# WHEEL REPORT

Winter Vol. 18/19 No.2


Inside Highlights:



south mountain division

SMD

smdnmra.org

## Clutter from the Super's Desk

If you receive the *NMRA Magazine*, you may have already read the President's Car column in the November issue. It was suggested to me that I read it before writing this, and I'm glad I did. If you haven't, I'll do my best to sum up Pete Magoun's words in a nutshell: "National can't overcome the challenges that face the Association alone. Regions and Divisions control their own web presence and PR efforts, and it's up to them to do the boots-on-the-ground work to build, grow, and prosper."

Pete's messaged really connected with me, because I believe SMD is ahead of the curve. We already have an incredible outlet through which to engage with the public in the form of the annual Mini-Con. Our membership is very much involved in the hobby both within and outside of SMD by way of operating sessions, enthusiast groups, open house tours, and conventions across the country. Not only that, but a recurring conversation at our meetings is the idea of stronger outreach and networking efforts to both new and long-time members. Furthermore, our newsletter editor and webmaster have been looking at options to overhaul our website. You can expect more dialogue regarding both of these subjects in the months to come.

I want to take this opportunity to apologize to those members who do not use email, as I did not mail reminders for those meetings as I promised in the Fall edition of the *Wheel Report*. Thank you for your patience and continued enthusiasm.

In closing, I need to thank this season's hosts, Rich Randall, Bob Johnson, and Frank Benenati for opening their homes to the Division. Congratulations go out to member, Bob Morningstar for his his "Golden Spike" Achievement Program (AP) certificate. We've built a strong head of steam in 2018, and I know we're only going to pick up speed through the winter.

Alex Polimeni

Superintendent, Division 10

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# Annual SMD Spring Mini-Convention

by Pete Clarke

Join your fellow South Mountain Division (SMD) members in a day of great fun and fellowship, and spread the joy of model railroading. On Saturday, April 13, 2019, with the support of Mainline Hobby Supply, the SMD will again host our very popular Mini-Convention at the Blue Ridge Mtn. Fire Co.

Our traditional format will be as follows…

Morning – Informal clinics. We need 10 folks to volunteer to give one from 9:00 AM to 10:00 AM and repeat it again from 11:00 AM to 12:00 PM. No formal presentations required. Just talk about a model railroading topic that's of interest to you. Bring what you want to have as examples or visual aids (no projectors, no loudspeakers). It's just you, talking to the attendees as they walk past your table. The guests are free to stay and talk with you for as long as they like, or move on when they choose. Don't think of it as a speech. Don't think of it as public speaking. It's just chatting with other interested model railroaders. Note that you have an hour break from 10:00 AM to 11:00 AM. That's to allow you to get a snack, visit the rest room, look around to see what other clinics are doing. Then, ten other members give their clinics beginning at 10:00 AM until 11:00 AM and repeating from 12:00 PM to 1:00 PM.

As of this writing, Ron Polimeni, Harvey Heyser, Bill Wilson, Jane Clarke, Jerry Skeim, Jeff Adams, Andrew Dodge, Don Florwick, Bob Johnson, and Jay Beckham have signed up to give an informal clinic. Jay intends to bring his 3D printer and print items on site.

Afternoon - Formal clinics. At 1:00 PM Jeff Grove of Carolina Craftsman Kits kicks off the series speaking on Laser Technology in Modeling. Ira Silverman follows speaking about his new book, *The Canadian, the Last of the Great Streamliners*. SMD member Alex Polimeni will bring up the markers, speaking on "Model Railroading as Game Design."

At 10:00 AM we will also have two "Make and take" clinics. Jeff Grove of Carolina Craftsman Kits will, again, donate a group of (small, easy) craftsman kits and Mainline Hobby Supply will donate (small, easy) styrene (plastic) kits. Just like last year we'll encourage young people by giving them priority on the make & take sign up lists. Another way you can help is by bringing tools to loan for these clinics. X-Acto knives, glue… Look for a list of items once our build leaders, Brian Greenawalt and David Sweeney, have had time to identify their needs.

