



Volume 33

SUSQUEHANNA SIDETRACKS



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

Number 1

Roman Rusynko's R² Railroad

The featured layout in this issue of **Sidetracks** has some unique attributes that are normally not modeled by many hobbyists. These include a multi-level track plan, a private airport with parked, taxiing, landing and crashed airplanes and a helix contained within a mountain with several portals! Another aspect of the [R² Railroad](#) (R² pronounced R Square) is that it is under construction with many scenes to be finalized.

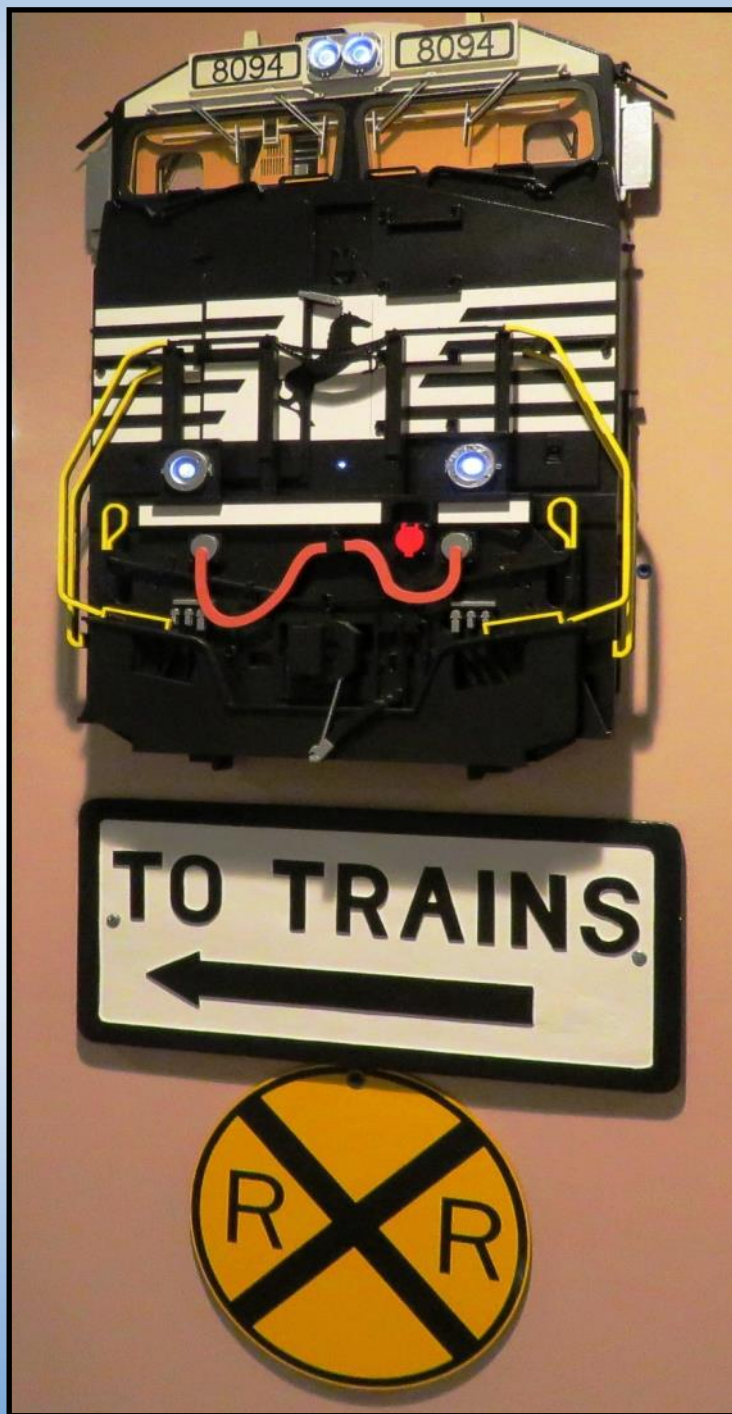
The R² Railroad is owned and operated by Roman Rusynko, a long-time NMRA member, a retired Air Force Master Sergeant and a certified single-engine pilot. Roman's interest in model railroading dates back many years and inspired him to create his own rail empire. With the help of a professional track planner, Roman incorporated his personal ideas and specified inputs as the final track plan was developed. The R² Railroad began life in Roman's full-sized basement which was finished and carpeted to enhance the layout's appeal.

Most model railroaders who own a personal layout abide by the motto 'it's a work in progress'. This holds true for the R² Railroad. Roman has completed the structural benchwork, yard and mainline trackage, digital control system, city, rural and industrial areas, a helix, and a viaduct. The continuing work will focus on structures and details. Roman's efforts are on-going and his patience and persistence is exemplified by his model railroad creation. He still has lots of work to complete, but he enjoys the ability to run the main lines and switch units in the expansive yard and several industries.

article continues on page 8



Multiple NS engines await maintenance service at the the R² Yard.



This 3D lighted plaque representing GE ES44AC NS locomotive #8094 was crafted by Stoddart's Artwork, Inc.

In This Issue

Roman Rusynko's R ² Railroad	1, 8-15
Superintendent's Desk	3, 16-21
Second Section	4
2025 Division Calendar of Events	5
NMRA Events	6-7
The Art of Jim Rose	21
Steamtown Event Recap	23-25



Drones are everywhere, even on model railroad layouts!

Superintendent's Desk

I'll keep this short because I have a story I think you'll enjoy. But first, part of my duties as Superintendent is to give you the news of the Division. On January 11, 2025, we will have an in-person meet at the Good Hope Fire Company in Mechanicsburg at 9 AM. We will have our free raffle drawing of items you bring in that you no longer need or want. They can be modeling materials, tools, books, etc.

On February 15, 2025 our meet will be in Allentown, Room 120, 905 Harrison Street. This will be a joint meet with the Philly Division.

Now on to the story; it was written by the late Tom Bavolar. When I was the editor of *The Local*, Tom allowed me to print his story. I know that the January-February issue of Sidetracks causes it to be a bit late, but I hope you enjoy it as much as I did.



A Lionel Christmas Story

By Thomas Bavolar

This saga begins several months before Christmas Day, circa 1955. I was 11 years old and considered myself the luckiest kid on the block because of the large Lionel layout my Dad had built. Except for a narrow center aisle, the train table filled a basement party room that was about fifteen feet wide by forty feet long. The layout was "U" shaped and consisted of three separate tables interconnected with bridges. Except for an occasional evolutionary change, the layout was finished, fully landscaped and fully operational. Thinking back it was truly a work of toy train art. Except for the trains, scale made little difference to my Dad. The size of vehicles, people, lamp posts and structures had only to be "close enough" and with this philosophy, he created a wonderland of endless enjoyment and fascination.

It was at this point that Dad decided he needed to have an area of real water as part of the layout. After all, he had the bascule bridge and it seemed almost indecent to have this marvelous accessory span a pond made from crumpled up blue cellophane. So, he set about to incorporate a section of real water into the layout.

My Mom was vehemently opposed to this notion. Her position was that electricity and water don't mix and either he or me or both of us or who knows how many other innocent bystanders would be electrocuted by the giant blue spark that would eventually issue from the inevitable contact of the aforementioned ingredients.

As I write this I can hear the arguments. "Vince," she would say, "Don't you care about safety?" Irene," he would say, "This is not like sticking your tongue into an electrical outlet. It's safe. 110 volts of electricity are not in those tracks." "Vince," she would say, "You're going to burn the house down if there is a short circuit." "Irene," he would say, "That's why there are fuses in the fuse box."

article continued on page 16

Second Section

Susquehanna Sidetracks

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

Contributing to Sidetracks are always welcome. Division members wishing to contribute articles, photos or features may do so by emailing items to the Editor at the e-mail address listed below.

Submissions should be in WORD format with photos sent under separate cover. Photos which are part of the submission should be identified as to their location in the WORD document.

The deadline for submission for the next issue is February 15, 2025.

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EDITOR'S MESSAGE

Greetings for the New Year!

Another year begins and we continue to grow in experience and knowledge! Hopefully, these traits are mirrored in our modeling skills, techniques and expertise. To ensure the advancement of personal attributes the NMRA provides a unique source of hobby enrichment. In addition to in-person events and ZOOM meetings, the NMRA website offers a myriad of video clips and documents that can assist members as they search for new ideas and techniques. By utilizing NMRA benefits you will certainly get all the benefits of your membership costs!

