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# BUILDER'S PLATE

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July 2019

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**Newsletter of Division 12, Mid Central Region, NMRA, Inc.**

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## Superintendent's Report

Mentoring or teaching is a big part of our responsibly as an NMRA Division. We have an active mentoring list for members that have questions on various subjects. I hope those with questions have reached out for help.

I want to tell you a little something about the mentors I've had and there are many. My father was my first mentor. He could help with layout construction. He could cut a straight line with a handsaw better than most people could with a power saw. But what I really want to tell you about are the modelers that helped me when I was first starting to model as opposed to just running trains in circles.

A few letters back I wrote about the trips to Cleveland and all the hobby shops we would stop at and then go to Harley Smith's Ohio Northern layout for the monthly op session. The three

gentlemen I used to ride with, Chet, John, and Bob, were all an influence on me. At age 15, when I met Chet I was very discouraged as a modeler. Nothing I worked on came out looking like something in the model magazines and I was ready to give it all up.

I was fortunate to have met Chet who introduced me to a whole group of local modelers; my eyes were opened and my love of the hobby was saved. On those many trips the group of us would discuss many modeling ideas and techniques. I would go to their houses and see how they did soldering or spray painting and decaling. I remember on one of our trips the subject was of battery- powered locomotives with some type of radio control. What fantasy, we thought. What we dreamed about then is what we have today as "dead rail DCC."

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## Next Membership Event:

Our next membership meeting will be held on **Saturday, July 13 at 10:00 AM at the Cambridge Springs Trolley Station**. The program will be a presentation on several different weathering techniques with an opportunity to try one yourself if you bring a sheet of horizontal siding. "What's on Your Workbench" will continue with members sharing what they have been working on. Our Social Committee chair is organizing an optional breakfast gathering. Please read his report for the details.

Time passes and there have been other mentors, but it was the first three, Chet, John and Bob, I remember the most. I write this in their honor as the last of the three passed away in June. John and Bob passed away too young, with Chet being the last to go at a very seasoned age of eighty-nine.

To use a quote from a fellow modeler who knew Chet, "I'm sure that right now he's explaining to the afterlife modelers how to modify something to make it accurate."

Happy Model Railroading

Bradley White

Division 12 MCR  
Superintendent



## Division 12, MCR, NMRA, Inc.

*The Alleghany Western Division:*  
Expanding your model railroading horizons

Please visit our website: [www.div12mcr.org](http://www.div12mcr.org)

Or  **NMRAAlleghanyWesternDivision**

## Meetings

Membership meetings typically include announcements and limited business; What's On Your Workbench, during which

members share what they have been working on; and educational model-railroad related programs, presentations, or clinics.

**NMRA:** <https://www.nmra.org/>

**Mid Central Region:**

<http://www.midcentral-region-nmra.org/>

**Division 12 Superintendent:**

[Superintendent@div12mcr.org](mailto:Superintendent@div12mcr.org)



## Officers and BOD

**Superintendent:** Brad White —  
[superintendent@div12mcr.org](mailto:superintendent@div12mcr.org)

**Assistant Superintendent:** Mike Hauk

**Clerk/Treasurer:** Dave Ellis —  
[clerk@div12mcr.org](mailto:clerk@div12mcr.org)

**Board of Directors:** Rob Bennett, Doug Sandmeyer, Chris Mincemoyer

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## Division 12 Upcoming Events

July: **Membership Meeting:** 10:00 AM July 13, 2019 at the Cambridge Springs Trolley Station. Program: Three different weathering techniques with presentation, demonstrations, and an opportunity to try one out.

July: **Jefferson Train Show:** July 20, 2019 in Jefferson, Ohio. We will have our T-TRAK layout and information at this train show.

August: **Membership Meeting:** 10:00 AM August 10, 2019 at the Cambridge Springs Trolley Station. Program: Modeling electrical equipment as large loads, and using DCC lighting decoders.

September: **Allegheny Western Mini-Meet 2019:** 8:00 AM - 5:00 PM September 14, 2019 at the Ambassador Center, 7794 Peach Street, Erie, PA. Information including the registration form and initial clinic list is available at <http://www.div12mcr.org/mini-meet/>.



October: **Membership Meeting:** 10:00 AM October 12, 2019 at the Cambridge Springs Trolley Station. Program: Mini-Meet after-action reflection and ongoing planning for 2021 regional convention.

November: **Erie Train Show:** November 3, 2019 at Rainbow Gardens. Division 12 will have its T-TRAK layout, consignment sales, and information table as well as clinic presentations.

November: **Model Railroad Tours:** November 11, 2019. Division 12 will showcase some of its

members' layouts. We are hoping for better weather this year!

December: **Christmas Party:** December 14, 2019 from 1:00 – 4:00 PM at Hoss's Steak and Sea House in Erie again this year.