SMD plans to have a modular layout or two set up and running as well. Please contact me, Pete Clarke, at ebtmx5@aol.com or call 301-253-4913 if you are aware of a modular group and have contact information for that group.

There will be some vendors there with model railroad stuff for sale. Carolina Craftsman Kits, Nyce Collectables (railroadiana), and SMD member Grant Berry (Misc. stuff) have all signed up. I am waiting to hear back from more.

Of course you can, and should, carefully walk across the road to Mainline Hobby Supply. Show them your gratitude for supporting this Mini-Con by making a purchase, and while you are talking to them, say "Thanks for sponsoring the Mini" out loud.

Again this year, SMD will purchase a $150 gift certificate from Mainline Hobby Supply and sell raffle tickets ($10 each) throughout the morning. Also HobbyTown USA - Frederick (Richard Benjamin) has donated a $50 gift certificate that we will give as a door prize. Both of these drawings will happen at 1:00 PM.

We will have food on site.

All this is just what I already know about! There's more in the pipeline. Look for a final update in your Spring *Wheel Report.*

A call to action! SMD really needs you to make this happen. Please contact me to offer to help. Mostly I need folks to give informal clinics. Everyone who's done one of these clinics has had a great time. There are other things you can do. We'll need extension cords, tools, labor for morning set up and afternoon clean up. Know of a modular group? I'd love to hear from you. Just can't do any of those? Attend, tell others about it!

Did you catch the part about having a working 3D printer on-site? I intend to spend hours just watching that do its thing. Come on down!

# Hellfire, Brimstone, & Damnation RR

by Robert Law

Everyone's layout is an expression of one's experiences and association with railroads. I believe mine has taken a more circuitous path than others. For me it begins when I was a young boy of about seven. My mother and I went to visit an uncle, a retired steel worker who lived on the outskirts of McKeesport, PA. The single lane dirt road that led to his house offered an aerial view of the steel mills below. There was a steep embankment on one side with the old-fashioned post and cable guard rail to prevent cars from falling below. I could see the belching smoke of the steel mills with trains shuttling about here and there hauling odd looking freight cars.

When we arrived, I begged to see what was happening below but was scolded and refused. I felt trapped inside the house having to listen to my mother's and uncle's boring conversation. Fortunately, they were in the kitchen and ever so quietly I slipped into the living room and then out the door. I went across the road and sat on the cable watching the activities below. After about 20 minutes, my mother and uncle came out to find me and give me a scolding. Nonetheless I begged to see the activities down below. My uncle said, "You don't want to go down there! There is nothing down there but hellfire, brimstone and damnation." Yet this picture became etched indelibly on my mind thereafter.

Some 15 years later at college I met Betty, the girl who would become my wife. She also enjoyed trains. When we married we went to see the Cass Mountain Railroad. It was at this time that I became more fascinated with unusual steam locomotives.

Much later still, Betty decided she wanted to leave her career as a special education teacher and study to become an electric power engineer. Her first job was with Bechtel Power, which was then in Gaithersburg, MD, causing us to move from our home in upstate New York. As she prepared for her engineering licensing exam I ventured out so I wouldn't disturb her. Curiosity took me to see the National Capital Trolley Museum. Meeting with the volunteer staff there, I told them that I had a previous business of restoring old houses. They encouraged me to work in the trolley shop and so I dedicated over three years part time to restoring an old New York City 3rd Avenue Trolley.

When Bechtel moved to Frederick, MD, so did we. We started investigating our surroundings and went to the B&O Museum where I got to see and climb around some camelback locomotives. This is a truly ludicrous locomotive. Because of the wide Wooten firebox, the engineer is consigned to a little compartment straddling the boiler. The fireman is left to the acrobatics of having to balance himself on two bouncing and shifting footplates while tending the fire. The cab is open to the elements more than other locomotives and for the engineer and fireman to communicate with each other, they must use a "speaking tube."

We also went to see the Strasburg Railroad and the Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania. There we not only encountered another camelback but also a GG1. I had seen a few pictures of these from time to time but knew little of them. I always admired the streamline appearance of the dark green and gold pinstripe livery. Betty quite naturally took to them as it was an electric locomotive.

