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# BUILDER'S PLATE

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May 2020

Volume 3, Issue 4

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

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## Superintendent's Report

I saw a comment online that only model railroaders will survive this COVID-19 pandemic, as we are happy to lock ourselves away in our model railroad rooms. From what I've been seeing in emails, text messages, and Facebook posts, a number of you are making great progress on your layouts. Hopefully we will be seeing your progress reports in future issues of the *Builders Plate*.

I think it safe to say our May meeting will be cancelled, as we are concerned for the health and safety of our members. Our board of directors will be meeting (virtually) in the near future to brainstorm how to best deal with this time of uncertainty.

Helping others in the hobby is still something we all can do, just not in person right now. This past weekend a person posted a request on an online model railroad group that he was in

need of one connector for the Digitrax signal system cable. As far as he knew the only way to buy them was in multiple packs, from Digitrax or a retailer that has them in stock. I just happen to have a rather large stash of the very same connectors. I purchased mine in bulk from All Electronics, an online retailer, at a fraction of the price. I contacted the person in need for his address and dropped them in the mail on Monday morning. All I asked in return was that he pay it forward. He informed me that he already did by donating a large amount of track from an old layout to a local model railroad group.

It was announced that this year's Mid Central Region Convention, which was to have been in Pittsburgh, has been canceled.

This means ours, *The Northern Express*, is up next. We are still very much in need of a person to run the

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## Next Membership Events:

As the Division 12 board of directors is concerned for the health and safety of our members, **we have decided to suspend membership meetings at this time.** We will issue advice on later meetings as events unfold. Our decision was based on Pennsylvania's statewide COVID-19 mitigation efforts announced by the governor on March 17, 2020.

Please, before heading to any events, especially train shows, check their website to see if they are still occurring! Many state and local officials are limiting the number of folks that can attend events. Please be aware of and follow all protocols from the CDC and state and local officials.

convention website. If life does return to normal, we could have a very good turnout for next year's convention. Word is that Pittsburgh will now host the 2023 MCR convention. In 2022 a tri-regional will be held in Indianapolis, as the national convention will be held in England.

It should also be noted that the plans for this year's Division 12 Mini-Meet are somewhat fluid. We are still planning to have some version of it, as we have a contract with the Ambassador Center. The board has been discussing options for the September event and will be seeking input from our membership.

Lastly, on Friday, April 24 the NMRA held what they called "NMRA-X". This was made up of twenty-four hours of live clinics from around the world broadcast on Facebook Live. I was able to watch parts of four clinics; Using iPhone Speakers for Sound Installations, Intro to Model Railroading, Using a Raspberry Pi for running JMRI, and Model Railroading as Art. Despite a few technical hiccups, it mostly went very well. I saw that at one point over twelve hundred people were watching one clinic. I hope some of you were aware of this event. I found out about it a day or two before. The plan is to post the clinics on YouTube in the near future.

Happy Model Railroading!

Bradley White

Superintendent, MCR Division 12



### **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)



The *Builder's Plate* is a publication of Division 12, Mid Central Region, NMRA. All opinions expressed are those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect those of Division 12, the MCR, or the NMRA.

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

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

## Division 12 Upcoming Events

May: **Membership Meeting:** May 9, **has been cancelled!**

May: **Steel City Express, MCR Convention:** May 28 - 31, **has been cancelled!**

## Upcoming Model Railroad Events

Links to additional upcoming model railroad events as they develop can be found on the Division 12 Website: <http://www.div12mcr.org>  
At this point in time, no public events are scheduled for the near future in the tri-state area.



Mike Hauk's son, Chris, has added the dates to the *Northern Express* logo, and the Mid Central Region will use the new version as they begin promoting.

## Division 12 Updates

The division, like much in our lives, has been impacted by the reaction to the unfolding COVID-19 pandemic. Division 12 activities for the near future have been suspended or postponed. The status of events as we move into later spring and summer is still unclear. We will continue to keep the membership informed through our website and future *Builder's Plates*, as the board of directors figures out how to meet virtually to reconfigure our plans.