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## Upcoming Model Railroad Events

**Greenberg Train Show: July 20 and 21, 2019:** Pittsburgh area public train show located at 209 Mall Blvd, Monroeville, PA 15146 from 10 AM – 4 PM.

**Jefferson Train Show: July 20, 2019:** This train show, swap, and sale is located at 11 East Jefferson Street, Jefferson, Ohio from 10 AM – 3 PM.

**Empire Junction 2019, Northeastern Region NMRA Convention:** September 19-22, 2019, Liverpool Holiday Inn, Syracuse, New York.

Links to these and additional upcoming model railroad events can be found on the Division 12 Website: <http://www.div12mcr.org>

Use the search button on the "Welcome" page or use the "News/Events" page, either by scrolling or clicking on the "Train Shows and Conventions" category link.

If you are aware of upcoming railroad events, please let the *Builder's Plate* editor and the webmaster know, so that we can list them.

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Webmaster: [webeditor@div12mcr.org](mailto:webeditor@div12mcr.org)

## Alleghany Western Mini-Meet Update

Our first major event as a division, the 2019 Alleghany Western Mini-Meet at the Ambassador Center in Erie on September 14 is rapidly approaching. This event is critical for the success of our division, and we are excited to see it coming together. The board of directors of Division 12 has been working together as the Mini-Meet Committee to create this event for the division, its members, and other model railroaders in the region. It is not a train show or a swap meet, but a chance to experience a model railroad convention's atmosphere and activities, including a continental breakfast and afternoon hors d'oeuvres for a reasonable \$28.00 registration for NMRA members.

The participation of our members will be critical for the success of the Alleghany Western Mini-Meet. **Please register sooner rather than later.** It will help us with planning *and* financially. The registration flyer is available on our website: <http://www.div12mcr.org/mini-meet/>, along with information about activities we have planned. The website is regularly updated as we finalize details. In addition to sending in your registration, please consider volunteering for a couple of hours at the event. We will need help at the registration desk, display room, and with the raffle. Remember, we will have white elephant sales. You will be given the option of selling with a 10% commission going to the division or donating the item with the full sale price going to the division. Either way, bring a few model railroad items to sell that no

longer fit your plans. Finally, purchase some raffle tickets at the event; we have some great prizes lined up.

In addition to the overview and asking for your participation, we really do have an update. Rob and I met with the folks at the Ambassador earlier this week to review the space for our event. We have a solid collection of rooms, a spacious hallway, and lobby space all together in the "Hilton Garden" area. CMR will have some vendor space in the entrance lobby and will combine with our T-TRAK participants to have a larger layout set up and running for the day. Over the last few weeks, Doug has gotten a good start on lining up clinics. Some clinics are from our members, and some clinicians are coming from outside our division. The initial list is available on the web site,

<http://www.div12mcr.org/mini-meet/schedule-and-clinics/>. Again, we are doing our best to keep updating the information on the mini-meet web pages as it comes in or is finalized, whether it is new raffle prizes, new clinics, or model railroads to tour or operate.

If you haven't gone online to check out the website, please do so. We are trying our best to make this an outstanding event and to have it sustain us financially. Do your part and register today (if you haven't already). We need maximum Division 12 attendance and support!

David Ellis  
[clerk@div12mcr.org](mailto:clerk@div12mcr.org)

## T-TRAK Committee Report

Scott Benson is looking for someone to manage a T-TRAK modular layout at the Great Berea Train Show, October 5 & 6. The show draws a large crowd every year and this year Division 4 has added another hall with space available for a 16' by 16' T-TRAK layout. With few T-TRAKers in the division they are seeking outside help in organizing the layout. The parking is free and staff would have free entry.

<https://www.thegreatbereatrainshow.org/>

Four of our division members participated in the large modular layout for T-TRAK at the MCR Convention at Boardman, Ohio and enjoyed the experience. It would be great to see more of you out there with your modules. We have a show coming up in Jefferson, Ohio, on July 20. I have updated our T-TRAK Wiki's shows with the exception of this one pending the results of the search for a Berea layout coordinator.

Doug Sandmeyer  
[ttrak@div12mcr.org](mailto:ttrak@div12mcr.org)

## Social Committee Report

I am happy to report our 2019 annual picnic was a success on Saturday June 8. In my opinion Dick Bradley summed it up best in his report to the Conewango Switch Tenders:

*"On June 8th at Gale Street  
we had a real nice picnic.  
I'm really glad I went.  
The weather was perfect.  
The people were fine.*

*And the trains ran by.*

*Eastbound: CSX mixed, on CSX a BNSF ethanol, CSX stack with mid train power, on CSX Amtrak, NS stack, NS mixed*

*Westbound: CSX mixed, on CSX a CP short stack--one locomotive, CSX ethanol--four units and loong.*

*Lee estimated the food just right and the shared dishes had good variety. Brad and Lee handled the grilling. I ate well.*

*Over three dozen people came, many spouses and lots of good friends. Many members of Division 12 came from long distances. Roger Schulenberg represented the Independent Railroaders and I represented the Conewango Switch Tenders." – Dick Bradley*

Thanks Dick, I appreciate the fine review.

