



Volume 29

SUSQUEHANNA SIDETRACKS



An Official Publication of the Susquehanna Division 11,
Mid-Eastern Region of the NMRA

Number 2



Bob Charles's HO scale South Penn Division of the Pennsylvania Railroad is featured in this expansive feature for this issue. The history and construction of Bob's model railroad begins on page 9.



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Bob Blackson's 1:12 scale live steam Toledo & Illinois Railroad 4-4-0 'Phantom' at the Pennsylvania Live Steamers, Collegetville, PA. Note the unusual spoked pilot wheels.

From the Superintendent's Desk

The Covid situation continues to affect our calendar. Pat Mulrooney has not been able to find a location for the April meeting. So that has been cancelled. However, plans for the May meeting are moving forward. Please look for the article on page 7.

We are still working on updating the Division website. The "fellow modelers" page is the one that will be the hardest. The key part is to ascertain which model railroads still exist and which want to be featured. Looking at a few random railroads on the list, at least one of the websites is still promising updates for 2010! Also, if there are any new model railroads out there to add. We would like to add your model railroad layout (regardless of size). If you are interested kindly supply the following information to me:

- 1) Name of Railroad
- 2) Name of Owner
- 3) Website (if applicable)
- 4) Location
- 5) A paragraph or two about the railroad and how to contact the owner
- 6) 1-2 photos to highlight the railroad

It would also be nice if you could write an article for Sidetracks about your model railroad. Rich Wurst, our **Sidetracks** editor, is always looking for printed material to include in **Sidetracks**. After all we are a model railroad group and too many of our issues of **Sidetracks** are lacking articles about modeling projects or even prototype railroad articles.

This year being an odd numbered year we will be holding our Division Director elections. Please consider running for one of the four Director positions. Please see the article on page 6.

I am looking forward to when we can meet again in person. There are individuals who are working hard to put together our program for the coming year. My hope is that we actually have the opportunity to implement them. For now, I am planning to work on some projects on my layout. And I want to encourage you to do likewise.

Tim Himmelberger



Second Section

Susquehanna Sidetracks

Official Newsletter of the Susquehanna Division
Mid-Eastern Region, NMRA
5 Hardy Court, Lancaster, PA 17602

Contributing to Susquehanna Sidetracks:

Sidetracks welcomes contributions from the Division membership. Letters, articles, photos and other items may be sent to the Editor at the e-mail address listed below or the street address above. Deadline for submission for the next issue is April 15, 2021.

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PRR #1187 H3 2-8-0 Consolidation was built in 1888 at the PRR Altoona Shops. It currently resides at the Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania.

Welcome New Member!

William Speakman

Boalsburg, PA

2021 Division Events

~~**April** – New Holland – Pat Mulrooney and Jeff Thompson – Canceled~~

May 1st – Columbia Railroad Day – Bill Lesjack and Barry Schmitt

June – New Oxford – Phil Peters and Howard Oakes

July – East Broad Top RR – Lee Rainey

October – LSOP – Wayne Betty

October 21 – 24, Hunt Valley, MD, MER Convention, Chesapeake Division

November – Division wide Open House Tour



PRR #7688 is a Lima Locomotive Works 2-8-0 Consolidation built in 1915.

Division Director Nominations

It's once again time to ask for nominations for our four Division Director positions. Each will be elected for a two-year term from July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2023. To be a Director, you must be a member of the NMRA, reside in the Susquehanna Division 11 area, and be at least 21 years of age. You may nominate yourself or another member you feel is qualified; however, in fairness to that individual please verify they would be willing to serve. If we receive more than four nominees, each will be asked to provide a short (200 words or less) bio-sketch that will then be provided to all members in the May edition of Sidetracks.

Some of our four Directors have expressed interest in running for reelection. However, like any other election, all four positions are open for election. So please be positive, get your name placed on the ballot, and make your case for election.

The timeline for the 2021 Director voting program is:

April 10, 2021: Submit nominations to Tim Himmelberger, Superintendent, either by phone at 717-454-8033 or email at super@susquehannanmra.org.

April 10, 2021: Candidate bio-sketches due either to Tim by email (see above address) or USPS (19 Penny Lane, Lebanon, PA 17046). Short bio-sketches (200 words or less) required only if there are more than four candidates. Please note that this is so we can get it out in the May Sidetracks. Please note we have a Sidetracks editor who works very diligently at putting together each edition of Sidetracks. So please be considerate as he works on the May edition of the newsletter and having it distributed in a timely manner. The suggestion is if you are nominating yourself submit your bio-sketch with your nomination.

May 1: Ballots and nominee bio-sketches (only if we receive more than four candidates) sent to members in the May edition of Sidetracks for vote.

May 31, 2021: Ballots received by either email or USPS.

July 2021: Vote announced in July Sidetracks.

Please seriously consider running for a Division Director position. Our annual programs are developed under the leadership of your Board of Directors (BOD) and all Division policies are approved by your BOD. Therefore, this is your opportunity to get involved in deciding the future direction of your NMRA Division. I know most members are very busy with job, family, hobby projects, and other community programs and therefore believe serving on our BOD would simply require too much time. On the contrary, our BOD only meets in person once per year – all other matters are handled by either email or phone. So once again, please give this important request your most thoughtful consideration. This is an excellent opportunity for you to have a direct say in how your Division is managed, and it does not require a great deal of your valuable free time. Please give me a call or send me an email if you have questions about the elections or our BOD operations at super@susquehannanmra.org or 717-454-8033.

Tim Himmelberger

NMRA Event- Columbia Railroad Day

On Saturday, May 1, 2021, the second annual Columbia Railroad Day will take place in Columbia, Pennsylvania from 9 AM-4 PM. The first Columbia Railroad Day was such a success that organizers/sponsors have banded together for an even better program and expanded facilities!

