WHEEL REPORT

Spring Vol. 20/21 No.3

Inside Highlights:

south mountain division

SMD

smdnmra.org

SPRING ZOOM MEETINGS

South Mountain Division MER NMRA is inviting MEMBERS ONLY to scheduled Zoom meetings…

Topic: SMD NMRA **March Membership Meeting**
Time: Mar 14, 2020; 01:30 PM Eastern Time *(US and Canada)*
Contact the Division by email to request detailed information on how to join this meeting.
SouthMountainDiv@gmail.com

Topic: SMD NMRA **April Membership Meeting**
Time: Apr 11, 2021; 01:30 PM Eastern Time *(US and Canada)*
Contact the Division by email to request detailed information on how to join this meeting.
SouthMountainDiv@gmail.com

Topic: SMD NMRA **May Membership Meeting**
Time: May 16, 2021; 01:30 PM Eastern Time *(US and Canada)*
Contact the Division by email to request detailed information on how to join this meeting.
SouthMountainDiv@gmail.com

On the cover: **This photo shows a Reading freight passing Fisher Brothers Manufacturing on the Cumberland Valley Model Railroad Club. The structure is a heavily modified Campbell kit built by John Pursell. John did the module scenery too. The CVMRR has multiple layouts in various scales. This HO layout is 25x75' at a 48" height with a 4 track mainline. Track is Atlas code 100 with Peco turnouts. Control is Digitrax DCC. Scenery base is a mix of foam, plaster, and plywood. (John Pursell)**

The *Wheel Report* is the official publication for the South Mountain Division of the NMRA. The newsletter is published three times annually. Please send your letters, articles, and pictures to SouthMountainDiv@gmail.com.

2021/22 submission deadlines:

Fall 2021……August 15
Winter 2021/22……November 15
Spring 2022……February 15

SMD Officers 2020/21

Superintendent:
Jerry Skeim
Assistant Superintendent:
Alex Polimeni
Clerk:
Harvey Heyser III
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To reach Division officials please email us at:
SouthMountainDiv@gmail.com


Skeim

Friends,

For me, 2021 is an anniversary of sorts. It was 50 years ago that I became a member of the NMRA. I was in college at the time (After a stint in the service). Back in 1971 you could join the NMRA for five dollars a year. Quite a bargain by today's current membership cost. You could also become a life member, for one hundred dollars. Joining the NMRA seemed like a good way to stay in touch with model railroading, and for the past 50 years I have quite honestly really enjoyed my membership. I have never thought that membership was anything other than a great investment!

A bit of history…Here's the by decade breakdown of how NMRA yearly membership cost has increased since I joined in 1971.

- 1981 = **$15**
- 1991 = **$24**
- 2001 = **$45**
- 2011 = **$58**
- 2021 = **$82**

One of my many regrets is that I did not take advantage of the option to purchase a life membership back when it was available. I was curious about when and why life memberships are no longer available, so I went to the NMRA customer service desk on the website earlier this year and asked the question.

BULLETIN

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION • NATIONAL MODEL RAILROAD ASSOCIATION

P. O. BOX 1328, STATION C, CANTON, OHIO, 44708

SOLVE YOUR CHRISTMAS GIFT PROBLEMS, NOW!

For your NON-NMRA Model Railroading Friends:

An NMRA membership: Regular: $5.00 per year, 5 years $20.00 or, if a real good friend, Life $100.00. All new memberships will start December 1, 1971 but material will be sent, with a gift card, to arrive just before Christmas.

For your NMRA Friends:

A Renewal Membership or a complete set of DATA SHEETS, $6.00.

A gift card will be sent with the gift.

Send your NMRA gift list to: Bob Bast, P.O. Box 1328, Station C, Canton, Ohio 44708.

I received the following response from the NMRA Chief Financial Officer Mr. Frank Koch.

> *"(The) NMRA stopped offering Life memberships in 2006 as they were not realistically economically viable. We would have to charge several thousand dollars in order for them to be sustainable over the course of a lifetime and NOT put any burden on non-Life members. If we were ten times larger in membership size, the effect would be much smaller, but our current Life members make up about 15% of our membership and we depend on the dividends from their original payment to cover the costs of supporting them each year...and they are living longer than the charts would indicate.*

As an alternative, we have suggested that members put some amount, say $2,500 into an investment account with securities that pay a good dividend and then use the post-tax proceeds to pay for NMRA dues and magazine. Growth might cover future increases. The upside is that you and your heirs retain the principal rather than the NMRA.