Brad and I were the Grill Masters for the event.



Here is a link to pictures from the picnic. (You may have to copy and paste the link into your browser's address bar.)

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/EEckbLN1ALQkRoMh6>



At the picnic Dick Bradley received the 2019 Russ Wenderfer Award, Mid-Central Region's award for the promotion of the hobby of model railroading. It was awarded to him at the regional convention in May, but there wasn't an opportunity until the picnic for Brad, our Division Superintendent, to present the plaque to him in person.



I have some concerns about the picnic at Westfield Rail Park. We were told that a portable toilet would be at the park and because of past experience I believed this to be true. However one was not there and that was unacceptable. In providing food and beverage to the public, rest room facilities are mandatory (McDonalds for example). However, their restrooms are not there for the benefit of non-patrons. Next year we'll need to have a solution. One possibility is to rent our own unit and if the

park has a unit that day, then there will be two units available.

Also unexpected was the lack of a key needed to unlock the grills. Fortunately Jason had his toolbox and was able to free the grills for use. Next year we need to have that key in hand. Better yet would be a combination lock.

Feeding the multitude concerned me. Reservations came in from the core group I pictured from the previous year so we had enough and more for those attendees, but the invitation was open so I imagined the possibility we could run out of food. We had plenty though, so my fear was assuaged for this year.

On the other hand, weather could have the opposite effect on attendance and make for an unpleasant time. While the weather was perfect again this year, the weather could choose to not cooperate on our picnic day. I think for the future we should have an alternate plan for uncertain weather.

I plan on meeting with the Division 12 board of directors to try to brainstorm some solutions to these issues.

**Next up** is breakfast at the Venango General Store, 8 AM on July 13<sup>th</sup>. RSVP [social@div12mcr.org](mailto:social@div12mcr.org) by July 12<sup>th</sup> and I will make our reservation.

**Time to order Division 12 apparel for fall at the July meeting.** We are now offering the Men's K500LS and Ladies L500LS navy long-sleeve polos. They will have our logo embroidered on the left chest and your first name on the right the same as a short-sleeve polo. The cost per shirt will be \$35.00 plus 10% handling. Aprons, suggested by Mike Hauk, are also available. We have two: the A600 full-length and the A601 medium-length navy aprons with two

pockets and a pen pocket. The division logo will be embroidered center chest and either apron is \$19.00 plus 10% handling. You may also select any other item already in our catalog. If we place our order between July 15 and July 24, our order will be ready for our August 10 meeting. Get your merchandise in time for our Mini-Meet and all the other upcoming fall events!

[Pinterest](#) [Order form](#)

Lee Farnsworth

[social@div12mcr.org](mailto:social@div12mcr.org)

## Brick and Mortar Hobby Stores in Division 12

We have a dearth of train stores here in the division. Several that exist are in New York State. If you visit them, let them know you are a member of the NMRA and you learned about them from the Division 12 newsletter.

### Terry's Train Shop

1739 Foote Ave Ext.  
Jamestown, NY 14701

716-397-5545

### East Dyke Depot

332 E. Dyke Street  
Wellsville, NY 14895

585-593-0005

## Mentoring in Division 12

At a membership meeting last fall, we discussed several approaches to offering mentoring in the division. Ultimately, we decided the best

approach was to keep it simple, or at least informal. We came up with starting a list of members who felt comfortable mentoring on specific topics. To contact the mentors, either email the clerk ([clerk@div12mcr.org](mailto:clerk@div12mcr.org)), who will forward your email, or contact them directly.

- Brad White: DCC, Signaling
- Dave Ellis: Backdrops
- Ed Blenner: Scenery
- Doug Sandmeyer: Benchwork, Wiring, Soldering

## Modeler's Project:

Brad White

What project is on my workbench? I finally acquired an ABA set of ERIE RR Stewart F3s. I had a spare Sound Traxx Tsunami sound decoder so I thought I'd install it in one of the A units. It's a pretty easy install as the decoder is a direct replacement for the light board that comes in the engine.

The speaker I had on hand was pretty big--40mm x 20mm. That meant I had to mill out some of the frame to get it to fit. (Side note: I finally decided using my drill press as a mill does not work well. My new mini mill will be delivered next week.)

So once I made up a speaker box out of .040 styrene it was too wide and just a little long.



Ok, now I need a smaller speaker. Ordering one from Walthers or one of the DCC dealers would take about a week to get here and I really wanted to work on it over the 4<sup>th</sup> of July weekend. Then I thought, “What about Amazon-- they have everything.”