The event locations will include the Columbia Crossings Trail Center (41 Walnut Street) and Columbia Historical Preservation Society (21 North 2nd Street). Since both locations are not adjacent to each other, a shuttle trolley will be available for transportation (\$5 all day hop-on-hop-off) between sites. In addition, the trolley experience will include a narrated, sight-seeing tour of the city.



The Columbia Crossings Trail Center will host fascinating lectures. The presentations will include:

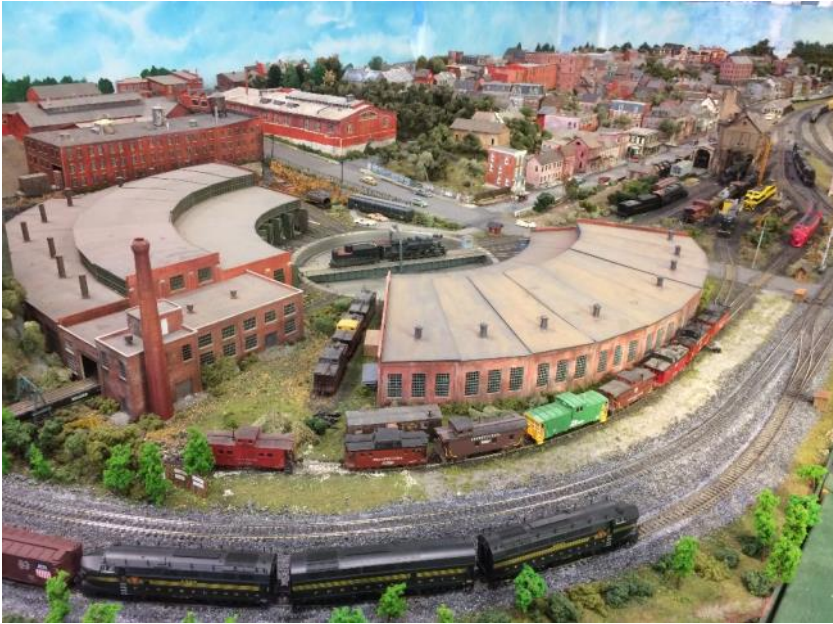
Scott Mingus “Civil War Railroad to Gettysburg”	10 AM -10:45 AM
Doug Bosley “Civil War Canals and Railroads”	11:15 AM-12:00 PM
Bernard Kempinski, MMR “Railroads of the Civil War”	12:30 PM- 1:15 PM
Bernard Kempinski, MMR “Civil War Model Railroading”	1:45 PM – 2:30 PM
Chris Vera “Rails to Freedom in Colombia”	3:15 PM – 4:00 PM



The park adjacent to the Columbia Crossings Trail Center will host the Lancaster Fencibles Civil War Encampment, the Invalid Corps Civil War Encampment, the 30th PA Civil War Encampment and the 45th PA Civil War Encampment. Food vendors will also be present including Rose’s Deli (home of the Columbia Shifter Sandwich), Bricker’s Fries, Auntie Anne’s Pretzels and others.

NMRA Event- Columbia Railroad Day

The Columbia Historical Preservation Society will host the Columbia & Susquehanna (HO gauge) Model Railroad, the Lower Susquehanna (O gauge) Model Railroad and NMRA Model Railroad Displays. Especially noteworthy is the scratchbuilt town of Columbia (Columbia & Susquehanna Model Railroad) which depicts scenes during the PRR's prominence in the city. This feature is well worth the visit to the second floor of the Historical Society.

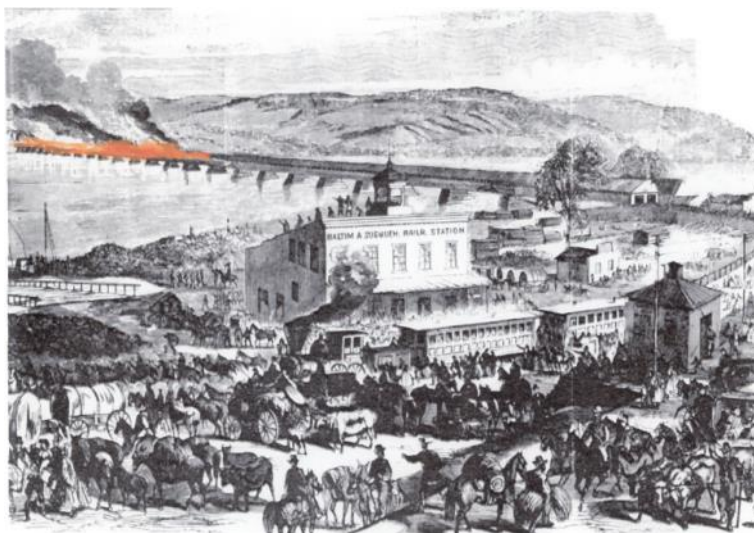


Columbia & Susquehanna Model Railroad



Columbia Historical Preservation Society

Mark your calendars for this very special event sponsored by the Columbia Historical Preservation Society, The Susquehanna Division of the NMRA, and the National Railroad Historical Society (Lancaster Chapter).



Burning of the Columbia/Wrightsville Railroad Bridge on June 30, 1863.

The Saga of the South Penn Division, PRR

Bob Charles, MMR

The History – Real and Imagineered

The Pennsylvania Railroad, South Penn Division, has its origins in a combination of two loves of mine, namely model railroading and history. I wish I could tell you my railroad was totally planned and designed with the South Penn in mind, but that would be re-writing history even more than I have. It simply developed as I learned more and more about this area, but I'm getting ahead of my story.

Let me here and now confess: I'm a bookie! No, not the betting type, rather the reading type. Among the books I have acquired for my library are three interesting volumes: *The South Pennsylvania Railroad* by Walter F. Walton, *The Railroad That Never Was* by Herbert Harwood and *Vanderbilt's Folly* by William Shank. These books tell the fascinating story of the real South Penn Railroad, why and how it came to be – and ultimately its demise.