Recently, our Division's website was used by scam artists to send fake emails. Please be mindful that only email messages noting events or other Division news are authorized. If any message appearing to come from the Susquehanna Division seeks donations or other funding requests be on notice it is a scam! It is sad that even a hobby website is targeted by unscrupulous individuals to subvert the mission of a leisure time activity.

In previous newsletters, we have announced the need to fill the **Model Showcase Chairman's** and the position of **Sidetracks Editor**. We are still seeking volunteers. Please consider donating some time to enhance your Division. You can contact the Superintendent or the current Editor (yours truly). I trust someone will step forward and help to share the load.

Best Wishes,

Rich

Susquehanna Division 2025 Calendar of Events

Susquehanna Division in 2025

Looking at the new year, the Susquehanna Division’s officers and board of directors have a number of events planned hoping to improve our membership’s involvement. At a recent board of directors meetings, we sketched out the year.

We have several in-person meetings planned with a variety of clinics and activities. The division’s in-person membership meetings offer the chance to come home with something tangible from the free raffle choices, some new knowledge from the clinics or the Modelers’ Forum, and of course the opportunity to engage in fellowship with other model railroaders as well as visit some of the division’s model railroads after the meeting. We will also host some live events at museums or other railroad sites around the division without having a full meeting agenda.

In addition to the in-person events, we are planning a couple of virtual meetings on Zoom. For a variety of reasons, including the geographic spread of our division, some find travel to in-person meetings difficult. We hope that providing an opportunity to engage in online meetings allows additional participation in attendance as well as having a wider scope of guest presenters or clinicians to draw from.

In looking at the schedule below, you may notice a couple of new activities in 2025. We are planning on “flying the flag” or manning a table at an occasional non-NMRA event to boost our visibility and even gain some new blood in our membership. As we finalize these plans, please consider joining us for an hour or two at the table or even just attending an event outside of our normal purview such as a train show or RPM meet.

This October the Mid-Eastern Region’s convention will be hosted by the Philadelphia Division. This will be a great opportunity for our members to attend a regional convention without traveling a great distance. If you haven’t

Month — Date	Location	Type of Meeting or Event
January 1/11/25	Mechanicsburg, PA. Good Hope Fire Company	In-person Membership Meeting-Confirmed
February 2/15/25	Allentown, PA. Bridgeworks Enterprise Center	In-person Membership Meeting-Confirmed
March		Possible “Flying the Flag” Information Table
April 4/12/25	Invitation will be emailed	Virtual Membership Meeting on Zoom
May		
June	Dauphin, PA	In-person Membership Meeting
July		Possible “Flying the Flag” Information Table
August 3rd Weekend?	Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania	In-person Membership Meeting
September	Scranton, PA area	Field trip to Northeast subdivision of Susquehanna Division
October 10/16—10/19	King of Prussia, PA	Attend or volunteer MER Regional Convention
November	<u>Model Railroad Open Houses</u>	On your own model railroad visits
December	Invitation will be emailed	Virtual Membership Meeting on Zoom

attended a regional convention, please consider taking advantage of the opportunity.

Mechanicsburg, PA Event

Saturday, January 11, 2025

Good Hope Fire Company

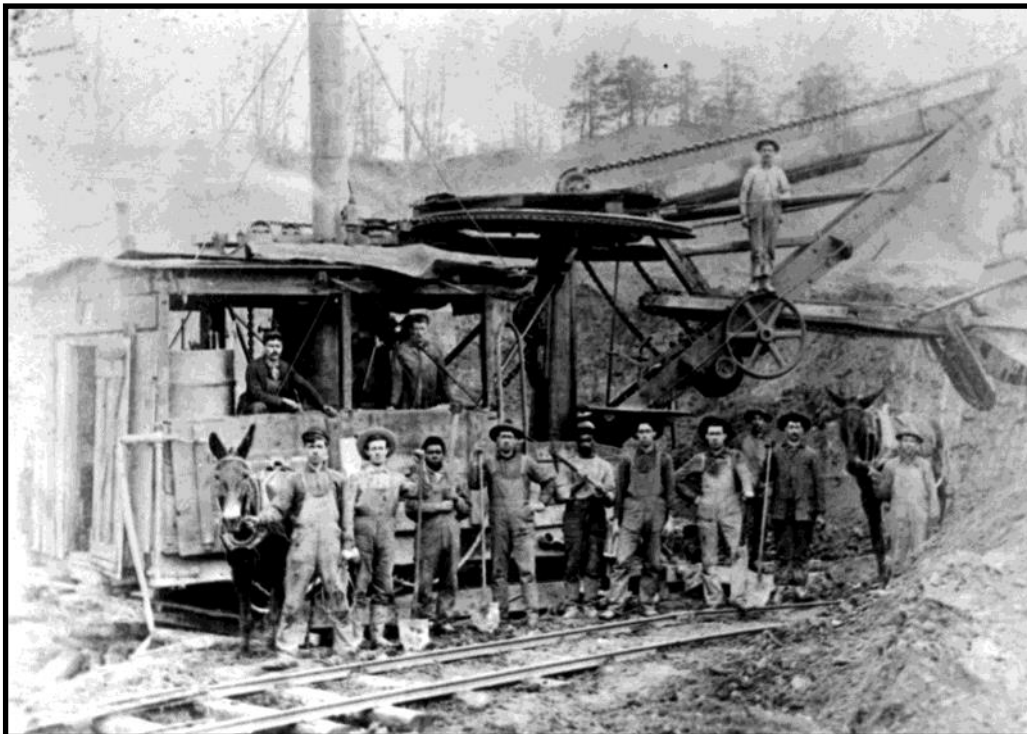
1200 Good Hope Road
Mechanicsburg, PA 17050

Kevin Macumber will present: **The House that Cheerios Built.**

It is a comprehensive look at using cardstock in modeling.

Jerry Lauchle, MMR will present: **Modeling an Iron Ore Steam Excavator**

There is a section of central Pennsylvania in Centre County known as the Barrens with widespread deposits of iron ore. In 1880, 45-year-old Andrew Carnegie traveled east to secure ore supplies for his expanding Pittsburgh steel operations. He purchased the Barrens from a local ironmaster. Carnegie named the area Scotia, after his native Scotland. He formed the Scotia Iron Works in 1893. Carnegie purchased newly-invented steam shovels from a company in Massachusetts. Each could load from 600 to 1,100 narrow-gauge ore cars per day. A 0-4-0 dinkey steam locomotive hauled up to 24 loaded ore cars from the open mines to the ore washer at the Iron Works. An average of 15 to 18 gondola cars full of ore were shipped to Pittsburgh daily via the Lewisburg & Tyrone RR and PRR. This clinic describes the scratch building of the steam excavators used in the Scotia Iron Works in HO-scale.



NMRA Events (continued)

Allentown, PA Event

February 15, 2025

Bridgeworks Enterprise Center

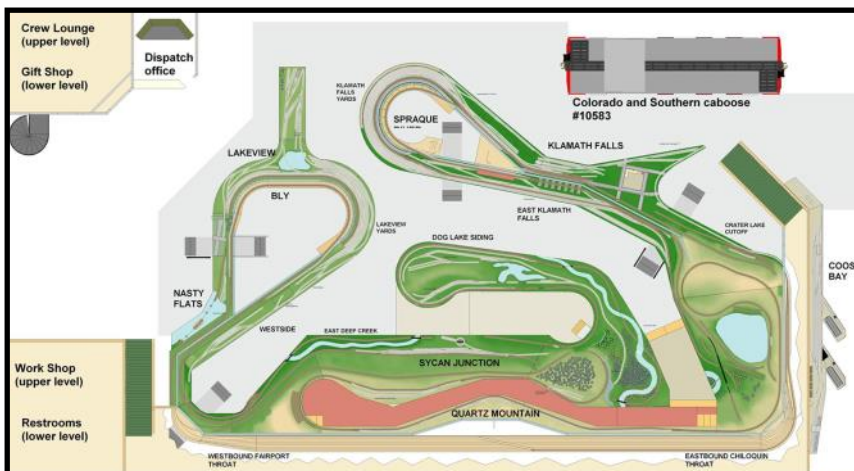
905 Harrison Street, Allentown, PA 18103

A joint meet with the Philadelphia Division will be held on Saturday, February 15th beginning at 9:30 AM. Doors will open at 9 AM offering an opportunity for conversation and refreshments.