# Hellfire, Brimstone, & Damnation RR

by Robert Law

When the Enron scandal struck, Bechtel lost most of its contracts for power plants. Betty, being a junior engineer, was soon laid off. In the recession that followed, she had some trouble finding work but at last landed a position with Con Edison in New York City. We were loth to give up our townhouse in Frederick, MD because I had done so much work on it and we also thought Frederick would be a good place to retire. With the willingness of our neighbors to look in on our place, we located an apartment right on the banks of the Hudson River in Jersey City, NJ that overlooked most of Manhattan. It also overlooked the old Erie Lackawanna ferry terminal which was actively being restored at the time.

Every month or so we would drive back to Frederick to look in on our townhouse and take care of things, always passing the Roadside America attraction. Eventually we made time to drop in. This experience caused me to consider taking up model railroading. I knew little of the hobby even though I had my car serviced at a garage where the waiting area had a stack of old magazines that included *Classic Trains* and *Model Railroader*. Those magazines gave me some conception of what was possible.

I was also faced with a dilemma. As a young man I had suffered an injury to my hip. With hip implant surgery I recovered and was able to do most things, including restoring old Victorian houses. But with age, I started losing mobility. By the time we moved to New York City it was getting harder for me to get around. I often had to resort to a cane. We thought it would be best if I would take care of all the chores and shopping during the week so we could enjoy all the sights and entertainments of the city on weekends. Nonetheless, this left me with much time on my hands which I tried to fill by reading history books. Once I became bitten by the model railroad bug, I thought I could do the modeling in our apartment, box them up and then bring them back to our townhouse in Frederick to eventually put on a layout. This I did on a tiny dinning table we had at the apartment which every late afternoon I would clean off for dinner.

I went to a hobby shop and got a Walthers catalog, magazines, and some how-to books, including John Pryke's *Building City Scenery for Your Model Railroad*. As soon as I saw this a modeling concept began to slowly develop in my mind: a steel mill town in Pennsylvania that would have an electrified portion of the Pennsylvania Railroad passing through a steel manufacturing city with an anthracite railroad servicing the mills not unlike Bethlehem, PA. My uncle's comment about Hellfire, Brimstone and Damnation some 60 years prior was reborn as my model railroad.

Conceiving of a model railroad and delivering it now presented many challenges. A townhouse does not have much basement space and we had already turned it into a combination office, library and entertainment room. With some ingenuity we converted a guest bed room into an office for Betty. Bookcases were moved to create a wall. This then left me with an area of about 19 by 11 feet. Not a lot of space, but enough for a respectable layout.

Next came the challenge of how to work in all the catenary and cables required for GG1's. I knew that modeling this would require a lot of work, possibly consuming too much time from getting the rest of the layout done. I came up with the idea of building the city on a platform above the catenary system which could serve as a staging for these trains to appear and reappear. Thus, only a simple loop of track would be necessary for the GG1's to play their part. To protect the pantographs as they went through under the city, Betty came up with a solution to use fasten discarded engineering drawings that had been printed on large sheets of plastic under the platform, allowing the pantographs to slip underneath.

I also had only built a few models as a kid. All my life had been spent in building the macro not the micro. I decided to test my modeling skills by building the blast furnace kit first. I figured if I could build that, I could build anything. This was a challenge trying to build this on our tiny dining table at the New Jersey apartment. Nonetheless, the parts held together enough for me to be able to transfer the model each evening to a small cabinet top a few feet away.

I chose the Fall of 1937 for the setting of my layout for several reasons. First it was the "depression within the Great Depression." This was so called because as the New Deal programs began to cause a recovery in the economy, Roosevelt desired to do some budget cutting. This resulted in a recessionary economy which did not recover until the Lend-Lease policy started in 1939.

I think that a layout should tell a story. The Great Depression opens a panorama of possible stories to be told in miniature scenes which I love to do: including hobo jungles, shanty towns, red light districts and tenement life. The New Deal programs hired photographers to go forth into the nation and record daily life in the 1930's. This provided me with all sorts of prototypes to work from especially industrial scenes. It was also the point when the Pennsylvania Railroad was completing the electrification for the GG1. Dating a layout to a fairly specific date helps to eliminate anachronisms. I chose the fall season because it presents many interesting scenic possibilities and adds color to the depressing rust and grimy black of industry.