The story goes that in the early 1880s, railroad fever was rampant. The Vanderbilt interests and the PRR were in a deadly competition for primacy for the east-west traffic, and each was spending like crazy to oppose the other. The Vanderbilts had put together a 15 million dollar consortium with Andrew Carnegie, the Rockefellers, Franklin Gowen of the Reading and others. They were actively grading and tunneling across Pennsylvania to build a "short line" designed to connect the Jersey Central and Reading in the east with the Central's Pittsburgh and Lake Erie in the west and on to Chicago. Seeing this potential competition, the PRR quietly bought control of the New York, West Shore and Buffalo Railroad which paralleled the Central up the Hudson. To compete successfully with the Central, the NYWS&B desperately needed funds to upgrade its physical plant, thus its bonds came cheap. PRR had the deep pockets needed. This head-to-head competition was bound to cause rate wars and be ruinous to the transportation business. In brief, that was the problem.

Some of you may know "the rest of the story." J. P. Morgan entered the picture when he saw what he felt was an incredible waste of resources in the duplication of the two railroads. The legend (which I suspect is just that, legend) is that both President George Roberts and Frank Thomson of the PRR and President of the Central, Chauncey Depew, agreed to a meeting with Morgan on his yacht, the "Corsair." There, Morgan supposedly dictated that they *would* reach agreement to solve this wasteful spending before he would order a return to the dock. In any case the upshot was that the West Shore was transferred to the Central interests, and South Penn was transferred to PRR, which was then abandoned. The Vanderbilts and their syndicate had built tunnels and graded the right-of-way, yet never a tie was laid. It just sat there until eventually in 1936 the right-of-way was acquired by the state of Pennsylvania. It became what we now know as the Pennsylvania Turnpike. That is the extremely brief version of the history of the ill-fated South Penn Railroad.

Bob Charles's South Penn Division, PRR

At the time I acquired the first of these books my railroad was not much more than a hole in the wall of my shop from the test track on the bench thru the wall and out into the rest of the basement. It led to an unnamed yard area and that was it. I had grandiose ideas for my empire, but no real theme or prototype let alone the time to build it.

The books really tweaked me, and after doing more research, an idea was forming. What if George Roberts had been a better negotiator? He might well have taken a different approach. After all, he was trading a real, operating railroad (even though it was in the throes of bankruptcy for lack of investment), the New York, West Shore and Buffalo Railroad, for the rights to what? A roadbed and a few tunnels? In my simplistic view it didn't seem like much of a trade, particularly as PRR was getting more and more busy. Maybe a relief route would have made sense. Any one of a thousand reasons may have motivated such an outcome. My revision of history was developing.

What if Roberts had been tougher? IF he succeeded in convincing Depew to complete the South Penn to "modern" standards, while agreeing to do the same for the NYWS&B, each would turn over a solid, potentially profitable railroad. (That idea has the distinct advantage for me that any of the modeling that didn't meet Pennsylvania's standards was obviously the fault of the builders from the Central and not mine!) What would have happened to the towns along the way? Would more industry have developed creating even more traffic for the railroad?

This thought process gave birth to my modified version of the South Penn's railroad history. As I portray South Penn history, President Roberts pushed the issue and forced an agreement to the concept of two operating railroads as an equitable swap. Ergo, the South Penn is built by the Central to connect with the Reading at Harrisburg and west to a connection with the P&LE at Connellsville according to the settlement agreement. Of course, once PRR assumed control, the connection at Connellsville switched to the PRR line up to Greensburg where it joined with the mainline on into Pittsburgh. Ultimately, the western end of the South Penn was extended to Washington, PA and then on to Wheeling, WV. On the eastern end the South Penn was connected with the Northern Central route from Baltimore. In a later reorganization the South Penn Division of PRR extended to Columbia, PA which is now the main division point headquarters in my version. That's my story and I'm sticking to it!

Design of the South Penn

With that history as a background, I began looking critically at the space I had. The question was: What would work effectively to create both a representation of the South Penn as a division of the PRR in the steam/diesel transition era and at the same time develop a sense of a realistic transportation system for operation of my railroad? Working with Bob Beecher and Brian Kampschroer, we worked out the basic plan of what exists today. It is essentially a point-to-point layout with 16-foot, 5 track staging at both ends. We included provision for continuous running for either an open house or simple loco break-in.

There is another interest I have had for many years and wanted to incorporate into the layout. It is narrow gauge railroad logging. Most folks do not realize that Dauphin and Perry counties once had both narrow-gauge common carriers and logging railroads. The narrow gauge makes for a fascinating counterpoint to

Bob Charles's South Penn Division, PRR

such as we see on the East Broad Top at Mt. Union. After research in the Pennsylvania Logging series by Casler, Taber and Kline, a logging line was added to the layout plan to interchange with the South Penn at Bedford.