The Philly Division will present a clinic to be determined. The Susquehanna Division will present David Trussell, the creator, founder and builder of the Colorado Model Railroad Museum in Greeley CO. Mr. Trussell will share the Museum's video presentation showing all aspects of this monumental model railroad. He will take questions while expanding on the presented video content. To preview the presentation, go to <https://www.cmrmm.org>.

In addition to the clinics, a Modelers' Showcase is planned. Bring your finished or under constructions project to the event. Take the opportunity to share your handiwork with other hobbyists.

The formal event will conclude at noon, with lunch on your own. The afternoon will present opportunities to visit private model railroad layouts in the Allentown area. Detailed information will be provided during the event.



Roman Rusynko's R² Railroad (continued)

What is the name of your layout?

R² Railroad (R² pronounced R Square)

What scale is your layout? HO 1:87

Does your layout have a specific era and/or location?

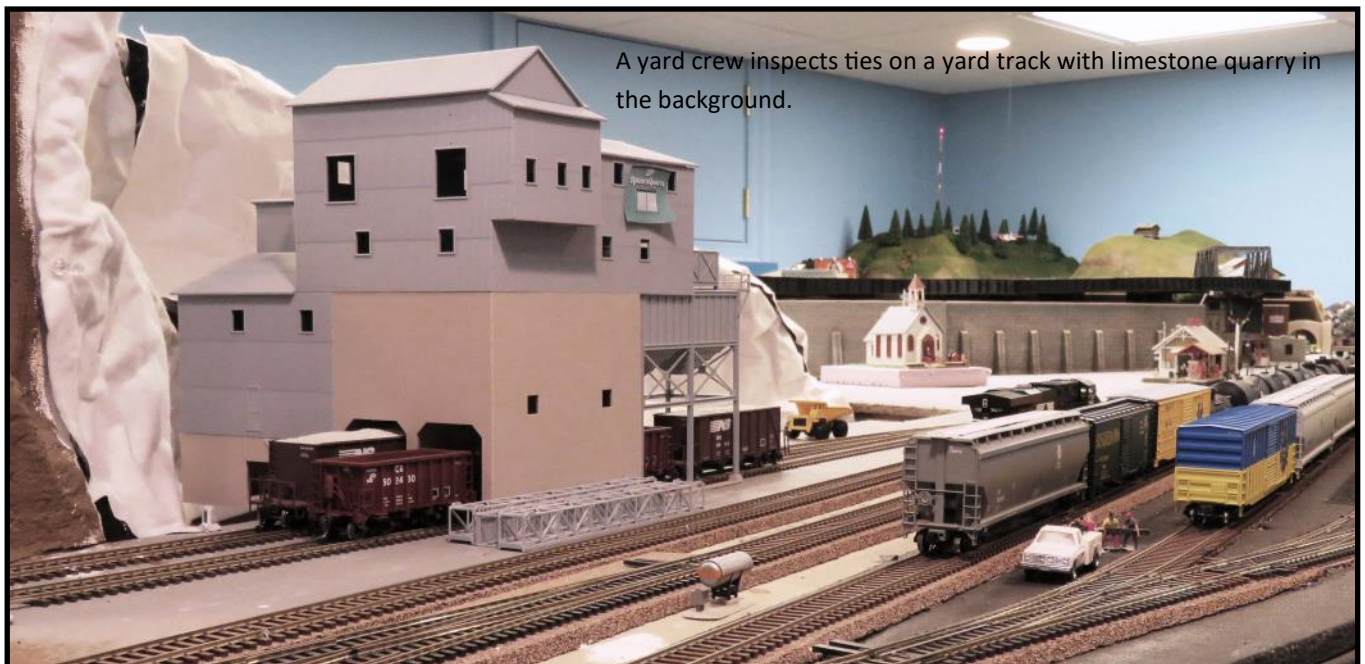
Freelanced set in the current era designed with some Pennsylvania influence, an Amish farm and wooden covered bridge and highly condensed Rockville stone arched bridge over the water.



NS Executive Units #4271 (F7A) & #4275(F7B) emerge from the engine house after completed maintenance.

What are the overall dimensions of your layout?

The railroad is about 400 square feet. Linear walk around 28' long x 17' at its widest point with a 19' peninsula. There are three levels; hidden staging yard at 49", main level at 54" a dual track helix to upper level at 60". Scenery is hydrocal over cardboard webbing, Walthers Shaper Sheet and foam insulation board. Upon entering the train room, the first layout scene includes an Amish farm complex followed by the Norfolk Southern engine servicing facility, a small rail yard, partially hidden helix within a mountain featuring a limestone quarry at one end and a coal mine on the upper opposite side, a condensed airport with nearly a 7' long runway, a stone arched bridge, a few small sidings, a city scene yet to be named, drive-in theatre, suburban housing area and the 4-track staging yard. There is a workspace at one end and a lounge area at the opposite end.



A yard crew inspects ties on a yard track with limestone quarry in the background.

Roman Rusynko's R² Railroad (continued)

By what means and brand of equipment do you control your layout?

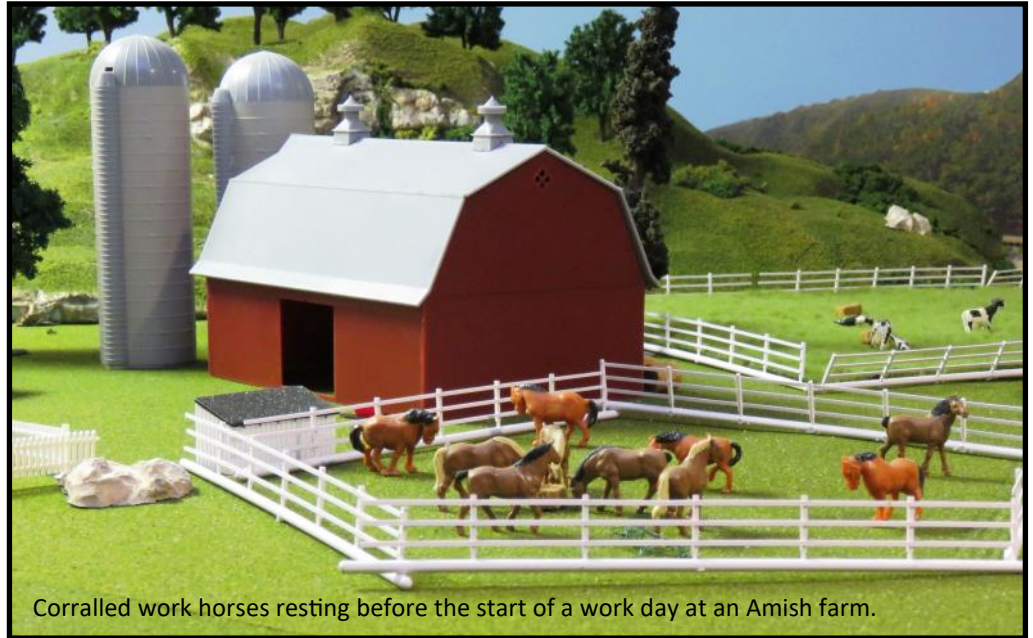
DIGITRAX Chief, Digital Command Control with 4 duplex radio throttles. There are five power districts on the layout.

When did you first begin construction of your layout?

Once the basement train room was finished and the layout space was determined, initial discussion and plans started in 2008. The design

was done by a friend once I identified all the features I was looking for in the layout. His design included 3-poster size drawings one in color, one in black & white and framework construction with track plan schematic. Also included were the lumber requirements, approximate track footage, number and type of turnouts with suggested placement and layout heights. In July 2010 benchwork was started with the help of two friends (one of which was the layout designer). Both were from the Virginia train club that I belonged to prior to moving here. Framework was

completed in about 130 man-hours over 4½ days. And to this date work still continues on the pike.



Corralled work horses resting before the start of a work day at an Amish farm.



Dairy cows are seen grazing in the pasture before milking time.



An Amish farmer fertilizes a field using a "honey wagon".

Roman Rusynko's R² Railroad (continued)

Do you sponsor Operating Sessions on your layout?

Not at this time. When designed the plan called for a single-track mainline runaround. However, over time with more interest in operating sessions, some areas were altered to include a few small industries with short sidings. Operating sessions could be planned in the future.

