mix should look like when it's ready to be poured. The plaster does set up pretty quick, usually less than 10 minutes, so work in small batches and work fast. I suppose a good place to start would be when the mixture begins to look/feel like a good quality cream soup, thick but not too thick. If the mixture gets to the consistency of cool whip, work really, really fast, because it's almost ready to become unworkable. Anyway, experiment and you'll find the right mix. Now pour the mixture into your mold(s) and set aside to cure. When the mixing container is empty, clean off your tools immediately! Drying time is from a few minutes to a few hours, again depending on the plaster, humidity and how much water you used. During the curing process, you can feel the plaster getting warm. This means it's starting to cure. This next step is real touchy but try it. If it works, fine, if it doesn't, make another pour. If the plaster is warm and feels firm, gently try to peel the rubber mold from the plaster casting. If it works (it usually does) set the casting aside to complete the curing process. Then, clean and remove the dry plaster pieces from the mold and make another pour. Of course, you can let the mold sit until the plaster has hardens if you wish. I usually remove the casting as soon as possible so I can make another pour.



Here's the great part of this process. Let's say you made a mold of the cab and body of a Walthers grain truck kit that cost's about \$13.00. Make one casting and the cost is now about \$6.50. If you make two more castings, the cost of the truck kit is now about \$3.25. I make the chassis from plaster or wood or from stuff found in the junk box. The real cost will be a little higher if you have to buy wheels and tires. The castings you made for the truck are not going to fit together so you're going to have to do some work. For example, you'll probably have to scrape away plaster on the bottom of the truck cab for the front axle to fit and for the chassis to fit into the cab. I don't object to this because I can't afford to buy the number of trucks I need for my layout at \$10 to \$15 apiece. Besides, it's a challenge and, it's fun!

The same cost efficiency applies to any part you use for a mold. The more you make, the less the original piece costs. Model railroads swallow detail parts, so cheaper is better. I have at least eight different truck molds. I mix and match the cabs and bodies for more variety. I have dozens of boxes, bags, barrels, crates, cord wood piles/loads, etc. I have molds for a couple different gondola loads and have made a junk mold that's used several different places on the layout. Speaking of gondola loads, don't worry about the load being longer or wider than your gondola car. Simply shave down the sides or ends of the casting with a small sur-form tool until the casting fits. Just be careful that you don't shave off too much and wind up with half a wheel in your load. Almost all of my tunnel portals and retaining walls are made from my own molds and, I use several different homemade rock molds made from real rocks. I must confess that I bought a set of Woodland Scenics rock molds a few years ago. They're very nice and are used often. Here's another example of cost savings: As I write this, I'm looking at a package of four (4) commercial crates that cost about \$4.00. On my layout, I need dozens of this item for box car loads, freight platforms, truck loads, and many other places. I, for one, don't want to spend \$1.00 apiece for this small detail item. Using my method, 60 crates will cost a little less than 7 cents each! That's a big saving for anybody's wallet.



I make molds from new patterns whenever I feel like it. I do not make plaster castings often. It's just too messy & dirty! But, when I do, the process will continue for up to a week of afternoon's or evenings. During the process, I'll make multiple castings of virtually all of my rubber molds. For molds that are used a lot, I have several of each. For example I have three or four each of retaining walls and rocks. The process goes a lot faster when you can make several castings at the same time. It's not unusual for me to have 15 or 20 castings of retaining walls and dozens of rock castings. When I'm finished, all the castings are carefully packed in boxes until they're needed. Keep the castings in a dry place and they'll keep forever. Take care of your rubber molds and they'll also keep for years. Some of mine, still in use, were made in the early 80's.

I hope you try making your own molds from commercial detail parts. Once you get the hang of it, you'll find that you might even enjoy the messy job; you'll really enjoy the savings; but more importantly, you'll be able to flood your layout with many detail parts that you might not otherwise have. After all, would you rather spend \$100 on boxes, barrels and crates, or on a new locomotive?