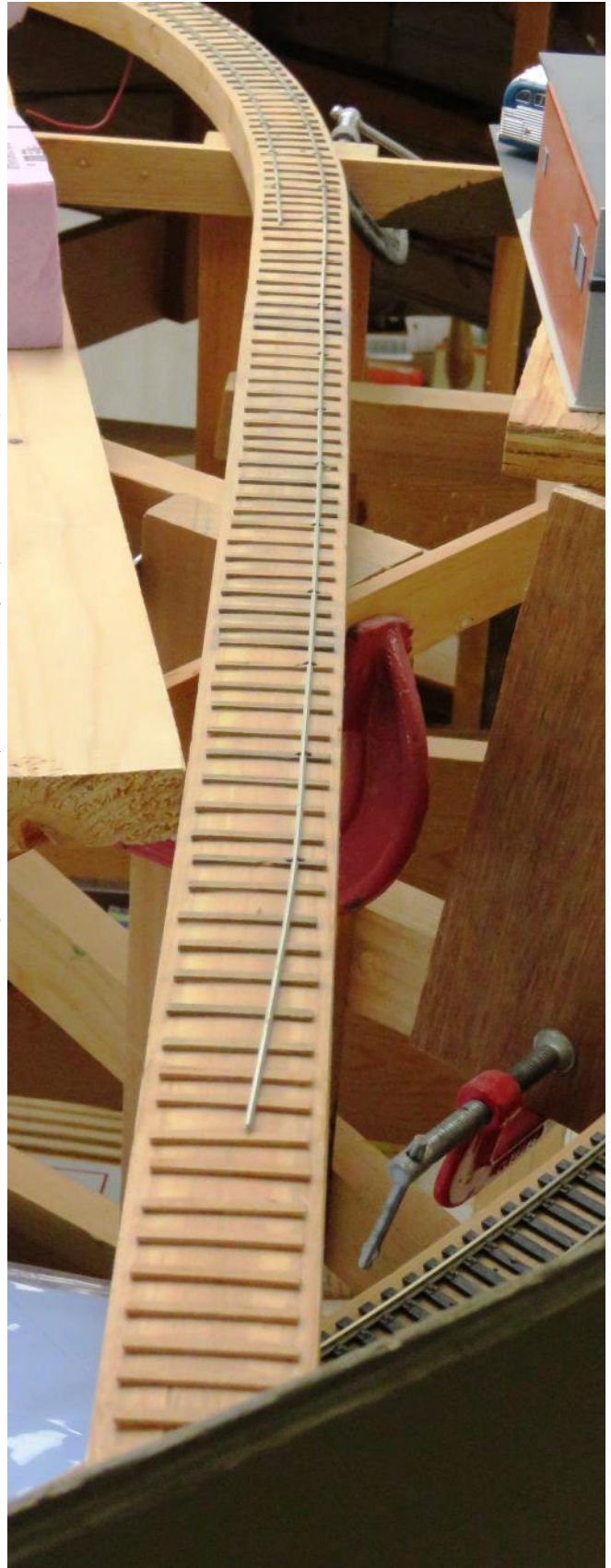


Construction

Now to the layout itself; the available space measures approximately 900 square feet less my shop area. Construction of the benchwork is modular with the idea of eventual removability in the case of a move. A base 1 x 4 open grid module with a track base level of 46" is screwed into the wall studs (2 screws) forming the only attachment to the house structure. This enabled us to cantilever out up to two feet of width. The idea was to build a "bulletproof" layout; thus, we chose to use 2 x 4s for legs, 1 x 4s to frame and 1 x 3s for the open grids and risers. In retrospect, we clearly overbuilt!

With benchwork basically complete, the next step was to erect a backdrop. We chose lauan cut to 28" width covered with linoleum. I visited a local paneling store, Kirby's, and asked an unusual question: "Do you have any linoleum that is defaced or so ugly you can't sell it?" Needless to say, that brought a strange look. Happily, the answer was yes. Next question was price. Again, I got a very satisfactory answer, though I no longer remember how cheap it was. Another strange look ensued when I asked him to cut the roll into 28" widths! With a good bit of Liquid Nails and the help of several friends to apply and spread it to the **finished** side, two others carefully rolled out the linoleum against the lauan. I followed behind with a kitchen pie roller to smooth everything out. The work went quickly. I emphasize finished side, as it is the smooth felt side that provides an excellent surface for a backdrop. We soon had a very functional base on which to paint a backdrop.

The "moveability" idea bit the dust when the decision was made to use laminated lattice roadbed. The roadbed is 1/8" x 1" lattice strips laminated together with yellow carpenter's glue, screwed to the risers, then planed smooth and level. Individual ties are glued to the roadbed and then rails are spiked in place. This construction provides beautiful, flowing trackwork and super elevation on curved portions. Yard areas are mostly a base of 1/2" plywood with Homasote overlaid, then ties and track installed.



Bob Charles's South Penn Division, PRR

When it came to trackwork, I made the decision to hand lay the track. Model Hobbies ties (yes, our sponsor in New Cumberland who no longer manufactures them) are used on the main and Campbell profile ties for yard and sidings. Rail was laid in code 100 for mainline, code 83 and code 70 for yard tracks and sidings. The narrow gauge is laid in code 70, code 55 and a bit of code 40. Hankcraft slow motors are used to power turnouts. While I would not necessarily make all those decisions today with all the improvements in flex track, Fast-Tracks turnout construction, and the many electronics updates, it seemed the best at the time (1989). In recent years I have moved to more updated – and quicker – methods for the most part, though I do still hand-lay some track.

As to scenery, we began using Mr. Beecher's favorite method: Pepsi cartons cut to strips and used to create a cardboard latticework covered with plaster gauze and then plastered for the base scenery. Woodland Scenics, Scenic Express, Arizona Products and many more products grace the layout's fully scenicked areas. Most buildings are kits with many having scratch-built elements such as interiors, roofs and the like. The layout is approximately 85% scenicked.

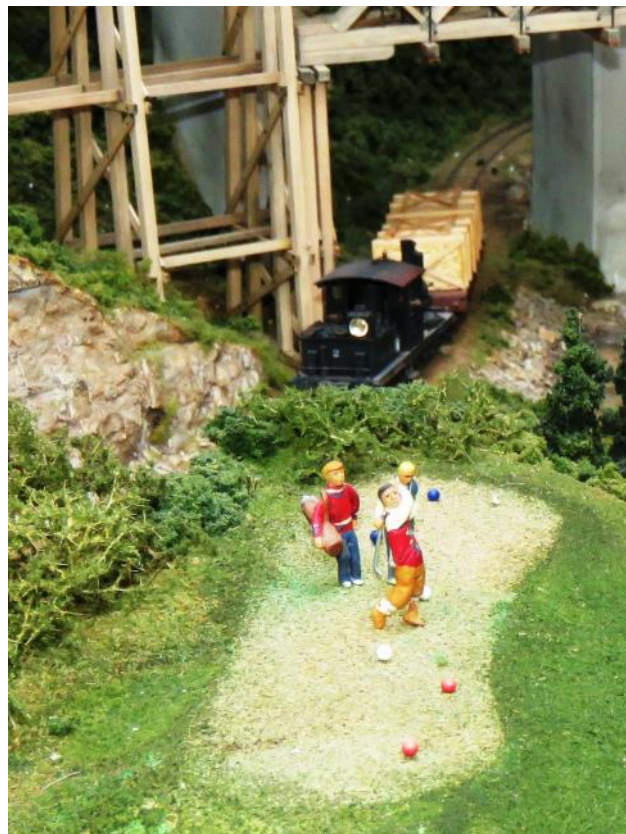
Originally, the plan was to use block wiring and that's the way it was initially wired from staging to my main division point yard at Columbia. I was well aware of DCC in its early stages. In 1993 I was the NMRA Trustee who introduced the motion to adopt DCC as the NMRA Standard. As you know, it passed and was adopted. Thereafter, I spent much time with various manufacturers and dealers learning and discussing the relative merits of the various systems. In 1998 I made the decision to convert the layout to North Coast Engineering's DCC system, including wireless throttles. The simplicity of the system, ease of operation and handling plus Jim Scorse's commitment to backward compatibility within his system were major elements of the decision. I have never regretted going with NCE and would still encourage anyone with large or small layout to strongly consider that system. The narrow gauge equipment still operates on a block system as to date it remains impractical to install sound decoders in narrow gauge Shays and Dunkirks.