Do you have a track plan diagram for your layout(i.e. JPEG or PDF format)? See Figures 1, 2 and 3..



Figure 1

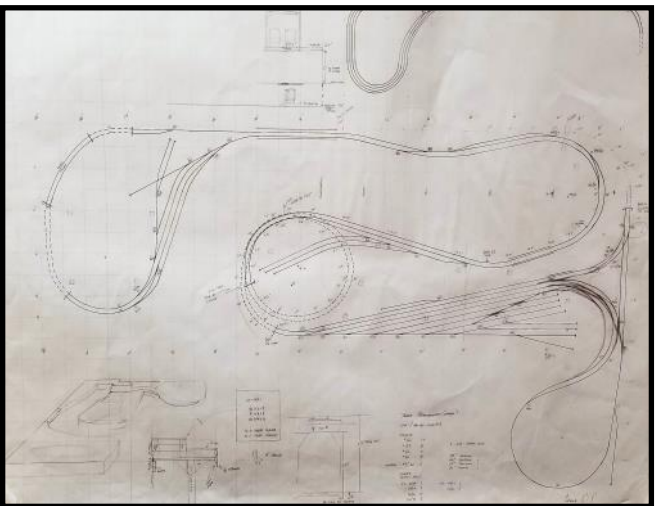


Figure 3

Figure 2

Roman Rusynko's R² Railroad (continued)

What type of track (sectional, flex track or hand laid) and switches are on your layout and what is its code?

Code 83 Flex track used throughout with a mainline run of 220' plus 80' hidden 4-track staging. Minimum track radius of 24" and helix grade rising ¼" every foot. For switches I used PECO #6 & #8 and Walthers curved turnouts. Tracks are on HO cork roadbed on homasote and plywood. Plans called for 50+ turnouts using Tortoise Switch Machines, however a number of the turnout locations ended up over benchwork that did not allow mounting switch machines. Hand thrown switches are now planned for those locations.



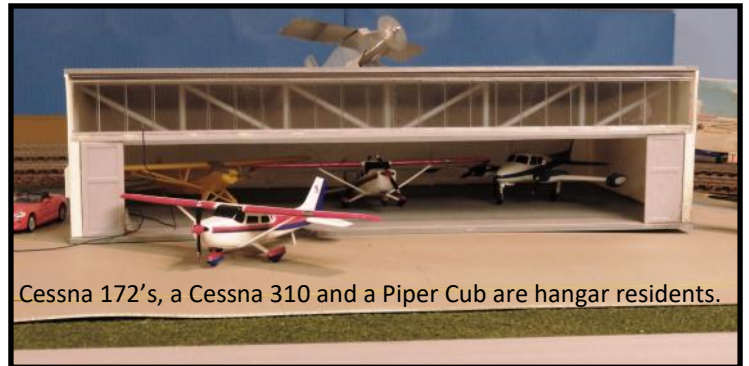
A reproduction of a Granville Brothers "GEE BEE R1", the fastest aircraft in 1931, is parked on the airport tarmac.



Police, media and photographer are on the scene of the glider mishap.



Local industry freights parked across the tracks from airport.



Cessna 172's, a Cessna 310 and a Piper Cub are hangar residents.



Waco taildragger taxiing back to the hangar.



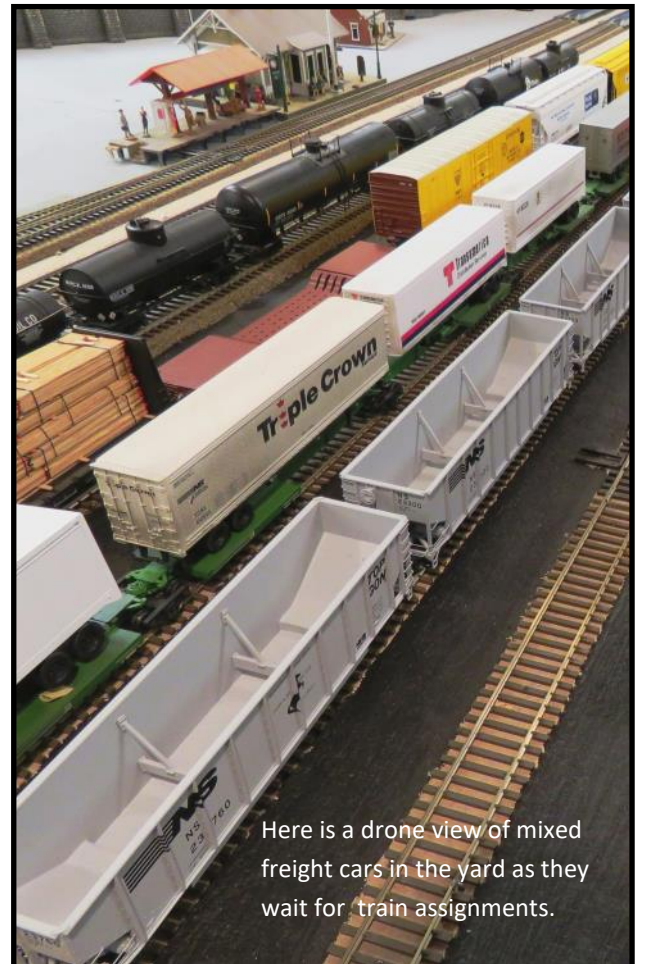
A couple of fly-in aircraft are parked on the apron while their pilots enjoy a meal at the airport café.

Roman Rusynko's R² Railroad (continued)

If you were to brag about your layout what would you describe as its outstanding feature(s)?

The airport scene will soon have LED lighting added to the runway, taxiway and assorted general aviation aircraft. Since there are very few HO scale GA aircraft to choose from in the hobby I found a source of aircraft from the Hallmark Christmas ornament series. They feature a different aircraft every year as part of their collection and the size of these planes work in HO. Currently there are 10 different aircraft included in the airport scene. The hidden 2% grade helix inside the mountain is ballasted and

where visible the interior walls are finished resembling stone blocks. Then on top of another hill there is the 105' tall flashing radio mast antennae (alerting landing planes). In 2019, we featured our home as part of an open house fund-raiser for a local organization showing how we decorated the interior of our home for the Christmas holiday. At the request of my wife, I included the layout with running trains. The train room was continuously packed with curious admirers and my layout guest book picked up an additional 289 signatures that day. And the trains ran flawlessly the entire 4 hours!



Roman Rusynko's R² Railroad (continued)

Approximately, how many engines and rolling stock are in your collection? Also, what brand of engines do you run on your layout? I have 33 diesel engines, 3 steam engines, 282 passenger, freight and maintenance of way cars, and 4 train sets (Acela, American Orient Express, Eurorail, Union Pacific). All pieces of equipment are in good working order.



Conrail engines waiting assignments.

Also, what brand of engines do you run on your layout? I have Proto 2000, Athearn Genesis, Broadway Limited, Intermountain and Kato locomotives.



Excursion train approaches the station.



Reading T1 4-4-4-4 #5549 on display at the station.



Aerial view of the sanding and fueling facilities at the R² Railroad Yard.



NS #2664, an EMD SD70, leaves the R² Railroad Yard after maintenance service is completed.