*[This is the first part in a short series from Bob describing the history and construction of his layout. There will be more to come in your Spring Wheel Report! -Ed.]*

# Caboose Conundrum

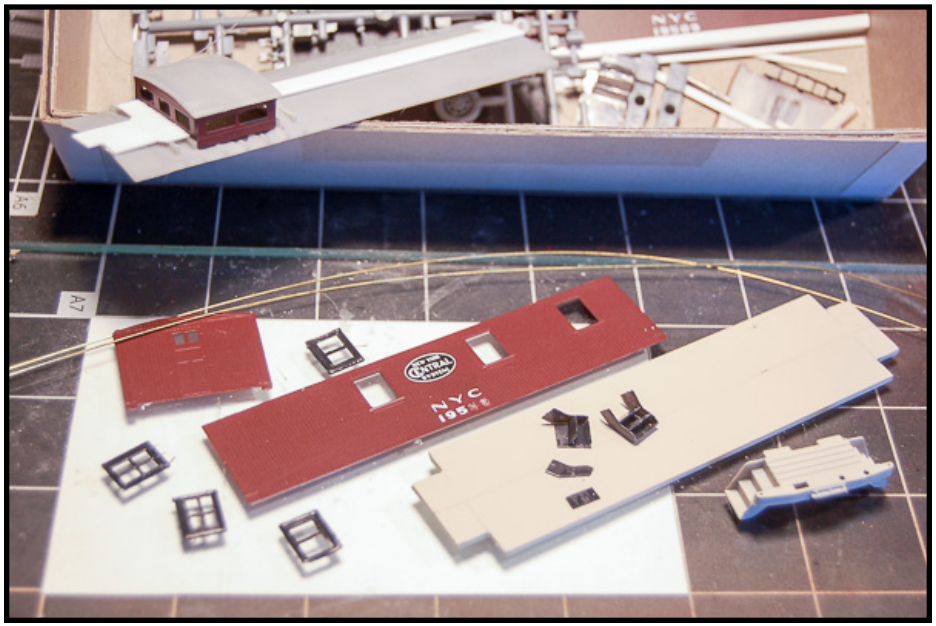
by Ron Polimeni

When my friend Don Florwick first initiated TT/TO operations on his NYCS Pittsburgh & South Pennsylvania Railroad (P&SP), he needed cabooses. Models of NYCS's 19000 series cabooses were the obvious choice. To that end, Don purchased 16 of the kits offered by Waterlevel Models for these cabooses. As building the Waterlevel kits would take time, in the interim, Don also purchased a pair of 19000 series NYC cabooses from Trix as well as a small fleet of bay window cabooses from Walthers.

The Walthers stand-in's unfortunately were lettered for Conrail and consequently were bereft of end ladders and roof walks. They performed well, but the sight of a modern Conrail caboose bringing up the rear of a 1950's era NYC consist had the effect of finger nails on a black board every time one passed me by during an operating session.

Learning of Don's stash of Waterlevel kits, I offered to build them for him as he had enough on his plate maintaining a rather large layout to operational standards (which he does very well). I began by taking a single kit to examine with the intent of determining the best approach to gang building the fleet. I found however, that these kits were probably never intended as fleet equipment for operating sessions.

The Waterlevel NYC cabooses are high quality plastic craftsman style kits. The model company did their homework and the instructions are well written as well as informative, providing much background information on the NYC 19000 series wood cabooses. The kits themselves however, are a bear to assemble. As the picture (below) shows, the steps are constructed out of six tiny pieces that are nearly impossible to hold in proper relation to each other while applying glue. For sixteen cabooses this would require constructing a total of 64 step assemblies.