Bob Charles's South Penn Division, PRR

Railfanning the South Penn

Let's take a fast tour of the South Penn Division of the PRR as it is today. Trains originate in east or west staging or in Columbia Yard. East staging represents New York, Philadelphia and Washington, DC. West staging is Pittsburgh and Wheeling, WV. Departing Philadelphia, we move from staging to West Philadelphia where PECO and Publicker-Ward are located. We emerge on scene in the main room thru a tunnel along the Susquehanna south of Columbia, PA.



Bob Charles's South Penn Division, PRR

Entering Columbia which is the end of electrified territory, there will likely be a power changeover. Catenary is now, and may always be “virtual;” I don't know if I'll ever get to that. Anyhow, most freights will be terminating here and shifted in the yard. Most passenger trains are thru with maybe an express or parlor car to be switched in or out. There are several industries to be switched as well. Marietta, the next town west, is switched from Columbia by the yard men. Most operating sessions require a Columbia yardmaster, yard engineer and a hostler.



Moving west, we pass Marietta, then enter a tunnel (physically thru the access staircase). In the tunnel we pass two staging sidings representing Erie, PA and Hagerstown, MD. We emerge on scene in the town of Bedford, PA. This is located along the back wall above our east and west staging areas. Over the years the railroad has brought growth, and industry has thrived here. There is a coaling tower on the main with a small yard adjacent and a shifter assigned for local work. It is here in Bedford the narrow gauge Shobers Run Lumber Company terminates. This company brings lumber both for local industry and shipment by the PRR. Dual gauge track allows direct access to Beecher Furniture Design (BFD), their largest customer as well as a timber gantry for switching loads to standard gauge.



Bob Charles's South Penn Division, PRR

Departing Bedford, we begin the laborious climb over the Alleghenies and thru the summit tunnel. It is all downhill from there to Somerset. Somerset has both industries and an interchange yard. Somerset is accessed thru a connecting siding to the B & O line from Rockwood to Johnstown, then trackage rights to the yard and the small village of Geiger. Back on the main, we continue into a tunnel leading to a helix that drops altitude thru an unmodeled area and emerges at the village of Kregar in Westmoreland County. Here the mainline splits with one mainline going to Pittsburgh staging and the other to Wheeling staging.



Bob Charles's South Penn Division, PRR

At Kregar we also connect with the Indian Creek Valley Railroad, a small feeder line that operates from there to the town of Indian Head, thence down the Indian Creek Valley connecting with the B&O at the confluence of Indian Creek and the Youghiogheny River. The interchange track holds cars destined for Indian Head, Kregar and intermediate spots. The PRR has trackage rights on the ICV as far as the breaker for Indian Creek Coal Company. Indian Creek Coal is a major coal supplier to the PECO plant in West Philadelphia.

The town of Indian Head is the modeled end of the ICV. Featured here is industrial switching using a version of John Allen's timesaver. Folks who are assigned the ICV operator job love it. As ICV has only one piece of motive power, there are no issues with other trains on the line. Just switch Kregar and Indian Head. Seems simple, but turns out to be a fascinating job requiring some thought to complete.



Bob Charles's South Penn Division, PRR

Between scenery construction and then the covid pandemic, the railroad has not seen a full operating session since the Susquehannock convention. When sessions finally can happen again, the typical operating crew will be 8 to 10 people. Steve King developed the Timetable/train order (TT/TO) system we use to operate the railroad. The dispatcher is headquartered in the shop where he has an antique candlestick phone and headset with foot pedal to maintain contact with crews and the tower operator. Interestingly, the dispatcher equipment came from Emlen tower on the PRR. The tower operator is similarly equipped and there are 3 “space saver” phones strategically located on the railroad. All phones were formerly used on the railroad.

Strategically placed around the room are “fast clocks.” We set them to a 4-to-1 speed so a 12-hour shift takes 3 hours. This seems a good session length. Often, we will work a shift with a “lunch break” in the middle. It makes a very nice way to spend a day, yet leave time for those who drive a distance to get home for dinner.