I did something similar when I changed scales and hobbies.I sold all previous stuff and gained agreement that all future hobby purchases would be made only from those proceeds or income derived from them. I put all the funds into an investment account and now use the post-tax dividends to fund my trains. The advantage is that my heirs will still inherit the original principal.

We have looked seriously at restoring the Life Member option and it does not make long-term economic sense.

As an aside, some of those organizations offering Life memberships do so knowing that their non-Life members will be subsidizing the Life members."

So that was the response that I received from Mr. Koch, and it answered my query about life memberships. *(Just a nod to our membership - The SMD life membership numbers equal about 25% of our total membership.)*

However I do think that the NMRA membership committee might want to explore some ideas of providing a bit of a break to those of us who still renew yearly.

One such idea I was thinking about was to offer a percentage reduction in the annual dues by, say, offering a 5 year membership for a 20% reduction. An example would be at today's rate of $82 per year, 5 x $82 = $410. If you reduced that by the 20% or so the equation would be the same as giving you 1 free year. Of course it doesn't have to be a 5 year offer, it could be a 3 year deal at a percentage reduction. Again the idea being that a little flexibility might be something worth looking at by the NMRA. So there you have it, my 2 cents worth.

Also, here's my continued pitch for the coming months:

As we are all aware the COVID-19 pandemic is still far from being in our rear view mirror although the vaccine is becoming more accessible it may still be many months before we can start to see the backside of all this. So that means that the virtual world is where we are still going to dwell for the foreseeable future.

We have had the good fortune to have a few members step up and provide us with after meeting clinics and my hope is that even more of you will take the "plunge" and share your layouts, your modeling skills, or perhaps even a clinic or two at the conclusion of our meetings.

If you are willing please contact us through the SMD Gmail account at southmountaindiv@gmail.com.

If you are hesitant due to lack of technical knowledge, again, please email us at our SMD Gmail account we will do our best to provide you with any assistance you may need to participate.

Spring will be here before we know it, and as the SMD meeting year moves into its final months we are looking at elections as one of the items that will have to be addressed. If any of you are interested in running for an office, when the call goes out please step forward. More on elections will be forthcoming in the next month or so.

Stay well & stay safe,

Jerry Skeim, Superintendent

Mid-Eastern Region Update

From Bob Morningstar

Convention - The Mid-Eastern Region convention is still on track for October 21-24, 2021 in Hunt Valley, MD. The MER is discussing alternatives if the pandemic conditions do not improve substantially to allow a safe and healthy environment for the convention. For more details about the convention go to mtclarejct.com. View the convention commercial by clicking below. https://youtu.be/fKHHQN0BAmM

Anniversary Shirt - The MER is making available to NMRA/MER members a 75th anniversary golf (polo) shirt. An option to have your name embroidered onto the shirt will be available. More details will follow on the MER website in the very near future.

One of my fascinations with model railroading involves resurrecting antique kits and derelict models. Among my 60+ year collection are many interesting model railroad artifacts. Every so often, when rummaging around in my model shop, I'll come across something that peaks my interest. The two items discussed here are cases in point.

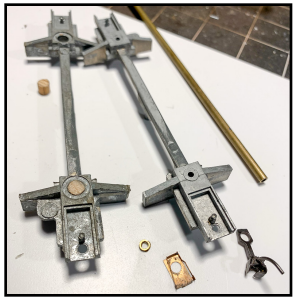
The Ulrich model company was known for their all metal kits. They offered a line of HO scale trucks as well as rolling stock. Among my collection of ancient kits are four Ulrich all metal hopper cars, all of which appear to have been built at one time and then re-kitted.

The Ulrich hopper car proved to be a challenge. I later discovered a set of instructions in one of the other boxes, but for starters it was a matter of by guess and by gosh. The body of the car glues together. I'm not sure what was recommended at the time these kits were new. I don't believe acc was available then. Ulrich kits date back to the 1950's.