Roman Rusynko's R² Railroad (continued)



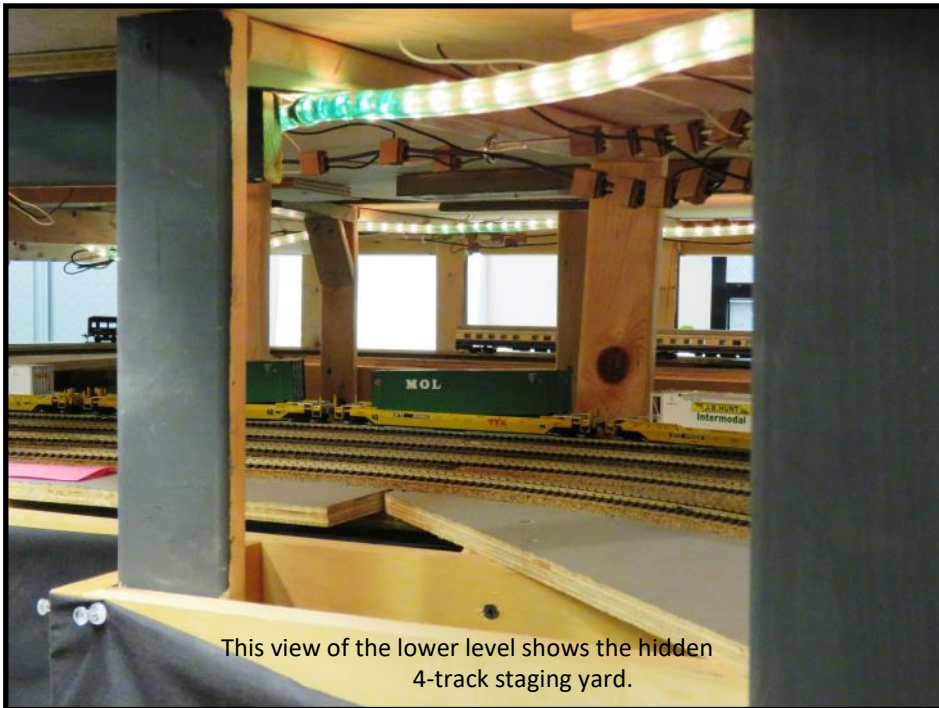
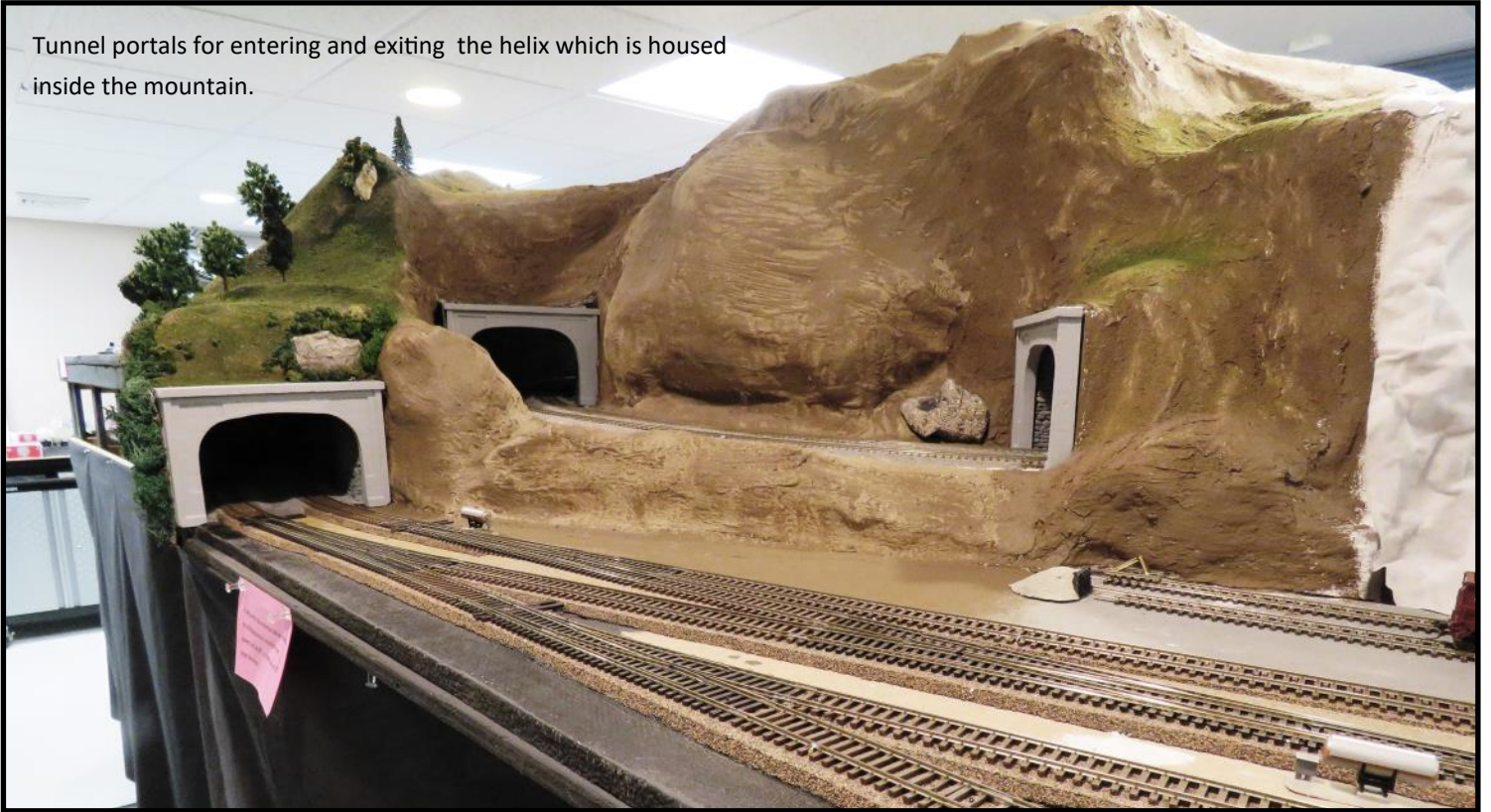
NS #2339 EMD SW 1500 switcher stages loaded run-of-mine coal hoppers.



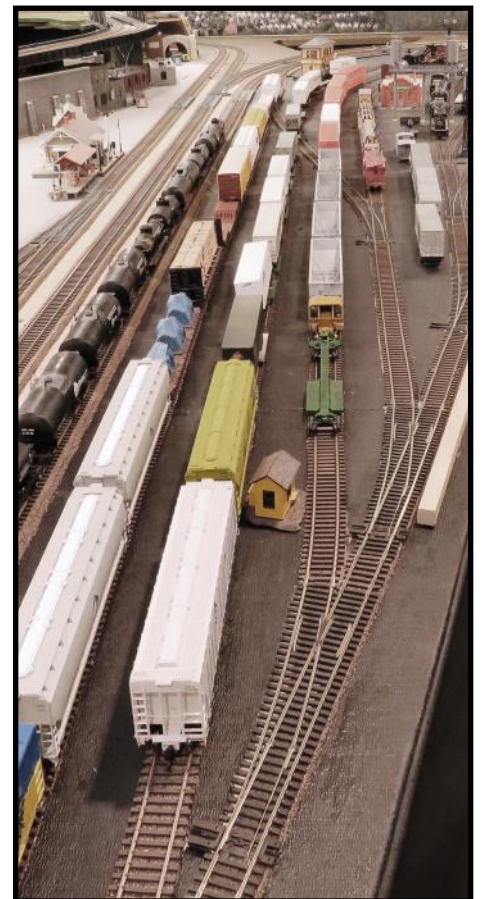
Here is an overview of the coal mine processing facility and adjacent yard.

Roman Rusynko's R² Railroad (continued)

Tunnel portals for entering and exiting the helix which is housed inside the mountain.



This view of the lower level shows the hidden 4-track staging yard.



Depicted here is an aerial view of the R²Railroad freight yard.

article and photos by Rich Wurst

Superintendent's Desk (continued)

Vince had his way. On the layout he surveyed a large rectangular area that was as wide as the bascule bridge and ran straight across the table from the wall to the isle. He measured and calculated taking into consideration the weight of the proposed metal trough and the water it would contain. He paid a sheet metal worker at his company to construct and paint the trough. He modified the table to accept the trough and its weight. Then one day he arrived home from work with the trough tied to the top of his DeSoto. Several hours later the trough was in place, its drain hole was secured and countless gallons of water, bucket by bucket, were dumped into the trough. My mother was upset with the amount of water it took to fill the trough. She was now concerned about an event of Biblical proportions. I recall her having made a reference to the Egyptian Army and their fate at the closing of the Red Sea.

Undaunted, my Dad was intent on finishing the project and when done, to my eyes, it was magnificent. There were boats that he bought at the five and dime stores. There was a large plaster hill with tunnels for the trains and, by the water's edge a campground and Popsicle stick dock. Lead figures of campers and fishermen abounded and in the water huge plastic fish with weighted bellies floated lazily, taunting the unresponsive sportsmen.

It was idyllic until my dad decided that he wanted running water as a scenic element. The mountain was there for a waterfall. The trough had a built in drain hole. All he needed was a pump, some hose, fittings and an electrical connection. Bingo, instant running water. One of his friends at Worthington in Harrison, NJ gave him the pump and fittings. Dad modified the mountain to accommodate a waterfall. Connections to the trough were made. An electrical supply was installed and that weekend the assemblage would be put to the test.