As Brad White mentioned in his Superintendent's Letter, many model railroaders are using the "stay at home" time to work on their railroads or hobby areas. Several of our articles this month describe the different projects our members have taken on during this time.

Thank you,

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

## Mentoring in Division 12

After discussing several approaches to offering mentoring in the division, 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

## Brick and Mortar Hobby Stores in Division 12

Right now is not the time to travel to visit a hobby store, but when the COVID-19 restrictions are lifted, the local shops could use your support. When the time comes to 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

### **Bova's Music and Train Shoppe**

31 McClurg Street  
Westfield, NY 14787  
716-326-6891

## Brick and Mortar Hobby Stores Near Division 12

### **Hobby Express**

[www.hobbyexpressinc.com](http://www.hobbyexpressinc.com)

1713 Route 228  
Cranberry Twp., PA 16066

### **Mercer Junction**

<https://mercerjunction.com>

151 North Diamand Street  
Mercer, PA 16137

If you are using this time to work on your railroad, and you find that you do need essential supplies to finish a project, check out the NMRA Partnership Program for online supplier possibilities.

### **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.

## This Month's Online Store

<https://www.tichytraingroup.com/>

Doug Sandmeyer sent in a notice that he has received about a new release from Donald Tichy of **Tichy Train Group**:

They are healthy and shipping orders six days a week. They have a new HO scale watchman's shanty kit based on 1911 PRR plans.



8328 Watchman's Shanty 1 kit 7.95  
8329 Watchman's Shanty 6 pack 36.00

<https://www.tichytraingroup.com/WhatsNew.aspx>

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## Committee Chairs and Volunteer Positions:

Achievement Program: Mike Hauk  
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Webmaster: Chris Mincemoyer  
[webeditor@div12mcr.org](mailto:webeditor@div12mcr.org)

## NMRA-X Virtual Facebook Convention

"NMRA X" What is it? The reason behind this virtual event was not only to reach out to all of us stuck at home but also to provide a format for those who normally can't go to a national or regional convention.

The first attempt was April 24 and 25, and for twenty-four hours live clinics were open to anyone. The event was free to all.

The next live NMRA X event is scheduled for Saturday, May 16 starting at 4:00 AM running until 4:00 PM.

The only hitch? You do need a Facebook account to watch them live. All the clinics were recorded and are available on the NMRA Facebook Group page. The recordings may also end up being posted on YouTube. So keep checking there.

# Scratch Building with the Structure Guy:

## Part 3: Organizing Materials

Bill Schopf

I had planned for this month to go over some techniques on using paper in constructing buildings. But the COVID-19 came along and changed plans. Like it did for most of us.

Following the advice of my main man, Dr. Anthony Fauci of the CDC, I sheltered in place, put on my mask and stayed six feet away from the world. With social activities pretty much eliminated, I had lots of time to build. In a non-stop spree, I kitbashed a service station from KC's Workshop and then scratch built a feed mill/grain elevator complex and a Red & White grocery store whose picture from the 1920s was featured a while back in the Meadville Tribune.

Making the structures was great fun. But the spree of building seeded some frustrations. Every time I was spinning along and enjoying myself, progress was stonewalled because I couldn't find the 4 x 4 or 8 x 8 or 2 x 12 I needed. My stripwood supply was scattered through four desk drawers and sometimes I needed a half hour to rummage through the mess and find what I was looking for.

Finally, I had enough. When the Red & White store was finished, I cleaned off my desk (no small task) and proceeded to dump the drawers of strip wood on the desktop. It was a daunting sight, to say the least. But I promised myself I would never build another structure until the mess was sorted out.

How to do it? I figured tubes of some kind would be ideal. My first thought was using mailing tubes. Unfortunately, I had no mailing tubes, Staples sold them but they were shut down because of the virus and if Staples had been open I would have been out \$50 or more for the quantity I needed.