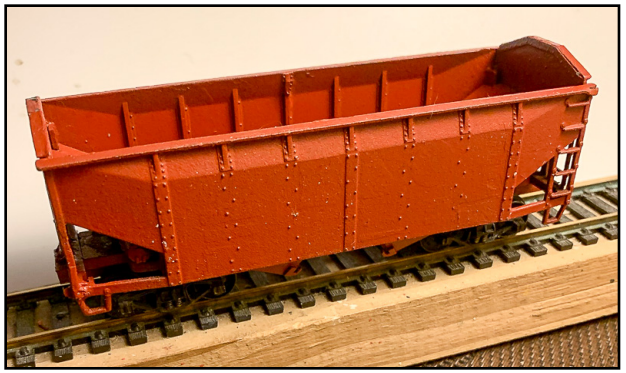
The first picture shows the basic parts for the car. The only item missing is the diagonal interior bracing but that can be fabricated quite easily. This car is from the box (original) where I later discovered the instruction sheet.

Photo #2 shows the basic body shell glued together. It took a bit of fitting and scraping of old glue. The slope sheets, for some reason, turned out to be just a tad short. A bit of .010 styrene remedied that.

The third picture shows the frames of two of the cars. The draft gear boxes are the same size as a Kadee #5 box and the brass spring is a perfect fit. Whisker style shanks would also work. Unfortunately, the locating pin is too small. A sliver of brass tubing remedies that problem.



I'll need to purchase couplers with the overset shank though, as after putting trucks under the car I found it to ride a bit high. The other option of course, would be to file off the sides and pin and mount a standard draft gear box shimmed to the correct height. Another issue I found was that one of the frames is missing some sort of insert for the bolsters. Short sections of hardwood dowel rectified that problem.

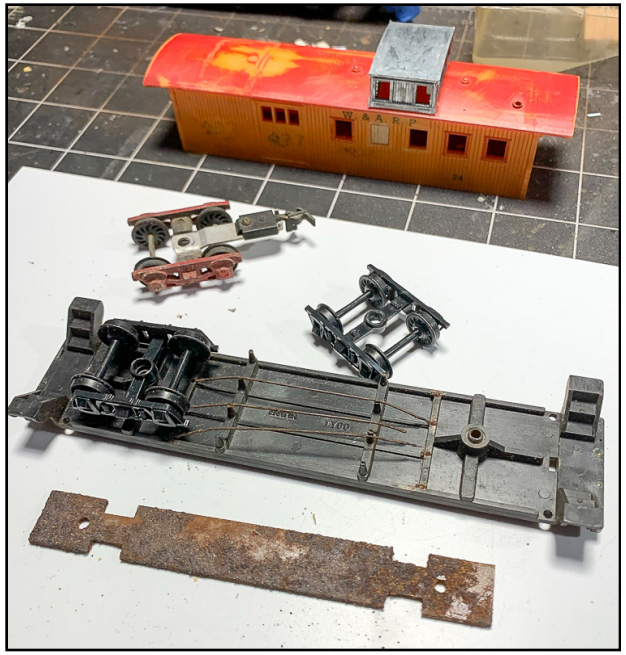


The trucks for this frame will be mounted using appropriate wood screws.

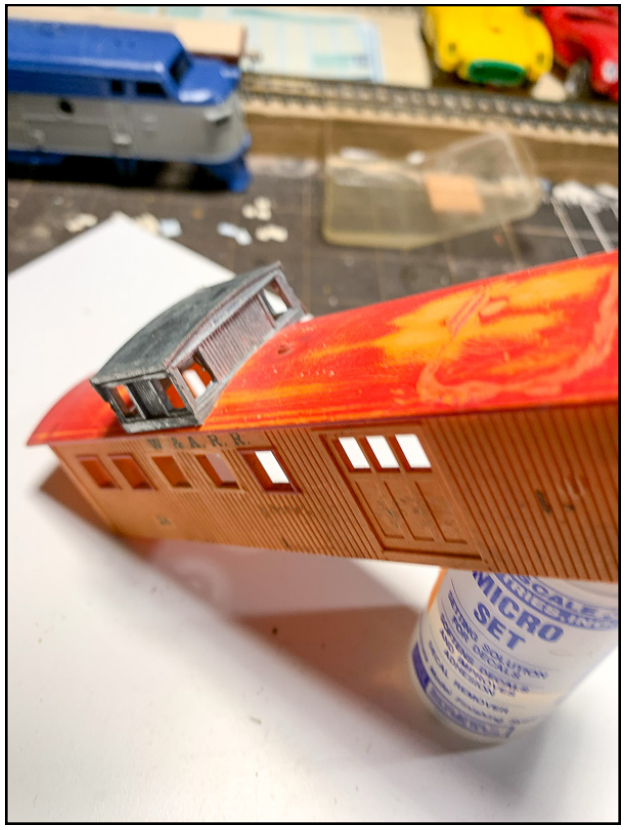
Final photos show the car body after a coat of oxide red paint. The hopper doors are still to be installed.