Epilogue

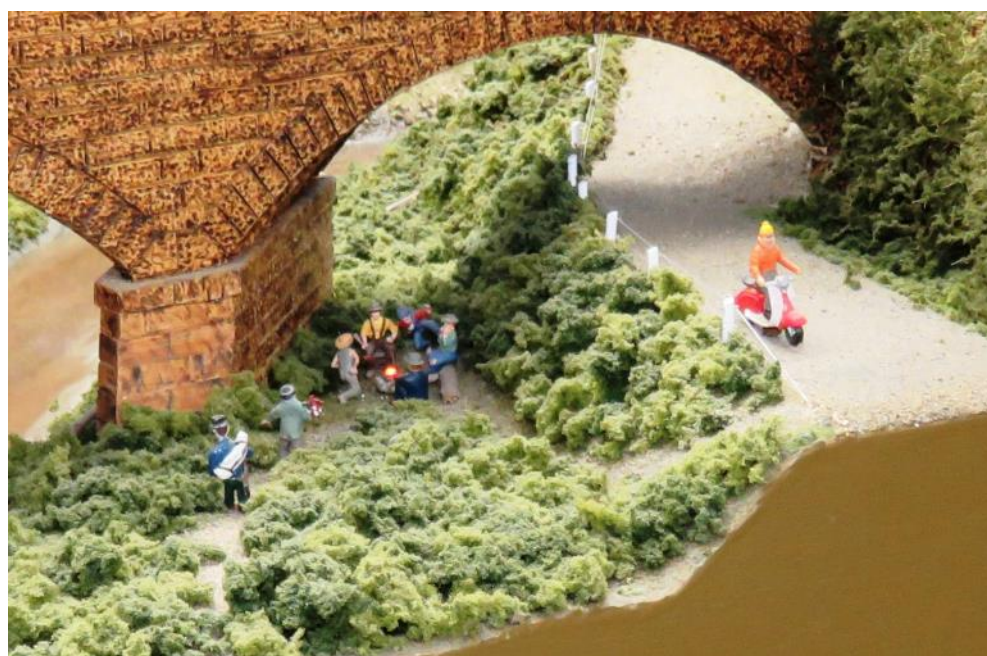
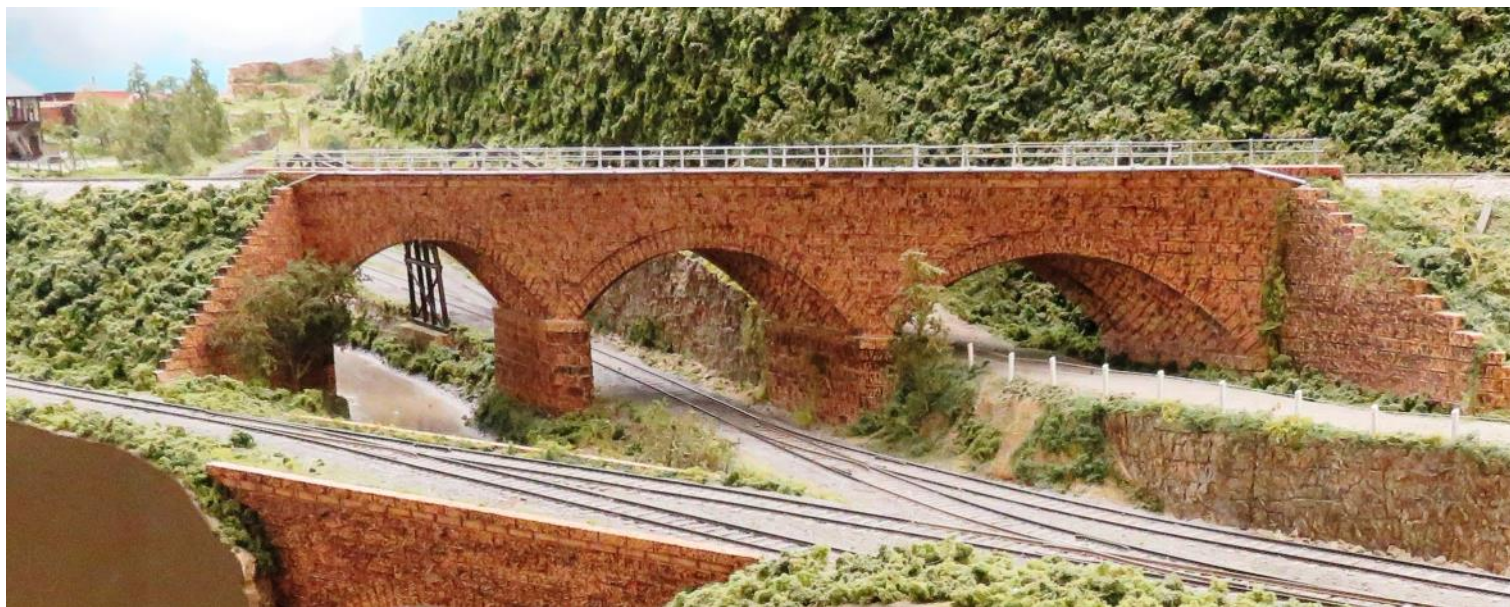
The South Penn has proven to be a real challenge to build and a joy to operate. Without the support and efforts of Bob Beecher, Brian Kampschroer and Bill & Mary Miller, it probably never would have come to pass. While everything does not always work to plan, neither did the real railroad. “Stuff happens!” The bottom line is that the crews and I enjoy the South Penn Division PRR. Once we get thru the covid issues, guests will once again be welcomed to view and/or operate on the railroad. I am really looking forward to that time. Meantime, stay safe, healthy and happy, and of course, stay on track!