My second thought was the tubes used in Christmas wrapping or paper towels. They would be the perfect size and free. But my wife dutifully throws out the wrapping paper tubes when empty. No go there. She did offer the suggestion that I unwrap a roll of paper towels and use that. I didn't tell her that I needed close to forty. I'm pretty sure unwrapping forty rolls of paper towels to get the cardboard tubes wasn't what she had in mind.

Then it hit me. PVC pipe. Years ago we built a temporary outdoor waterline with PVC that we later abandoned and took apart. Those who live in the country know the first rule about building materials. Country folk never ever throw away building supplies. For me that includes fencing, fence posts, snow fence, pieces of treated wood, pipe, culverts — and, fortunately, PVC. So the dog and I took a run out to the Schopf Outdoor Buildings Material Center back in the woods across the road and we found our jackpot — about forty feet of 1½ inch Schedule 40 PVC pipe. The perfect size. Happily, we (me, not the dog) dragged it back to the house with a clear image of an organized workshop dancing in my head.

I wanted the stripwood organizer to be out of the way, not fastened to a wall where it would continually be bumped and interfere with normal activity. So I cleared out a shelf that stored stuff I never use anymore and created a space about two feet wide and just deep and high enough to be perfect.

Mocking up the organizer, I planned three rows of PVC tubes stacked on top of one another. I would make it as long as I could to fit into my available space. Eleven pieces of the tubes laid side to side took up twenty-one inches -- enough room to fit comfortably into my available space with a little breathing room to access the rest of the shelf. Admittedly, Schedule 40 PVC is overkill for this project, but it's what I had.

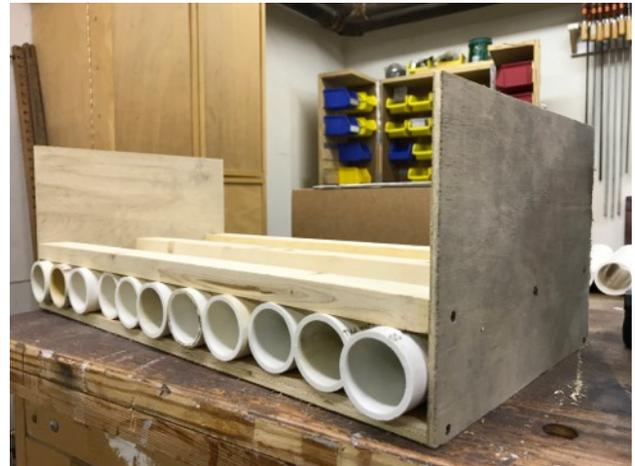
The construction was pretty straightforward. First I hosed down the pipe to remove loose dirt, leaves, and other debris. Then I took them down to my chop saw and cut them into lengths of 11½ inches so that the normal twelve inch long pieces of purchased stripwood would jut out and be easy to grab.



Then to the basement sink which I filled with hot water, soaking and scrubbing both the outsides and insides of the tubes to remove any stains and dirt. Brillo pads and a long skinny round brush did the job nicely. Then I set them out to dry.

Next I built a very simple box to contain the tubes. You can use whatever you have around the house to build this box. The construction methods are very flexible. I had an old piece of half-inch plywood that was just big enough to work

for the base and pieces of scrap luan for the sides and back. I cut the base and sides a half inch shorter than the length of the pipes (in my case eleven inches) so that the tubing would nose out of the box for easier access.



Once the luan sidepieces were screwed into the plywood base, I laid the eleven tubes along the base where they fit nice and snug for the first row, just like I measured. Then I took leftover scraps and made dividers to separate the rows from one another. These can be any width or thickness you want. I had some old 2 x 2s that I ripped into 5/8 inch thick pieces, cut them to the length of my box's base, simply laid them on top of the first row of tubes, and screwed them into the luan side pieces. I then laid another eleven pieces on top of these dividers to form a second row.