My other mini project involves an old Mantua combine. My son Alex is contemplating a layout with a spaghetti western theme. I felt a second side door caboose would be a nice addition to the small fleet of cabooses I've been working on for him *[see WRpt_VOL2021No2.pdf - Ed.]*.

While rummaging, in yet another box I found an ancient Mantua 1880's era open platform combine that I had at one time considered turning into a drovers caboose. The box contained a badly deteriorated Mantua combine along with a cupola, a pair of MDC passenger trucks and the one remaining original truck complete with talgo style horn/hook coupler.



The first picture shows the primary components for the caboose project. The Model Die Casting trucks I'd originally chosen proved to have too long a wheel base to clear the truss rods. Luckily, picking through my bin drawers, I found a pair of MDC trucks from their 'Overton' series of shorty passenger cars. These proved to be perfect and are a close match for the original trucks (also shown).



The cupola is also a product of my parts bin drawers. I had two but thought this one looked best on the combine. The truss rods will have to be replaced as they're badly rusted, as is the weight. The curvature of the base of the cupola didn't match the curvature of the roof. Simplest fix was to sink the cupola into the roof. Cutting across the roof was easy. The longitudinal cuts however, required drilling two holes, the use of an X-acto keyhole saw and a bit of file work. The resulting fit is perfect. As can be seen by the scars on the roof by the baggage door, I had originally intended this to be a drovers caboose when I first had the idea of a conversion years ago.

The last photo illustrates the finished opening in the roof. The windows under the cupola will be plugged with scribed siding patches (shown) as they would likely have been in a real life conversion. The sills surrounding the windows were filed off. Caboose platform railings/crab irons will finish it off. This little project should turn out nicely. I'll post the results of both of these efforts next issue.


Sweeney

Hello South Mountaineers! Greetings from North Central Pennsylvania! Fate has dealt me a 15 month construction assignment at the north end of Bald Eagle Valley in Mill Hall. About the only positive thing this job offered is that my apartment is one long "shotgun shack" of living room, dining room, and kitchen. An open area that is now entirely filled with a layout. You may remember the former Frederick Rio Grande was a shelf-type layout migrating through the house. This layout is a module framework of 1x4's with 3/8" plywood on the top, with large openings in the center.

Welcome to the Union Rio Grande! The exceptionally long room dimension inspired a 25 foot long layout in which about half the length is devoted to the eight tracks of the Denver Union Station. The mainlines are two loops, the north loop and the south loop, and they are connected by a wye. The wye is for turning around the trains into the Union Station. Operationally, the south loop adjoins the Union Station tracks and is intended to be the local freight track in Denver.

The north loop at the outlet of the lead tracks from the station is double tracked and is for the passenger trains.

A third feature is the "Moffat Route" which is the Rio Grande's mainline to the west. It starts an incline immediately out of the station and is intended to become a second level to the layout.

Operationally, the loops on this HO layout are really for just staging trains and the focus is on the switching activity in turning and preparing trains on the Union Station tracks. It is also an opportunity to expand my interest in the other railroads that served Denver. These included the Union Pacific, CB&Q, and Santa Fe. I might even get the MoPac Colorado Eagle in there someday. The era is the 1960's. The trains may be shorter but they are still arriving at Denver Union Station.

Other details include a disappointing 32" minimum radius on the South Loop but its devoted to short freight trains. The north loop has an outside radius of 36" and the inner track at 34". So just barely acceptable for passenger cars. There is only about six feet width to play with because the layout is bordered by necessary aisles to access the apartment and the utility rooms.

The roadbed base is ½" homasote topped with cord roadbed. I find this combination is ideal for pinning track and with my subcontractor, The Crooked Rail Construction Company, the new track needs every advantage! The code-83 track is all recycled from the Frederick Rio Grande.

The layout building started in July with the construction of several of the first modules. Maximum module size is 2'x 8' to make disassembly and transport manageable. However, there are no track breaks or roadbed cuts in the modules as built. That will be done when it becomes necessary. Right now, my assignment is until June, maybe July, so there are a few more months of building time.