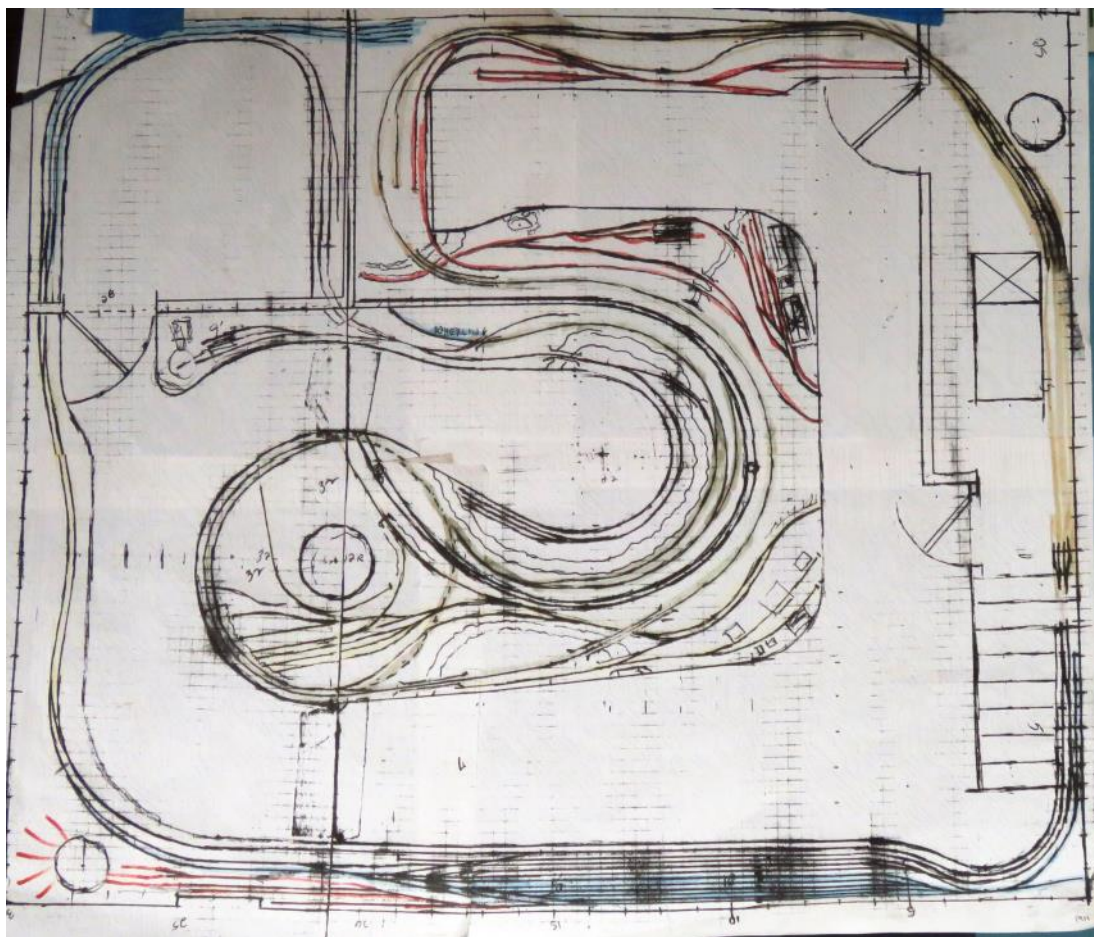
Bob Charles's South Penn Division, PRR



Bob Charles's South Penn Division, PRR



Bob Charles's South Penn Division, PRR



The Frugal (Cheap) Model Railroader

As a frugal model railroader, I frequently look at household detritus and wonder whether it can serve another function. Since I am a coffee drinker who uses coffee creamer, I became interested in the tamper proof aluminum foil seals found on each bottle. Additionally, small fruit containers with a similar aluminum seals joined my thoughts. Both these sources of aluminum foil began to accumulate in a box. The next step was to devise an appropriate application.



I decided that this scrap aluminum could represent shredded metal that would be found in a scrap yard or made into bales and used as gondola loads. The first step was to shred the metal. I had on hand a seldom used coffee grinder (blade type not burr type) that became my shredding device. Filing and grinding many batches of the foil finally resulted in a large quantity of shredded foil. Since the foil was aluminum, it could quickly become the basis for a scrap pile or compressed into HO sized bales.



blade coffee grinder



grinder with cut up pieces of foil



grinder with shredded foil



shredded aluminum to make one bale



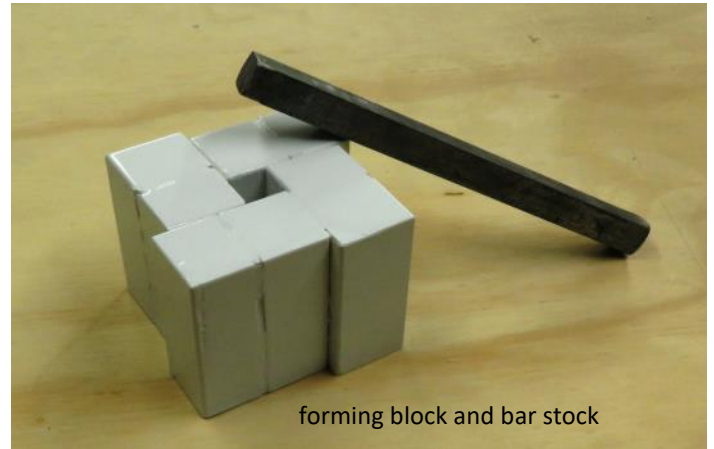
shredded aluminum for scrap pile

The Frugal (Cheap) Model Railroader

To make compressed bales I screwed together several blocks of maple that were left over from making table card holders for my wife (one of those 'honey do' projects). I found a piece of 1/2" square bar stock in a tool chest drawer and I was set to go. The baling process began by placing the forming blocks on a very hard surface (concrete floor). Next, I filled the core with shredded foil and slowly compressed it allowing more room for adding shredded foil. I repeated this process until the slightly compressed foil filled the forming cavity (approximately 2 1/2" high). This was followed by compression using a 3 lb. hand drilling hammer. With several hard strikes on the top end of the bar stock, the foil continued to compress.