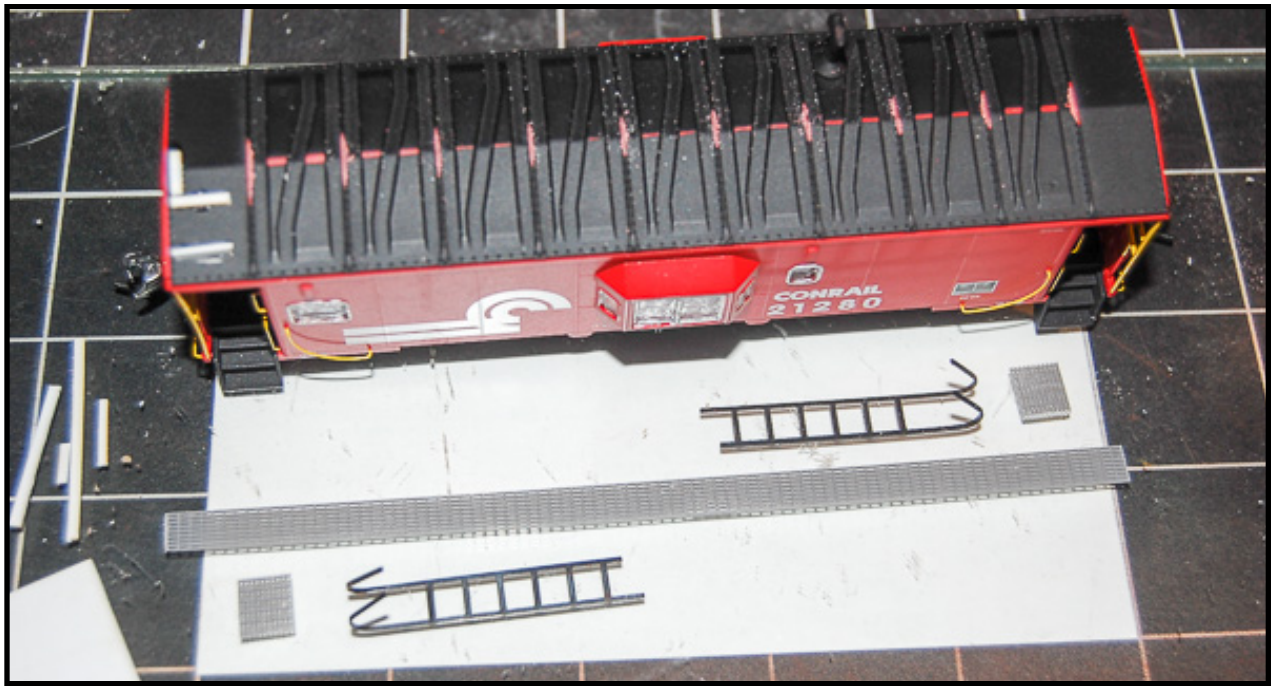

Since what Don needs are operational pieces, not contest pieces, we began looking for options. In the right hand corner of the pic is a set of steps from an Athearn "blue box" caboose kit. These steps, complete with end platform are a nearly perfect substitute for the steps in the kit. With the help of Jay Beckham we will be looking into having them 3D printed. The Waterlevel kits are therefore on hold for the time being.

As yard master for Somerset yard, switching the bay window Conrail cabooses when making or breaking up a coal extra was especially grating. To that end I offered to back date the cabooses. Don is in the process of realigning a section of mainline with the consequence of having to cancel Novembers operating session. This has allowed time to repaint and back date the Walthers bay window cabooses.

The prototype for these Walthers bay window cabooses is most similar to Conrail as class N21. They are very nearly correct for NYC's Lot 782, built in 1949 by Despatch Shops Incorporated. They have the correct bay window but the other windows should be square double pane rather than have the rounded corners with riveted aluminum trim. In the interest of simplicity and the need to have them back in service within a limited time period, Don elected to invoke modelers license and say the cabooses were purchased directly by the P&SP due to a shortage of NYC hacks.

To that end, all I have to do is backdate them to a 1950's appearance. Tichy Train Group came to the rescue with roof walks and friction bearing caboose trucks. Tichy has to be one of the best deals on the market for model railroaders. Their products are of the highest quality with some of the finest castings I've ever had the pleasure of working. Plus their prices can't be beat. A box of 10 trucks goes for 15.50 albeit with plastic wheels. The wheels however, are of the correct tread profile. The roof walks come three to a package for 5.95.