In closing, it may seem odd to build a layout just to disassemble it a few months later. And its unlikely to be built again in any similar configuration. The other confounding issue is that I dislike laying track and wiring track, even if DCC makes it much easier. But I do it because overall I like to build layouts. They inspire my imagination, which largely must remain indoors these days, and each one is a learning experience. Its nice to operate trains too but I enjoy them even more watching them travel autonomously in a loop while I am busy building more railroad!


Heyser

How many times have you been to an operating session when everyone arrives at the same time and all the trains are supposed to start at the same time? The beginnings of these sessions are often stressful and chaotic. Yardmasters tear their hair out trying to get a bunch of trains on the road all at once. As a result, departures are often delayed. Trackage close to yards gets clogged leading to further delays. What is supposed to be a relaxing and enjoyable experience certainly does not start that way. My friends call this situation a "shotgun start." What can we do to avoid this chaos?

This is definitely one time when even the most informal model railroad operating system can benefit from looking at what prototype railroads do. For the most part, the prototypes do not try to start all their trains in a short time at the beginning of the day. They run 24/7/365 operations with trains starting throughout the day/night and running around the clock. At any given moment, we are likely to find trains all along main lines and in all the yards.

While we model railroaders celebrate the dedication of professional railroaders reporting for work and doing their jobs at all hours of the day and night, our operations are part of our hobby, not our work. Unlike prototype railroads, our operating sessions have defined starting and ending points. In between those times, we attempt to recreate a specific period of operations – a day or a shift perhaps. Where we go wrong is trying to begin and complete every job within the time represented by the session. For some reason, we try to start with a blank slate: all the past shift's (or day's) trains having finished their past work. Eager crews wait impatiently for this session's assignments. Yard crews hustle to get those trains ready. Before we know it, we are enmeshed in a shotgun start. That is not what happens on the prototype.

Operating on layouts with schedules has taught me several things. (Don't worry. I am not trying to insist you have a schedule, timetable, etc.) In order to make best use of limited track capacity, every train has an assigned track time (also known as its schedule). As indicated by the timetable, trains do not all start at the beginning of the time represented by our operating session, nor do they all terminate before the session's end. Of course this is somewhat theoretical because, regardless of schedules, operations do not always happen the way they are "supposed to happen." Situations develop, trains get delayed, and jobs don't get finished. As a result, our sessions likely will begin and end with trains out on the main line (like the prototype). Between sessions, those trains are "frozen in time" as Tony Koester has put it (MR, August, 2013). At the beginning of our next session, they will "come to life" and complete the jobs started during the last session. Not surprisingly, this situation offers some possibilities that I feel are worthy of consideration for layouts with less formal operating systems.

We commonly handle informal sessions by planning for a reasonable amount of work, getting everyone started at the beginning, and hoping that everything goes well enough that jobs get completed by the end – clearly not quite the way the prototype deals with its tasks. For instance, if a prototype crew "times out" in a remote location, the railroad sends a bus or taxi to retrieve them and to deliver a new crew to complete the run. (To put it in model railroad terms, the old crew has completed its "session," and the new crew starts a "new session.") We modelers can take a similar approach. The following are some suggestions:

1. Don't worry if an operating session gets through only part of the "session time" you have planned for – whether a shift, part of, or all of a day. You can pick up running trains where you left off at your next session. On the Barneytown and Scupperville, sessions often ended before everything planned got finished.

At the next session, Dick McEvoy simply picked up on his sequence schedule where the previous session had stopped. One pleasant consequence was a great variety in the flow of his sessions.