I did a search and found some 25mm x 15mm, 1-watt 8-ohm speakers. They were sold in a 4 pack for \$9.95? Less than \$2.50 for a speaker, I thought what's there to lose.



So I placed the order Monday night and had them Wednesday afternoon, and by 5:00 PM I found that they were a disappointment. I could not get enough volume out of them to hear the prime mover. I could hear the bell and horn okay, but not great. I think they would be great for background sounds.

I'm just going to place an order with Walthers and wait the week.

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## Some Thoughts on Operating Sessions: Considering “People Things”

Bill Schopf

Operating sessions can create — if done well — some of the most fun we enjoy in this hobby. We interact with friends in the

environment we all love — the train room. We meet new people. We learn what we are doing well or not so well. We can watch multiple trains running on our layouts at one time — something that rarely, if ever, happens when we operate solo.

But setting up for an operating session? Not so fun. Planning and figuring out what to do? Not so simple. Most experienced layout owners say it takes hours and hours, if not days, to ready a layout for operations. I certainly agree. Things need cleaned and sorted. Lots of things — from the room itself to the track to the engines to the cars. Paperwork is intense. Figuring out the train schedule can overwhelm the time restraints most of us work under. To run really well-orchestrated op sessions takes years of practice and learning and mistakes. But mistakes can be corrected — eventually.

In the few sessions I've hosted I've discovered there are more things to think about than just cleaning the track and arranging a schedule. These are, of course, critical to the session's success. Assuming you have the layout and the schedules down pat there are lots of what I call “people things” — some obvious and some not so obvious — to consider.

People, of course, are the heart of op sessions. Without people, there are no operations. But whom do you invite to your next op session? Whom do you not invite? How many do you invite? What do the people you invite like to do in op sessions? What do they not like to do? How can you develop a scheme to make your guests happy? Let me tell you, it ain't easy. Let's leave TT&TO and track cleaning alone for now and think just about how people should inform how we set up our op sessions.

**How many operators:** This is critical. Almost every model railroad has some limit on the number of bodies the railroad room

will comfortably hold. Some of the best-known layouts in the country can handle up to two-dozen operators at a time. Not many of us have that luxury.

First, consider your aisle space. Where will human pileups and traffic jams occur? How many operators can comfortably work in each area of your railroad? It would be ideal to have two-person crews for every train (engineer and conductor), but can you run four trains at one time with two operators per train plus yard crews plus dispatchers and not have bodies clanging against each other? When in doubt, size down on the number of people you invite. If that number works well, try upping it the next time and gauge how that works. You will know when you and your train room has reached its threshold.

Sometimes smaller and simpler is better just because it is less stressful. Mike Hauk, for example, simply doesn't want to have the stress of a dozen or more operators working his S&NY even though his layout room is one of the roomiest I have been in and could probably accommodate far more operators than he prefers. An operating session should be fun for the owner as well as the guests. If something stresses you or aggravates you, eliminate it. Mike chooses around a half dozen because that is what he personally is comfortable with and what his operating scheme calls for. Remember this. It is your railroad and you can do whatever you want. Don't be overly influenced by what others are doing or what Model Railroader or Tony Koester claims you should do.

**Who to invite:** Here is where it gets tricky. Where is your layout located? Most layouts are either in a basement or an attic. If they are located on a main floor in your home, then you have one wonderful spouse and should name the railroad after her! Typically, though, this doesn't happen. Is your layout up multiple flights of stairs and in an attic (like mine)? Are there physical

limitations to accessing your layout? Do you have duckunders or crawl-unders that mandate a guest must crawl sometimes to do his work? If so, consider the physical conditions of people you'd like to invite. Someone who has just had knee replacement surgery might not be the ideal guest to run my staging. Do I ask him to come up 2 1/2 flights of stairs and then crawl a couple of feet under a duck-under to operate the staging area? I don't think so.

Do your trains involve a lot of time and switching? Does a typical job for one of your trains take 30-60 minutes? Or do your trains pretty much start at Point A and finish at Point B five minutes later with virtually no switching or stopping? Many model railroaders detest switching. It is simply a fact of life. They are perfectly happy holding a throttle and simply running a train from origin to destination — or even better around and around in multiple loops on a continuous run layout. If you over-hear a lot of four-letter "compliments" from someone assigned a delicate switching job, then you have a pretty good idea you have the wrong person in the wrong place.

Others love switching and thinking through complex operational problems. So if you have a layout that relies heavily on switching, then you might not want to impose on someone who you know really doesn't like to do that. And trust me. One time on your layout and you will learn who likes or doesn't like the operating concept or what they have been assigned. They will tell you — either directly or indirectly. If someone really detests a lot of switching, assign them a through freight with few or no stops. Or assign that person a passenger train that simply stops at various stations. That person will be happy and will also be performing a critical part of your operations — running a through freight or a passenger train.