3 lb. hand drilling hammer and 1/2" square bar stock



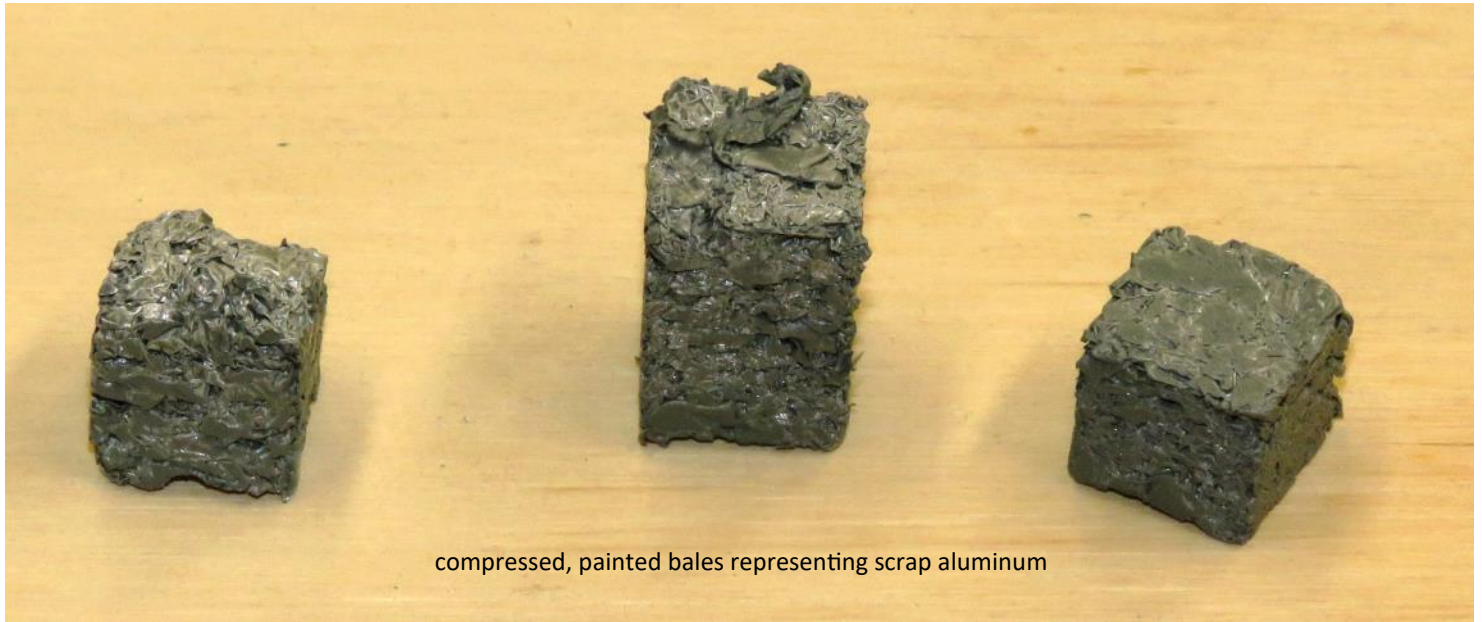
forming block and bar stock

Once the compression was complete, the block form was turned on its side and the bar stock was struck repeatedly with the hammer, pushing out the compressed bale. The bales were then painted representing aluminum or steel. The finished bales could then be used for either scrap gondola loads or bales in a scrap yard!



compressed, painted bales representing scrap steel

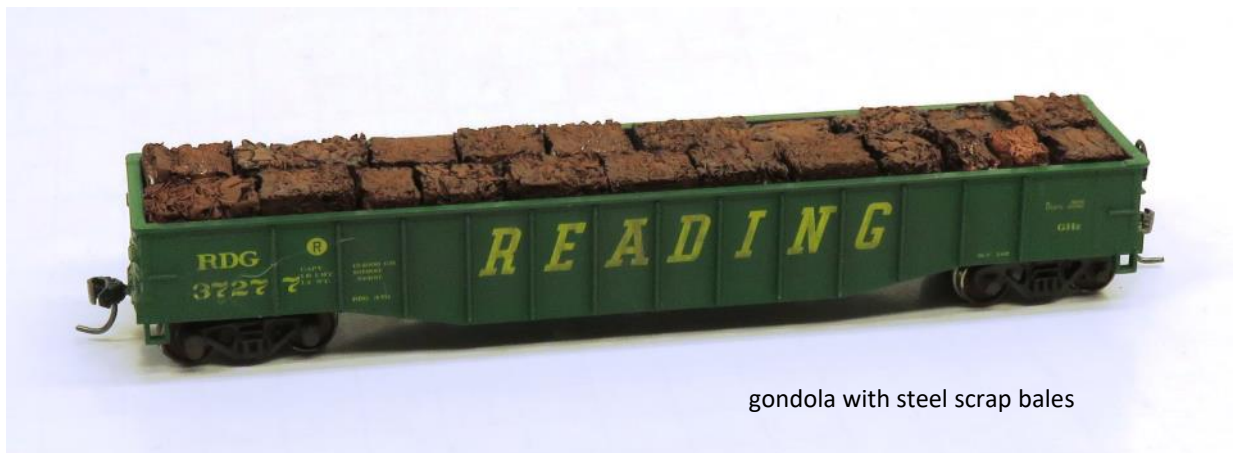
The Frugal (Cheap) Model Railroader



compressed, painted bales representing scrap aluminum



gondola with aluminum scrap bales



gondola with steel scrap bales

article and photos by Ben Kubelski

Reference Section

Robert Getty has built a web application that indexes every segment of Ken Paterson's "What's Neat" YouTube show for Model Railroad Hobbyist Magazine. It's free to use and member's might find it quite useful: <https://wnindex.theconsist.com>

Sample screen shot below:

The screenshot shows the homepage of the 'What's Neat Index' website. At the top left is a circular logo featuring a train. The navigation menu includes 'Search', 'Presenters', 'Videos', 'Categories', 'FAQ', 'Tip Jar', and 'Contact'. A yellow badge on the right indicates '369 segments currently indexed'. The main heading is 'What's Neat Index' with the subtitle 'When Daniel Coombs isn't around to help find that segment!'. Below this is a search bar with the placeholder text 'Segment / Presenter Search' and a 'Search' button. The background image shows a model train set with a yellow locomotive and a blue freight car. At the bottom, there are logos for 'MRH MODEL RAILROADER HOBBYIST' and a text block stating 'What's Neat with Ken Patterson is produced for Model Railroad Hobbyist Magazine'.

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Conrail cabooses sitting in Lancaster Yard, February 2013.