Saturday morning came and after breakfast we went down to the train room. Dad unlocked and opened the door. Beams of early morning sunlight from the two, narrow basement windows, sliced through the dark, illuminating portions of the room. Each breath taken carried with it the scent of the train room with its compliment of Lionel trains and somehow, in addition, also brought a sense of excitement and expectation. Dad turned on the light and we both went back to the control panel.

I thought that he had already tested his handy work. He had not. In fact, it would be left to me to throw the switch that would, for the first time, activate the pump and the waterfall. The power was put on and I was instructed to flip a switch which I did. There was a loud whine of the pump followed by a ferocious sucking sound as every ounce of water drained out of the trough. Then from the hole in the mountain, through which a gentile trickle was supposed to flow came a mighty, 50 gallon, jet of liquid disaster. In an instant the watery blast shot more than sixteen feet down one leg of the layout. The resulting catastrophe was rivaled only by the epic flood in Johnstown, PA.

During the frenzy that ensued, my Dad uttered words that I had only heard spoken by others and my Mom, thinking that her worst fears of electrocution had come to pass, pounded down the stairs to add her own invectives. I, with my finger still on the switch, flipped the toggle to off just as the pump began to smoke.

It took Dad several weeks to clean up the sodden remains of what used to be a residential area. There were a lot of cardboard buildings that had warped. On the sly, Dad learned how to use Mom's iron to press the building sides flat so they could be reassembled and Dad's friend at the pump works provided a reducing valve.

Superintendent's Desk (continued)

Undaunted, Dad set to work in a feverish effort to reengineer his hydraulic debacle. The holidays were fast approaching and there would be company for whom he would need to proudly display his Lionel trains. At long last the pump worked as it should. It sent a gentle stream of water down the side of the mountain where it cascaded into the trough. In the current the little boats and the oversized plastic fish meandered randomly around. Mom became more accepting of the use of real water. It was a perfect world. Then came Christmas Day. Even though I was part of a small family, any holiday, birthday or anniversary was always encumbered with the inevitable task of preparation. To a degree, as a child I was somewhat insulated from most of the chaos. Christmas however was different. I became part of the organized frenzy that accompanied this holiday and as a result became swept up into the hubbub. The participation created in me an immense sense of anticipation.

It was now Christmas Eve Day. The tree, which had been up for a couple of days, now received the obligatory necklace of some Lionel trains at its base. I helped Mom, Dad and Grandma prepare some of the food that would be consumed.

My Dad liked to bake and having completed his model train duties, turned his attention to the production of pies and cakes. My Mother and Grandmother labored over ethnic foods for the Christmas Eve supper and Christmas Day breakfast and dinner. My Grandfather, being true to his 19th century sense of how men participated spent the day in the basement hosting numbers of his cronies from Esso Standard Oil by smoking Blackstone cigars and sipping blackberry brandy.

It was very late by the time Christmas Eve dinner was ready. After we all had our fill of the traditional dishes it was up to Grandpa to blow out the ceremonial candle. The brandy he had consumed during the day did not facilitate the ritual. According to tradition, if when the candle was extinguished, the smoke went straight up, the extinguisher and all at the table would go straight to heaven at their demise. As the most elderly, only Grandpa could perform the task. After several attempts and several different candles, our place in the hereafter was assured and at last Grandpa and I went to bed. Grandpa had no trouble falling asleep. I was not so lucky. The nasal cacophony of his loud snoring permeated the walls and floor to reach my bed room which was directly under his. I was wide awake but I wanted desperately to fall asleep because I knew that the sooner I did the sooner Christmas morning would come.

Feigning sleep, I remember Mom closing my bedroom door and then the muffled whispers of clandestine conversation. At last I drifted off to the crinkling sound of wrapped Christmas presents being transported by Santa from their hiding places to the tree.

On Christmas morning, I woke up to the sound of the Lionel tree train. No doubt Santa stopped back to turn it on. Santa had also opened my bedroom door. Interpreting these events as an invitation, I tiptoed into the living room to survey the bounty. The presents were all carefully arranged. There was a pile for me, Mom, Dad, Grandpa and Grandma. Inspecting my pile I was able to determine by the weight, feel and size which contained the dreaded clothes and which, for a child, contained merchandise of a more desirable nature. I had almost a sixth sense that allowed me to predict which package contained Lionel trains and I knew that this Christmas was going to be the best ever. But first I would have to endure the preparations for and participation in the obligatory church services.

We all got back home at about 10 AM but before the pile of gifts could be dispensed; I had to sit through the traditional Christmas morning breakfast. It occurred to me that the speed at which I ate would somehow hasten the

Superintendent's Desk (continued)

ritual of opening the presents. Such was not the case as all it did was to encourage Grandma to pile more food on my plate. Then, not remembering that the previous evening's candle ceremony had guaranteed us a place in paradise, Grandpa insisted on repeating the rite.

Fortunately the lucky candle was one of the first ones used and so in a short time we were all down stairs clustered around the tree. My mom, ceremoniously, distributed the gifts. The best was always saved for last. I had already opened several presents. Grandma was delighted that I liked the socks she gave me. The winter coat from my aunt was too small. When I put it on my arms stuck straight out like a penguins wings. It would have to be returned. The largest box was still unopened. Its tag read "To Tommy from Santa." I knew intuitively what it was but I had to wait for the allocation of gifts to reach the point at which this treasure was the only one remaining.

When there were no unopened gifts left my father got up, slid the giant box over to me and said "Well Tommy, looks like this is for you and it's from Santa."

I didn't have to open the box to know what it was. Of all the items I circled in the Lionel catalogue, there continued on page 6 was only one that could have been this big. It was comforting to know that Santa and I had the same taste in Lionel trains. After looking up at Dad for a second or two I ripped into the package.

It was the Lionel Santa Fe passenger set with two gleaming diesel engines and a set of shiny, aluminum passenger cars. They would have been beautiful in any light but now, reflecting the multicolored tree lights, the pieces seemed to shimmer. It was magical as I inspected each piece and I was speechless. I was transported into another world. It was a place of imagination and fantasy. A place where the mighty engines, struggled to pull their cars up steep grades and through deep mountain chasms and tunnels. A place where the trains flew across the flat lands so fast that it was hard to turn around quickly enough to see them come and watch them go. A city place where the train slowly wound its way through freight yards and around buildings. A place like our model railroad empire in the basement.

As I slipped back into reality, as if increasing a radio's volume, the voices of my family gradually became louder. "Let's go son," Dad said, "Let's get this beauty on the layout." It was, at one time, both what I did and did not want to hear. Usually my Lionel presents were mine until I got them out of the box. Once on the layout, they somehow became his.

Grandpa, like an old cat, fell asleep in the big wing chair. Mom and Grandma went to the kitchen to finish the preparations for Christmas dinner. Dad and I packed up the set and headed to the train room. "Be careful of the electricity." my Mother said. My dad carrying the large box rolled his eyes upward. In a sort of annoyed sing song manner, "OK Irene." he answered.

Once there, for the horn, a fresh D cell battery was installed and my father carefully placed the new acquisition on the rails. It was his plan to teach me how to properly run the new train set. As usual, although I didn't think I needed any instruction, I let him have his way without complaint.

Superintendent's Desk (continued)

We sat at the controls, which for this section of track was a powerful ZW transformer. Dad allowed me to advance the transformer's lever just a bit. The engine sprang to life in neutral. A flick of the direction button and it began to move, ever slow slowly on its way. We tried the horn. A resounding blast of sound assured us both that all was well. First one loop around all three tables at slow speed just to make certain that there were no clearance problems. Now through all the different switches and routes. All was still perfect. What a thrill for of us both. Everything worked even the automatic station stop. The only accessory left to try was the bascule bridge across the trough.

The accessory was wired so that a train, approaching from either end, would stop at a certain distance from the opening bridge thereby preventing disaster. I asked my dad if I could open the bridge. Opting for caution, my Dad suggested that we try another train first to be certain that the bridge worked. The new Santa Fe set was put in a siding and one of the other engines was dispatched to test the bridge's circuitry. As the bridge rose the test engine stopped at a safe distance.

Now our new passenger train slowly departed its siding and began to traverse the serpentine labyrinth of tracks. Picking up speed it clattered over the bridges and across the switches as its horn sounded powerfully. As my fantastic chariot neared the appropriate spot, having had my Dad's permission, I threw the switch to raise the bridge. The train hurtled forward.