And some model railroaders have no desire to operate at all. I once asked an O gauge friend of mine from Erie to come out and operate with us during a session. When I described what an op session was like, he simply said, "I can't think of anything worse." But that's okay. He does what he enjoys and he doesn't do what he doesn't enjoy. There is room in the hobby for everyone. Don't be offended if you get this response.

And don't be offended if someone implies or tells you directly they really don't like what you're doing all that much. Don't take it personally. It is not an insult to your birthright. A guest has told me, "Bill, you have a nice railroad but you have no idea how to run it." Of course I bristled a bit inside because I thought I had some idea what I was doing. But he might have been dead-on right. And maybe if I had listened and didn't get up my hackles, I could have learned from what he was telling me.

Simply put, not every model railroad is for every person. As you operate more and more you will come to learn who synchs well with what you are trying to do. Stick with these people for op sessions and invite the others to your next non-ops open house. You can have all kinds of friends. Some drive Hondas and some drive Fords. And some like to operate and some just don't.

**Regulars and newbies:** Then there is the issue of "regular crews." This opens up a shelf full of worm cans. Personally, I probably feel more comfortable with people I know can handle the more complex jobs — in my case the yards at Diamond and East Centralia and the staging duties in Reading/Wilkes Barre. But how about new people? How do we include our regulars and blend in the newer operators?

Maybe some kind of mix — three regulars and four new people or four

regulars and four new people. Or whatever works. Maybe start a new person with a train that might have only stops with minimal — if any— pickups or setouts. That way the new person can get the feel of the railroad — the arrangement and names of the towns, an engineer's view of the yards and the crossings and the turnouts. The next assignment might have two stops with a bit more work. But to begin someone with a complex switching puzzle might not encourage them to come back. Remember that no one — absolutely no one — visiting your railroad for the first time will have a clue of what you are doing. Operating any model railroad has a long and unique learning curve.

I know that if I have less to explain and oversee in a session, fewer problems will pop up and I'll be less stressed. So, on the one hand it's a lot easier to run a session with the old regulars. They know what to do and they just go out and do it. But, on the other hand, it's fun to introduce new people into your railroad. And as NMRA members, we are under a directly stated corporate mandate to get new people interested in model railroading. Mike Hauk recently had an op session on TT&TO strictly for people who had never used a timetable or train orders. It seems to me that what Mike did was exactly the direction we need to go. We need more of that.

What if we started including an educational part of each op session — a teaching instrument or an instructional mini-session where operators would be taught about a specific railroad, a specific job, a specific railroad practice? Maybe mini-sessions that would introduce operators to a particular prototype railroad or, for another example, prototype railroading in general in northwestern Pennsylvania? Or what about a mini-instructional session during a regular session on operating a coal or ore dock, switching a large industry like an oil refinery or a transformer plant,

prototype practices used in coal breakers, use of helper engines on steam layouts, switching a specific town on a specific railroad, operating with track warrants, operating with a sequence method, signals in general and signaling on a particular railroad, how JMRI works, use of interlocking towers. The list could go on and on. These mini-sessions would not have to be long — maybe 20-30 minutes. But they would add lots to the other aspects of the session — namely running trains and switching industries. And people — both the experienced regulars and those new people who are filtering into the hobby — would leave knowing a lot more than they did before about railroading in general and operating in particular.

However we choose to accomplish it, we must figure out ways to encourage new people into operations without offending “regulars” who might not have been invited because of lack of space. It’s a really hard call, but I’d hope most people would understand that not everyone can be invited to every op session. Personally, this is what I most dislike about having an op session — a “did-not-get-invited” list. It’s not a pretty chore.

#### **Crew lounges and food and drinks:**

Personally I would kill for a lounge like the one Mike has in his home or the one that Rob Bennett will have when he gets his layout nearer completion. Mike’s is in his large basement area but physically removed from the layout itself. Rob’s will be in an adjoining room totally separated from his Pennsy layout. Both have (or will have) comfortable seating, televisions, DVDs, reading material and an enjoyable place for snacks and drinks.

Me? I’m lucky to have an area large enough to squeeze in four folding chairs for operators to sit between trains or when they tire. But the point is that I have chairs. People get tired. I’m blessed so far with a pretty good pair of hips but when I stand for

a couple of hours, my legs start crying and I need to sit down. It’s a basic fact of life for most of us. Especially for those of us who are older.

You will absolutely have guests for whom the chair is critical whether it is age or knees or hips or whatever. Try somehow to accommodate that. Someone may run one train and then be perfectly content to sit for the rest of the session and enjoy conversation. This is okay. That’s why I think it is critical for me to have the minimal creature comforts I can squeeze in — the folding chairs, a chair in the staging area where a yard man can sit while working the two staging yards, and the chair at my work desk that is usually available unless someone is working the coal breaker immediately behind it.