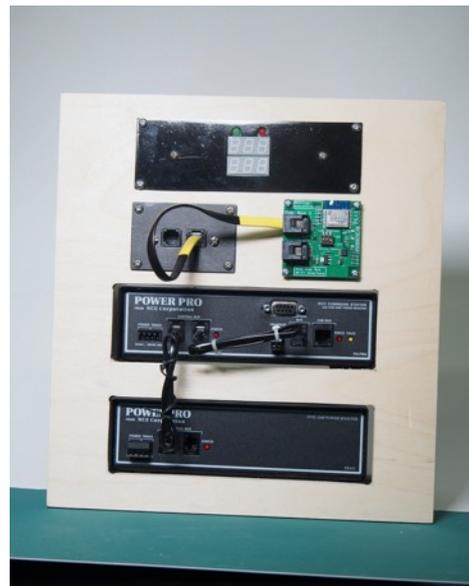
that may have been the most difficult part. Once deemed safe to handle, the box was opened to reveal a half letter size envelope containing a quick start pamphlet, a baggie with mounting hardware, and a small 2" x 2" module.



Reading the quick start pamphlet revealed that there wasn't much to do. I had already installed WiThrottle on my iPhone, so all that was left was connecting the NCE cab bus cable and selecting the WFD-30's Wi-Fi network on the phone.

The instructions were confusing around selecting the correct cable thus sending me to the internet and scratching my head over RJ11 versus RJ12 connectors and their respective wiring configurations. It comes set up for bus address of "10" so a quick check of addresses in use was required. A complete 58-page manual online is clearer here and all is well. They just don't want you plugging an NCE PowerPro throttle to the second RJ12 connector on the board. The standard NCE cable works great.

Instructions were also given for connecting to the network and setting the WFD's server. I couldn't find the server settings on the WiThrottle lite app but it connected without further intervention. The Android app Engine Driver also works with the WFD-30 for non-iPhone users. Automatic network configuration is available in the settings.



I was very pleased with the ease of installation and spent way more time building the panel to organize all the control bits. Note that JMRI is not a requirement for accessing the throttle. Many features are available to explore for customizing the throttle and using the recommended full version of the smart phone. It can be set up for direct mode or to use a home network for customization. No password is required, but one may be set up if it's desired. You also have the ability to assign proper names to locomotives, functions, and accessories making it easier for

guests operating the layout. Another nice feature is the ability to latch functions and their displays independently if desired. My brief exploration of the full WIThrottle app and a look into the manual suggests I've only scratched the surface.

WFD-30 NCE Cab bus available from:  
<http://www.wifitrax.com/>  
for US \$110.00

Doug Sandmeyer

## Spring Scenery Project

### Dick Bradley MMR

Here's a snapshot of what I've been doing the past few weeks. It's just dull scenery. The sort of area you run through without much thought. And that's just what it is supposed to be. It's an area between intense switching of the three sidings at Risp Cabinetry and the west entry to the Risp Mill passing tracks. No buildings should block the view of the track.



The vaguely tree backdrop is from LARC Products. It is cut from two

sections of the six-part "Jersey Night." Purchase of the LARC Railroad Graphics disc 5 was a good deal. It has so far provided three backdrop sections for me.

The water tower is a built-up model from Walthers. It sat in shiny black plastic for several years before I got around to finishing this part of the scenery. First I removed the spider webs. Then I repaired the loose wires. I decided it was too fragile to wash and so just dusted it with a soft brush. In the spray booth I misted it with light gray primer from a rattle can. I held the can about two feet away and aimed short puffs of spray off to the side of the tower. This gave a very light misting to one side and was repeated for each side. Next came generic rust color from a rattle can. Again spraying puffs to the side. The still shiny top of the water tank got a burst of clear flat.

Many water towers have logos on their tanks. I printed several sizes and wordings to test. Yes, they were black on white, but they gave me guidance for height and length. There is no lettering on the Risp Mill Cabinet Co. water tower. I decided that even a heavily weathered logo would be too distracting for a background structure.

A chain link fence separates the Risp Cabinet property from the Fitch Chair Co. Its brass frame was soldered together at the workbench. The frame is painted primer gray. The blue bridal veil is held on with super glue. Only one post is long to fit into a hole in the plywood scenery base. The weedy

scenery around the fence keeps it from moving.