Responding to the electricity flowing through its motor, the bascule bridge rose majestically while my Christmas train approached at speed. My Dad and I watched with pride. The train did not stop. At least not right away.

The first of the pair of diesel engines flew off the rails and into the water filled trough. Waves of tsunami proportions swept downstream swamping the boats and washing over the dock and its metal figures. The bridge, having reached its apogee began to return to its closed position. The second engine of the pair remained stopped in the spot where the first unit should have halted. My Dad, again using words I only heard from others, vaulted into the air and threw himself across the table in an effort to quickly rescue the submerged engine. I remained frozen in place in total disbelief of the spectacle before me.

In his effort to reach the scene of the disaster my father managed to crush part of the plaster mountain and several buildings. The pump continued to push out a steady stream of water which now saturated much of my father's clothing. As he dragged himself along the table top, in an effort to prevent any more damage, he shouted to me, "Turn off the power, turn of the power!" I dutifully obeyed. There was more shouting "Get rags," quick get rags!" The physical demands of his rescue attempt must have been too much for him because before I could oblige, my father who was not an athletic man, must have pulled a muscle in his leg. His cries of pain added not only to my panic but to that of my Mother's and Grandmother's as well. They both had heard my father's yelling and, fearing the worst, had run down, still in their aprons, from the kitchen to the train room.

Vince was soaking wet, sprawled across about four feet of track, in obvious pain, still shouting and trying to reach the engine. My Grandmother, who was first into the train room and thinking my Dad was dying, dropped to her knees in the narrow aisle and clasping her hands together raised them and her eyes towards heaven in a loud and desperate prayer. My mother thinking he was being electrocuted was shouting "Pull him off, pull him off!" All my Dad wanted was a rag. He settled for my mother's apron.

Superintendent's Desk (continued)

Having rescued and dried the engine it became obvious to my father why the train hadn't stopped. The unit he held in his hand was the dummy. It had no motor. It was pushed into the water by the second, powered unit which had halted in the normal spot. In his exuberance to get the train on the tracks and teach me its proper operation, he had forgotten to put the powered unit first.

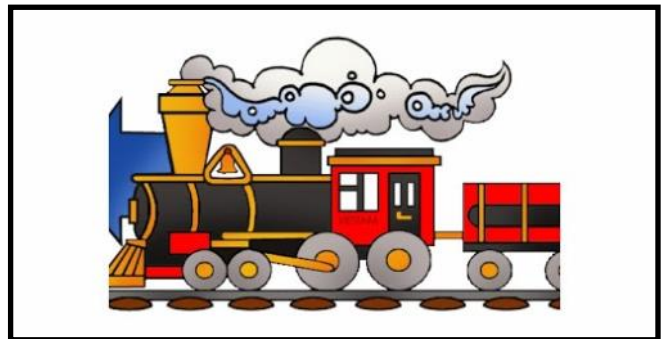
Dad was deeply embarrassed and regretful of having made this mistake. By the time he crawled back off the table my Grandmother had already gone back up to the kitchen. I still stood by the silent controls. I wish my Mom would have been as mute. She launched into a verbal tirade chiding my Dad for being so reckless as to put his life and mine in jeopardy especially on Christmas Day. She wouldn't stop. My dad was losing his patience and wanted to demonstrate to her, once and for all, how safe water and model train electricity really were.

Dripping wet, still hurting from the cramp, with a torn shirt and some minor abrasions he commanded me to turn up the power. "Tommy," he said, "Turn up the power, turn it all the way up. All the power as far as it will go. All the tracks. All the lights. All the accessories. Turn it all on." I did as I was told and the layout sprung to life. The room was aglow and every engine hummed loudly in neutral, waiting for the next electrical command.

Glaring at each other, Mom and Dad faced off in the aisle. He rolled up his left shirt sleeve and shouted at her "Watch this!" He lifted his arm and slammed it down across the three tracks that, at this point, parallel the edge of the layout. In his haste to prove a point, he had forgotten about the metal, Speidel band that secured his watch to his wrist.

Upon contact with the track all the layout lights dimmed and it took a while, several very long seconds for the transformer circuit breakers to kick in. Being emotionally and physically frozen by the incident, I was paralyzed and couldn't act. During these situations, time seems to stop and events seem to proceed in slow motion. Large blue sparks flew out from the spot where the metal wrist band touched the track. They flew upward in gentle arcs and outward bouncing off the table and other tracks. As the heat from the short circuit increased, the wrist band became welded to the rail and the odor of singed hair became noticeable. Trying to free his arm my father pulled up several sections of track while shouting to turn off the power. I obeyed and the layout fell quiet. My mother, remaining silent for a change and seeing that Dad had not been electrocuted, turned and went back upstairs to the kitchen.

Except for the clinking sounds of knives and forks, Christmas dinner, that day, was consumed in silence. Grandpa, who had slept through it all, must have been told by Grandma, to keep his mouth shut. Having changed his clothes, Dad sat at the table with his wrist slathered in chicken fat or some other grease. The wound was protected by several layers of gauze strip which had been tied into a neat bow where, at one time, his watch had been. Mom and Grandma passed food around without question



or discussion. All I wanted to do was finish eating and return to the basement to run the trains.

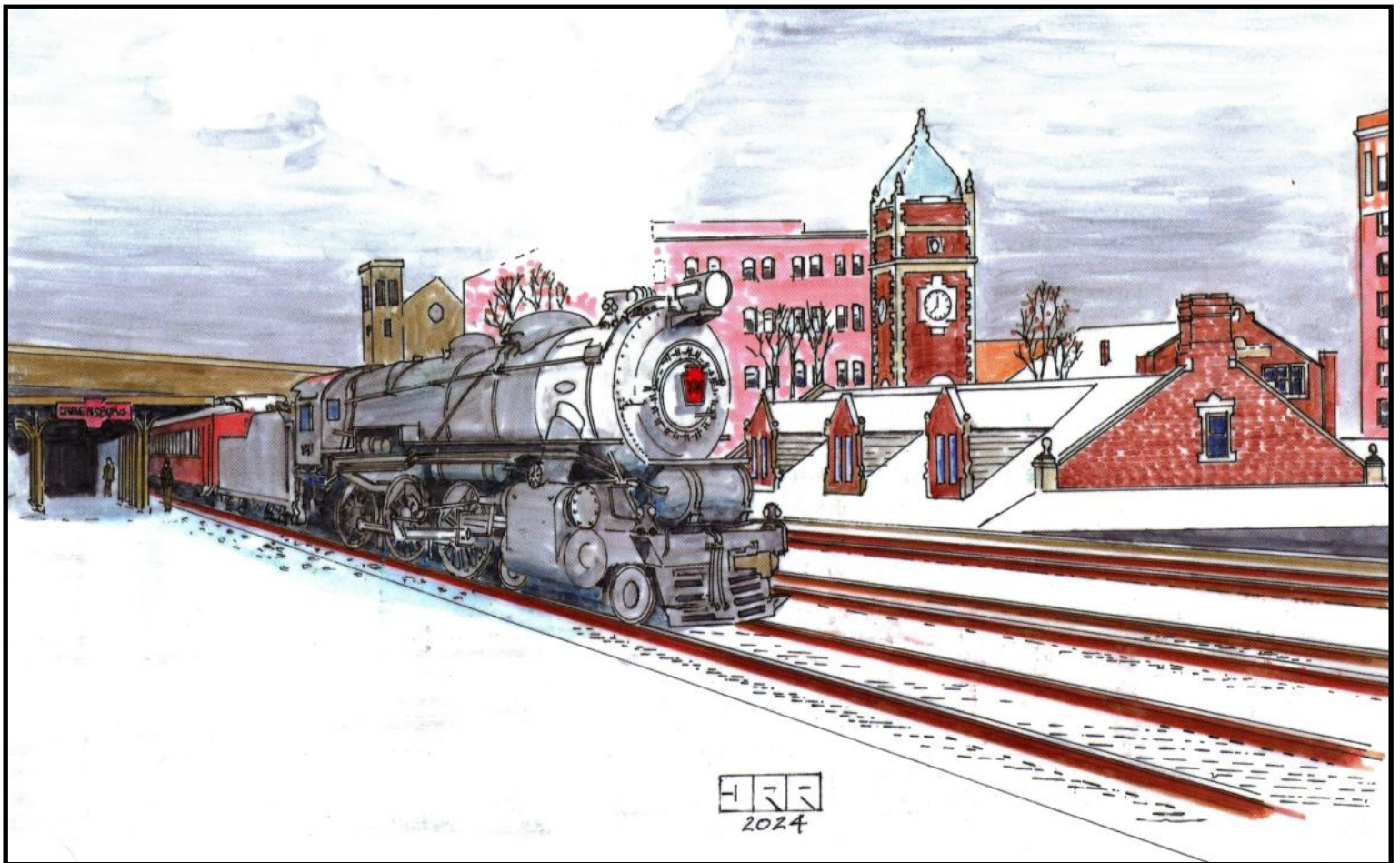
Superintendent's Desk (continued)

With the meal done, I helped Dad do the dishes. Today though, due to his wound, I washed and he dried. Grandpa went back to his wing chair. Grandma helped put away the cleaned dishes and Mom talked to someone on the phone. When all was complete Dad looked down at me and asked, with his usual wry sense of humor, "Well son, what kind of trouble would you like to get into now?" "Could we run the trains again?" I asked. "You bet we can!" was the reply and down to the basement we went.