2. While you do your planning based on the number of crew attending and giving them a reasonable amount of work to accomplish, don't worry if the session does not accomplish all the tasks you have planned. Remember the ultimate goal is for everyone to have a good time. (Thank goodness our model railroads don't have to answer to stockholders the way the prototype does.)
3. Leave unfinished jobs unfinished when the session ends. Remember not every task that gets started has to be completed. Those "leftover" jobs will provide something for eager crews to do at the start of the next session. As a result, you will have less need for all the new session's trains to start right when crews arrive. In addition, those "leftover" jobs are likely to be out on the line (not in the yard) and, therefore, out of the yard crew's hair.
4. If your railroad is a dawn-to dusk operation like Pete and Jane Clarke's East Broad Top and if you have organized the start of the next day to avoid a shotgun start (as they have), send a wrap-up crew to finish leftover work between sessions. (In other words, you get to operate your own railroad.) Otherwise, treat unfinished work as to-be-done the next day (as in to No. 3 above).
5. Consider additional organization for the beginnings of sessions to avoid shotgun starts. Set up an informal train sequence (or rough schedule) that spreads out the start times for train runs. That will ease the burden on both yard and road crews. This bit of organization gives yard crews more time to get their work done. It also permits trains to get going in a calmer, more orderly manner without clogging the mainline leading from the yard.
6. If setting up a train sequence or rough schedule is not desirable, do some of the preparation work yourself ahead of time. (You become the prep crew and, once again, get to operate your own railroad.) Preparation between sessions allows that work to be done at a less hurried time and in a less stressful manner. Prep work can include the following:
   A. pre-staging and blocking trains in the yard,
   B. hostling motive power onto those trains before the session starts, and/or
   C. having some trains already under way waiting out on the line.
   D. Doing this prep work allows the maximum number of trains to get moving quickly at the start of the session without the chaos of a shotgun start.
7. Set up an assignment sheet listing the trains to be run in chronological order. Then, crew members will have a better idea when they can expect their trains to be ready. If they know about how long they have to wait, they will know if they have time to socialize before their runs begin.
8. Stagger crew arrival times. Let everyone know that you do not intend to start all trains right at the beginning of the session. Crew members who arrive first can run the earliest trains. Later arrivals will run later trains.

Shotgun starts can be quite chaotic and not particularly relaxing. With an understanding of how the prototype handles its trains and with a bit of organization, we can avoid that chaos. We can follow the prototype's lead and spread out the start times of our session's trains. We can leave train runs unfinished at the session's end and, thus, create jobs for the next session's eager crews to do while they wait for their assigned trains to be readied. The starts of our sessions can become enjoyable, rather than chaotic, times. Those unfinished runs can create some unexpected situations. Dealing with those situations and finding ways to address them can be quite satisfying.

As the lead picture shows, there can be surprises while working on a model railroad in the basement of a 250 year old home. Even during the pandemic and with excess snowfall, my wife and I have the additional challenge of heating a drafty house. Our heat comes from a pellet stove and a wood stove on the main level. My train room, however, is in a buggy basement that is currently 45 degrees Fahrenheit. This long slinky black creature has found a place that's warmer than outside, curling up on an old building kit under my layout. It stayed for a full day even as I tried working in the cold space, which I do not recommended especially if you're over 70.

My wife and many folks in my neighborhood do not care for snakes, while others have asked me to catch them and bring them to their gardens for rodent control. So you're wondering what does this have to do with model railroading. Well, frankly nothing but since I haven't done much on the railroad for the past couple of years, the visit of a snake is laudable. Other creatures in my basement include very lively crickets which jump all over when approached. It's a land for an entomologist. While most of you have nice warm and dry basements, some can be challenged by poor decision-making in house buying. Do not buy a house that's over 200 years old with a partial dirt basement. Instead build a great three car garage with a beautiful upstairs, perfect for a model railroad, like I did. Just beware of global pandemics that bring home daughters, escaping from the COVID stricken big city, in need of a temporary residence.

Getting back to model railroading, the lower picture is my last meaningful project. It's a coal yard similar to the one that Brian Wolfe, of Mainline Hobby Supply, has on his excellent Western Maryland Railway layout. When I have shown folks the coal yard and explained it's origin and utility, they are astounded that people actually had coal furnaces in the basement to heat the house along with an adjoining bin fed by a chute from a dump truck. I'm sure Division members of a certain age are familiar with this (including having no thermostat, or other electrical wizardry). This brings me back to the reason I am involved in this hobby. I enjoy thinking about how civilization was built before the electron became the basic unit of our agency.

Let me know if you need a snake for your garden.

Prototype Action

CSXT crew on train D798 picks up a loaded gondola of scrap from Maryland Metals Inc. in the Security yard limits on the Hanover Subdivision (HV) on Friday afternoon, 19 February, 2021. The conductor lines the switch for the return westward to Hagerstown (MD) Yard.
With a run-around track, several spurs and two different on-line industries, this prototype spot has a lot of operational potential for a LED on one's pike.