On the issue of food and drinks? Water bottles are probably critical. Especially in a warm environment. And the more people packed into a room the warmer it will become. Most layouts I have operated on offer snacks and soft drinks. I’m a bit different. I have a cooler of water bottles but no other drinks or food allowed in the railroad room. Why? I guess I’m scarred by my memory that at one of Lou Millard’s op sessions I knocked over a soft drink onto the edge of his layout. I will never get over it. Lou, of course, as Lou always is, was gracious and understanding. But I am still mortified. So that is why pizza and Coke won’t be offered up between trains on the Baltimore and Lehigh. This is an important decision that you will have to make for yourself.

**Human safety concerns:** Attics or basements with steep stairs can always be a safety hazard. Part of my own wondrously thought-out track plan involves having a four-track coal breaker that holds nine cars several feet back over the top of the stairway. To operate and throw turnouts (manual, of course ... what else would you expect from such an ingenious design)

involves leaning over the top step. Not a good idea. So I installed a hinged single-board gate that swings across the top step when everyone is up in the room. Now no one can fall down the stairs. A critical thing to remember is this. Not everyone is familiar with your layout room. If you have a split-level floor with step downs or step ups, mark them. Obviously, avoid power cords stretched across the floor. People are concentrating on trains, not the floor, and could well trip.

A year or so ago, I had the realization that I had no banister on my stairwell. Not a good idea, so I installed one. Mike in one of his recent blog postings on his S&NY website wrote on the same thing and had the same realization. He had an op session coming up and no railing for his visitors to hold on to as they traveled the steps. So he fixed it. Not a sexy and great addition to the railroad but certainly a very important one. Look at your room and study it carefully. Where could an accident or disaster happen? Then try to correct it.

**Keeping operators busy:** How busy do you want your operators to be? As discussed earlier, some people would prefer to run a train or two and just converse the rest of the time. If this is what you would like your sessions to be like, then run a light schedule of trains with departure times staggered far apart. Many owners operate this way and it provides great social interaction. Running a couple dozen trains and moving a couple of hundred cars during a session might work beautifully for some. But it might not work for others. More is not always better. You have to decide what works for you.

However, if you want everyone to be busy for most of the session and you want to run a life-like shift, then plan your sequence of trains and identify crews that will run each. For example, Road Crew #1 might run Trains 11, 23, and 44. Road Crew #2 might run Trains 3, 17, and 37. How many

road crews will you have? How many yardmasters? All this takes a ton of thought and planning and will constantly evolve. Once you think you have the answer, suddenly you will realize you have no answer at all and will move on to something else. But someday it will all click.

**Job assignments:** You can email invitees, list the jobs and have them choose what they want. Or if you know your operators well, then you can play it more safely and assign them jobs based on previous experiences. For example, I know Mike does not like loading coal with my coal dumper in Burnt. He told me. (That's okay, Mike). However, I know he likes running yards and he likes having cars unblocked to make it more challenging. So maybe I'll assign him the large Diamond yard job and know he'll be happy. Jason Graves has run Dale Desser's Brensdale yard for years and knows how yards work. I know he likes doing yard work and can handle any yard assignment. Brad White is great at dispatching and likes it, so if he doesn't mind I will let him dispatch the railroad in the future knowing that things will run smoothly. Ron Prindle, a friend of mine from Erie, loves working the East Centralia yard. So he'll get that assignment just because it will increase his enjoyment.

Should you mix it up and assign people different jobs every time? Make Ron run a coal train, make Mike handle staging, put Brad on a coal loader, set up Jason on a local, put Dale in a yard he's never handled before? Maybe. Maybe not. You will have to read your operators and play it from there.

**Length of sessions:** This is a tough one. Should they be four hours? Two hours? Op 'til you drop? There is no right answer here. Each layout owner has his own preference. But the general rule would be this: at what point on the clock does it become no longer fun, but drudgery. Every owner has his own preference. Mine is 2 1/2

to 3 hours — TOPS. But that is just a personal preference. If operators have travelled a long distance to run your trains, maybe then consider lengthening out the session to make the travel worth their while. But you might want to consider breaks in a session that long.

Some Division 12 members have spent a weekend running Bruce Chubb's nationally known railroad in western Michigan. They ran Friday night, all day Saturday and finished off Sunday morning. Brad White just returned from a weekend long series of op sessions in Michigan where he ran different railroads all weekend. Dale Desser and Jason Graves last fall attended an "Op 'Til You Drop" weekend running trains on Syracuse area railroads. Some members regularly spend a weekend running layouts on OpSig tours in central and eastern Pennsylvania. Me? I'd collapse by Saturday noon. But that's just me.

**Finally, make it fun.** It is only an op session for crying out loud so don't do what I've read and heard that some owners do. Don't give out pink slips for screwing up. Don't demote someone to the bottom of the job seniority list for messing up an assignment. That's a sure way to get that person never to return. As the CEO don't fine your "employees" for "errors." Don't reprimand and stand over the shoulders of someone and criticize their mistakes. Operations should be fun. Not punishment.