It was, most certainly, the best Christmas ever.

Thanks Dad, Thanks Mom.

The Art of Jim Rose



On a cold morning amid freshly fallen snow, the G5s locomotive No. 5741 departs Greensburg heading a commuter train to Pittsburgh. (© 2024, James R. Rose, used by permission) This now 100-year-old steam locomotive, built in the Pennsylvania Railroad's Juniata Shops, came to the Museum as one of the pieces from the famed Pennsylvania Railroad Historical Collection and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. No.5741 is on exhibit in Rolling Stock Hall on Track 2 East.

Steamtown Event Recap



A small group of Susquehanna Division members met up at Steamtown National Historic Site in Scranton on October 26, 2024, a beautiful fall Saturday. Seen from left to right in the opening photo are our initial ranger guide and division members Chris Kier, Dean Johnson, William Cowperthwait, David Ellis, and Keith Frantz. Carol, Dean's wife, joined us for part of the tour as well.



Before our scheduled tour we met up behind 4012, the Union Pacific Big Boy, near the parking lot. While this was more of a field trip than a formal meeting, Chris and I had a chance to chat with Keith and William, who had not been able to attend an in-person meet before.

Steamtown Event Recap (continued)



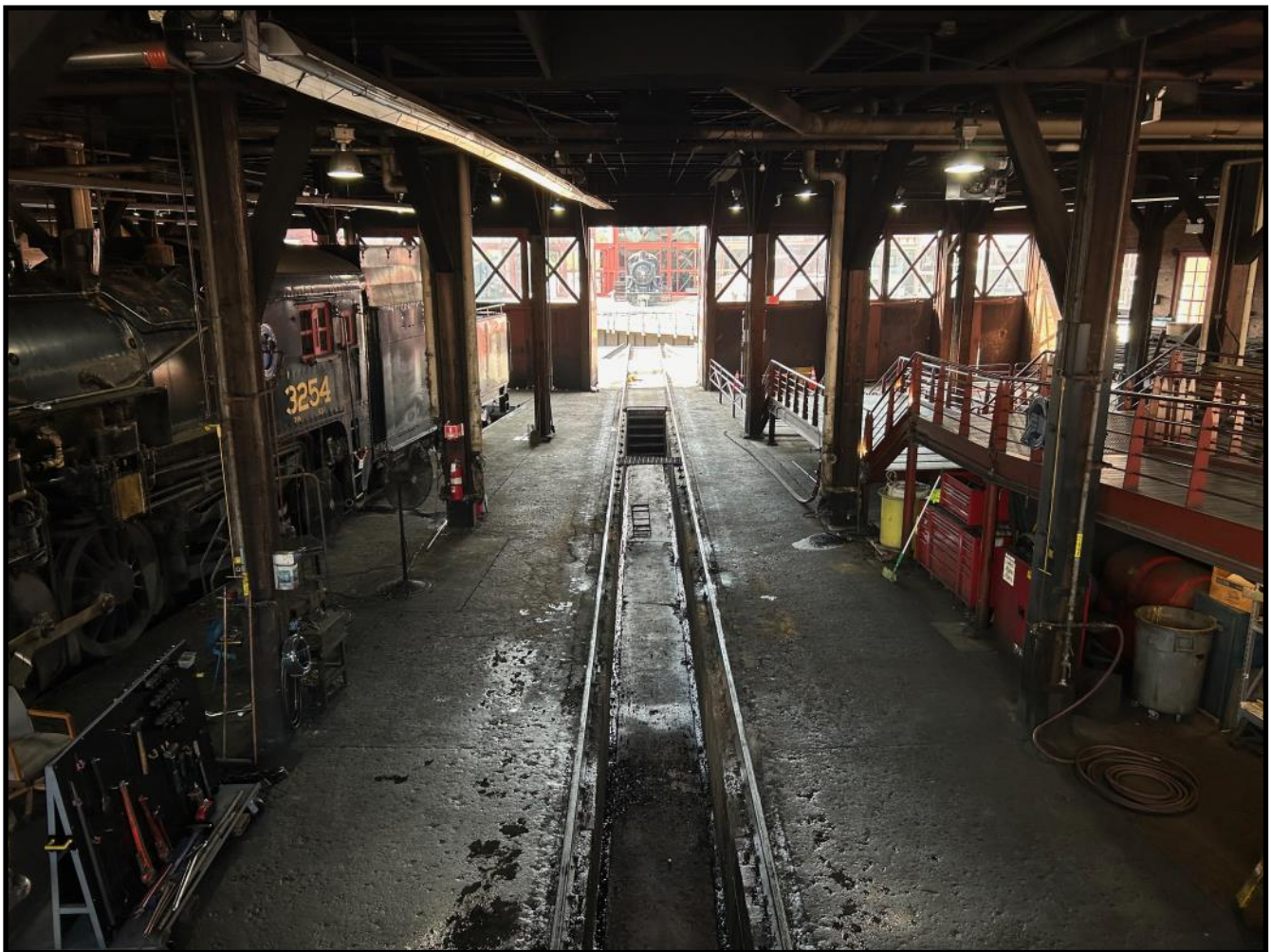
At 10:00 a.m. we met the ranger who would guide us through a history of the former Delaware, Lackawanna, and Western railroad facilities and the development of the Steamtown collection of locomotives and rolling stock. One notable feature during our tour was the demonstration of the 90' turntable in action. A member of the Steamtown staff turned locomotive 2317 on the turntable and answered questions about the locomotive and turntable. Our private tour ended at the cutaway locomotive, and we had some time before joining other patrons of the park on a back-shop tour.

I visited the museum, explored the Louisville and Nashville railway post office car, and checked out some of the rolling stock on display around the turntable and roundhouse before we gathered again for the back-shop tour with Ranger Alex. (As of mid-December, one can watch Ranger Alex giving a virtual tour of the cab of Nickel Plate Road No. 759 on a link from the Steamtown National Historic Site [web page](#).) As he led us to the locomotive repair shops, he explained the history of the various iterations of the roundhouse and repair facilities.



Steamtown Event Recap (continued)

Just as the Steamtown National Historic Site's mission is to preserve the yard, locomotives, and rolling stock, Ranger Alex explained an additional mission is to preserve the facilities and machinery behind the scene. Maintenance, repair, and restoration are a key part of the preservation efforts. In the back-shop he explained the incredibly large industrial machinery and equipment, much of it historic, used to maintain Steamtown's collection. We also saw volunteers and Steamtown staff working on several locomotive restoration projects. Our tour ended back at the roundhouse.



The feedback that I received suggested that the members that attended our meet enjoyed themselves. I was disappointed by the small turnout, though particularly for the folks who opened their layouts for us in the afternoon, as they had few if any visitors. For myself, the effort put into organizing the trip was worthwhile, as I find it a great railroad resource and experience. I highly recommend visiting Steamtown if you have the chance.

Steamtown Event Recap (continued)



Central Railroad of New Jersey Bucyrus Wreck Crane #5



Erie-Lackawanna Railroad steel cupola caboose # C191



Empire Refineries newly painted two-dome tank car #4525



Cut-a-way display of a typical steam locomotive



interior of Louisville & Nashville Railroad #1100 Post Office (RPO) car



boneyard of locomotive parts

article and photos courtesy of David Ellis