Those weeds are Mini-Natur tufts made by Silflor from Scenic Express. I bought a selection when they were first offered. Other companies now offer similar products. I use a half dozen colors and sizes. The clumps with yellow or white tops make nice dandelions and daisies. I'm trying to model springtime. Choices for grasses are short light green with some straw and brown clumps mixed in. Although the clumps come with a sticky back, I prefer to glue them in place with Elmer's.

Mixed in with the Silflor Mini-Natur grasses are laser cut paper weeds from Noch. I was an early buyer of a selection; others now make similar products. The weeds are in the form of a cluster of leaves attached by their stems to a gluing base. Each cluster needs to be cut from its carrier and folded. In this area I've used pestwurz and farn laser cut weeds.

Also mixed in the weedy area are some natural materials. Burdock burrs coated with green ground foam are the round bushes. Fox tail grass seed fronds coated with fine green ground foam are the taller bushes. There are a few sprigs from Scenic Express Super Trees mixed in for texture.

Some thought needs to go into the placement of the grasses and weeds. Room should be left for paths through the growth. The "rule of threes" applies to significant things like bushes. Paper laser weeds should be in clusters.

Daisies and dandelions seem to like to be in clusters.

Weedy stuff fills in between the backdrop and the Atanasoff Hardware at the front edge. Now I begin to make scenery reflecting a built up area. Another chain link fence separates the factory entry from the weeds and track. This time I drilled holes in the plywood for each fence post. Too long brass wire posts were glued in place, straightened, and clipped to the proper height. The top rail was soldered in place. Light gray paint was brushed on. Light blue bridal veil netting was super glued to the wire supports. A bit of rust color paint was dry brushed over the fence. A few weeds at the bottom of the fence complete its installation.

The original entrance steps were concrete. They looked too small for a showroom entry. I made a deck the full width of the entry bay with wide, low rise steps ten feet wide. The railings are brass wires soldered together. Green paint matches the building trim. A concrete walk at the base of the new stairs leads to the parking lot. The walk is 0.015 Evergreen styrene sheet cut to fit and scribed for paving sections. Paint is Polly Scale aged concrete with a dusting of weathering powders sealed with Dullcoat.

Grass in the yard is ground foam mixed with a bit of light green flocking. Thin white glue holds it in place. The plastic dandelions come from Busch. Each is a three-piece assembly; I use them sparingly. The picnic bench is laser cut wood made by Vector Cut. The ladies at lunch break are from my

box of figures. The trash barrel is from Tichy. I think it would be nice to have a shade tree in the yard. It would block the view needed for switching and so is omitted. And a shed for mower and tools would be appropriate, but again it is distracting and omitted.

I place operating convenience ahead of artistic desires. This is supposed to be a model railroad, not a photo diorama. If I wish to try for publication worthy photos I could temporarily put in scenic props. Someday the tree and shed may appear in a photo. Maybe even a locomotive on the near track.

To get from the yard to the parking lot a wood walk way goes over the track. The parking lot is Evergreen 0.030 styrene sheet cut to fit and painted. I needed about six tries to get a color and texture somewhat resembling an asphalt surface. It's still just acceptable. The wheel stops are wood with Tichy NBW details. They are really needed since the car models do roll (are pushed) onto the track. Parking lane marks are white pencil.

Finally the remaining two small front areas of weeds are filled in. It is important to use the same sorts of materials as in the background to provide continuity across the scene.

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

Modeler's tips, modeler's projects, the "Modeler's Workbench" column, or any other railroad or modeling related stories make excellent submissions. Any member can submit a short article. Share what you have been working on!

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*.

*Builder's Plate* encourages Division 12 members to share their favorite YouTube videos or DVDs. The more you share, the more the rest of us can learn from the modeling masters that are out there. Give it a shot in the coming months and tell us what you've been watching "At the Movies."

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. It is very helpful to the editor to include the JPEGs as a separate attachment rather than imbedding them into the document.