That's not to say that a little guidance and advice from the owner is a bad thing. It is not. It is often necessary and probably welcomed by your guest. But there is a difference between patience and yelling. Mike told me of his recent experience running a well-known model railroad in central Pennsylvania where the owner tolerated no mistakes and clearly announced his displeasure. Loudly. Not good.

Once at Mike's, I held up his entire railroad for 45 minutes while I tried to

untangle the switching nightmare I created at his Newberry yard. Did Mike yell at me? No. He probably wanted to but is too nice! He simply smiled, patiently accepted it and moved on. Eventually the mess was cleared up and the session proceeded. Again, this stuff is fun. If it becomes work and tedium and stress and anger, then let's all quit the NMRA and start collecting baseball cards. Have faith that eventually all of us will get our railroads operating smoothly without too many hiccups and that we will learn to operate each other's railroads with minimal foul-ups.

So how do you set up an op session? Design one that is fun for you and others and not stressful. Think about these "people things" and try to implement some if you can. You may have to keep trying. But try and try again. Change it up and then change it up again. Always be flexible and think outside the box. Operations are the lifeblood of the hobby. We have to make them work to keep the hobby alive. We simply have to.

## Committee Chairs and Volunteer Positions:

Achievement Program: Mike Hauk  
[ap@div12mcr.org](mailto:ap@div12mcr.org)

Newsletter: Dave Ellis  
[clerk@div12mcr.org](mailto:clerk@div12mcr.org)

Operations Coordinator: Dale Desser  
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## A Regular Column: The Modeler's Workbench

This month by: Dick Bradley

This will be the third in a regular series that features several tools or products that Division 12 members find indispensable on their workbench — things that their modeling efforts would be crippled without. **Think about several of your favorite tools or products and submit them to the newsletter. We would all like to read about them.**

### Tweezers

At work in the mid 1960s I was issued a pair of stainless steel watchmaker's tweezers. I liked them, and I paid the fee for a "lost" small tool when I left that employer in 1972. I still use them as my first go to tweezer. Still visible is the engraved manufacturer: #1, A. Dumont & Fils, Switzerland. A well-made tool used appropriately lasts a long time. My second favorite tweezer has very fine tips. The white paint on the safe end helps me avoid sticking the sharp tips into me. These sharp pointed tweezers have lasted a long time. The brass tweezers are for use around magnets. Brass tweezers are not magnetic; they can keep wires in place near speakers and motors. The tips of the brass tweezers are not very stiff and these tweezers need a soft grip and sometimes realignment.



Yes, in the toolbox there are several other specialized tweezers. The "pearl" and "stamp" tip styles are sometimes just the right tweezer to hold an odd shaped item.

### Painting Saga

When they first came out in the mid 1960s I tried a couple of scenery colors of Polly S paints. I did not like them. By the mid 1970s reformulation and new railroad colors led me to try them again. I deemed them to be good paints for brushing but not with the spraying ability of Floquil. Articles in the modeling magazines taught me how to spray Polly S and it became my preferred paint. Now it is gone and I must find a new paint.



Many craft acrylic paints are on the store shelves, and I have tried several

brands of them. The Apple Barrel brand at Wal-Mart is cheap. Craft stores have other, more expensive, brands with wider color selections. I find that they all brush paint well. They clean with water. Some colors have recognizable names – burnt sienna – others need a guess – Georgia clay.



To try to keep track of the colors I label the end of a blank 3 x 5 card with the brand and color and paint a sample on the rest of the card. They don't come in colors labeled for railroads. The colors can be mixed. I have an acceptable 'boxcar red' made with equal amounts of iron oxide red and iron oxide brown. The article by Gregory M. La Rocco in the June, 2015 issue of *Railroad Model Craftsman* showed how to alter them for airbrush use. Following these instructions I find that they air brush excellently. Craft acrylic paints are now my most used paint for models.

Look into the web site for Plaid Industries:

<https://plaidonline.com/about/company>

Under the products tab you'll find that several of the widely distributed craft acrylic paint brands are made by Plaid Industries. Within a brand name link are lists of colors and accessories. There are

also links to articles and videos on the use of their products.

### Elmer's Carpenter's Wood Filler

It is in the paint section of hardware stores. It comes in several sizes of plastic cup containers.



Resealed after use it has a long lifetime. It appears to be a mixture of wood flour and carpenter's glue. I use it on wood, plaster, fiberboard and plastic. It cures slowly giving ample working time. It sands well. It paints well. Tools clean with water. Clean tools promptly; once cured, the filler is hard to remove.

Water can thin the uncured filler. Moderately thinned, I use it as filler for gaps in kitbashed plastic models. I fill dimples and unwanted holes in molded models. I use it as a putty to build up parts of figures. Between the rails it can be neatly molded into grade crossings. It fills holes after fascia revision. When a flangeway at the tip of a frog is too deep I fill it with thick filler. When cured I file it to shape and then saturate it with thin super glue.

### Glue Applicator

This is a do-it-yourself project. Start with an empty and cleaned two-liter soda pop bottle. Use heavy-duty cutters to remove each of the lobes at the

bottom. Clean up rough edges with sandpaper. From the curved portion at the top cut five segments. Now you have ten glue holders. They will tip and move about as you try to use them. From your scrap box select as a base a piece of cardboard, plastic or metal a bit larger than the glue holder. Use Walthers Goo or Aileen's Tacky or a similar product to stick the glue holder to the middle of the base.



For the glue applicator it's back to the scrap box for a piece of wood. The wood should be rectangular so it doesn't roll about. It should have a cross section somewhere between 1/8 and 1/4 inch. The length should be somewhere between 1.5 and 3 inches. Pick sizes which feel right in your hands. Cut a piece of very stiff 0.015 wire about 1.5 inches long. Detail Associates Stainless Steel part No. 3505 works very well. Tightly holding the wire in pliers force it on center and into the end of the wood. Leave about an inch showing.

To use the glue holder and applicator put a drop or two of glue in the holder. Dip the applicator wire in the glue. Hold the applicator vertical for a moment. A small drop will form on the end of the wire. With the applicator transfer the droplet of glue to your

model. From time to time wipe the wire clean.

Glues with slow evaporation and watery consistency can be used. I've used white glue, yellow carpenter's glue, both thin and medium super glue and canopy glue. The soda pop bottle material seems to resist these glues very well. The glue holder can be wiped or washed clean for reuse. Both fast evaporating glues – liquid plastic cement - and thick glues – Goo - do not work with this tool. However, if you want to use a similar gluing tool to apply thick glues from their containers make another applicator with a heavier wire. Detail Associates No. 2509, 0.033 brass rod works well to transfer and spread the thick glues.

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## A Preview of Saturday's Presentation:

Rob Bennett on Vallejo Acrylic Washes and Mig Pigments



To me, this hobby should be simple and relaxing. Too many model railroaders seem to think every task or project needs to be a complex, NASA funded science project. Hogwash. In terms of

weathering I have "simplified" my life and found the following items to cover nearly all of the weathering tasks I needed to accomplish.

For structures, details, and now even rolling stock I rely on Vallejo acrylic washes and Ammo of MIG pigments. Both lines have many choices, but I have settled on the ones below and rarely need to reach for others:

Vallejo Washes:

76.505 Light Rust

76.507 Dark Rust

76.512 Dark Green

76.515 Light Grey

76.517 Dark Grey

76.524 Blue Grey

Ammo of MIG Pigments:

3001 Black

3004 Europe Earth

3005 Medium Rust

3007 Dark Earth

3008 Track Rust

The entire range of both lines is available at [Scalehobbyist.com](http://Scalehobbyist.com). Look in the Paint section under Specialty Paints and then by MFG. There is a plethora of other useful items as well, but that is a topic for another article.

The beauty of these items is that the Vallejo washes can be mixed with their entire paint line as well as the MIG pigments. Many different weathering effects can easily be achieved.

The use of these items will be covered in much more detail at our July 2019 meeting where I will demonstrate the use of the items to weather structure, rolling stock and paper pattern sheets. Simple. Easy. Life is good

## To publish the *Builder's Plate* we need submissions!

Modeler's tips, modeler's projects, the new "Modeler's Workbench" column, or any other railroad or modeling related stories make excellent submissions. Any member can submit a short article.

To make our membership meetings less business-focused and include more model railroading fun, we also need reports from the officers and committee chairs submitted to the *Builder's Plate*.

Write it up and submit it as a minimally formatted Word document attached to an email to [clerk@div12mcr.org](mailto:clerk@div12mcr.org). Photos are best formatted as JPEGs. Next month, I will publish an article on simple tricks for photography for the *Builder's Plate*, thinking that some folks may be hesitant to submit because they feel "they are not photographers."

## NMRA Partnership Program

The NMRA Partnership Program is a member benefit that truly has a tangible payback. The NMRA has partnered with model railroad manufacturers of all sizes, giving them exposure on the NMRA website in return for receiving generous discounts for NMRA members all year long. Some provide members with special codes, others prefer a phone or email order, but all appreciate the additional business from our members.

For complete descriptions of the partners, the discount they offer, and instructions on applying the discount on your order visit the NMRA Partnership website (<https://www.nmra.org/partnerships>). If you are not signed in as a member, you will only see a list of the partners offering the discounts. To see the instructions on how to apply the discounts you need to register or log in as a registered member. If you have not registered, here is an [FAQ](#) with instructions for how to register at the NMRA website.