The Walthers cabooses came with very nice metal wheels. As can be seen in the photo, the wheels have been exchanged on the trucks with the metal wheels being installed in the Tichy frames and the Tichy wheels being placed in the roller bearing frames ( the pile in front of the cabooses). The third pic shows the roof of one of the cabooses with the file marks where the ribs have been filed down to accommodate the metal roof walk. Supports will be added at the ends of the roof with bits of styrene bent to shape and filed flat. The ladder walks are supported the same way with bits of styrene cut to shape. The ladders are gleanings from the scrap drawer where fortunately, I had just enough for the six cabooses. However, scale ladder stock is available from several sources.




Once the roof details are completed the cars will be painted the standard NYC box car red with black roof. To avoid having to disassemble the car bodies, I decided to use Micro-Mark liquid masking film to cover the windows. This is a rubber like film that can be peeled off. Tedious to apply but much easier than disassembling a half dozen models that weren't designed to be disassembled.

The cabooses should be back in service in time for Don's December operating session. All he has to worry about now is having the mainline to Wheeling back in service by then.

As for the Waterline models, that's another story for another time. Perhaps by the next installment of the *Wheel Report* I'll managed to have the steps and end sills recreated via 3D printing and will be able to convey how I fared with that adventure.

# 2018 MER Convention Report

by Bob Morningstar

The NMRA Mid Eastern Region held their convention at the Rockville Hilton This past October. The following is a recap of my observations as an attendee. More information on the convention can still be found at http://potomac-nmra.org/MER2018/Main/index.html.

My overall impression was that the convention was well planned and executed. A convention official indicated approximately 200 were in attendance.

I stayed at the convention hotel Thursday and Friday because clinics were scheduled up until 10:00 PM each evening. This was a very nice, typical Hilton property, and the convention chairmen are to be commended for negotiating very favorable pricing. Room rates were almost ½ of what was available on expedia.com for the same location. There was ample free parking on site. The convention center was also accessible via the Twinbrook metro.

The only negative aspect of convention was that layouts on the tour were too far away or conflicted with evening clinics that I wanted to attend. Some of these layouts were 1-2 hours away (one way travel). I found it hard to believe there were no closer layouts to view.

Many of the clinics were informative and well presented, yet some, while acceptable, were not convention caliber.

SMD member Jay Beckham gave a fine clinic on C/MRI. I learned a lot and now wish I had looked closer at it before I went with a Loconet solution on my layout's signaling system.

I did spend an extra $5 and attended a 2 ½ hour 3D printing clinic. We were required to bring our laptops for hands on labs. Using the SketchUP program we designed and printed a B&O mile post. This clinic was well worth the time and I learned a lot of techniques on how to better use SketchUP. I intend on taking the 3D design from the convention and printing it on my 3D printer at home.

The contest room had many models, including two that I submitted. I earned 3rd place in "On Line Structures." I pried my scratch built WM yard light tower off the layout and placed on a piece of pink foam board with some ground cover to give it a finished look. This was my first NMRA competition and I learned quite a bit from the judges score sheets. The comments were helpful to understand their scores. I had no qualms with their ratings.

My take away is that they look for contest quality models. Mine were detailed for a level that I find acceptable for use on the layout but did not meet the grade to take 1st place. If a entry doesn't have the same level of detail as a Tangent Scale Model, you will not be competitive. My light tower lost marks because I didn't have the nut-bolt-washer details installed on one side of the tower. This was a build decision I made, not wanting to super detail a side of the structure a viewer would never see when on the layout. My other entry was a Athearn "blue box" gondola that I had repainted and decaled for the Penn Central. I got high marks for the paint and decals, but got dinged hard for lack of underbody detail and leaving molded-on ladders in place.

The Prince William Model Railroad Club had their module layout up and running with some really long trains. They also had the John Allen Timesaver switching layout setup. At first my son, Nicholas and I were able to complete the switching puzzle in 42 moves (the host said the best you can do is 29 moves). It took us 3 attempts to get it down to 32 moves but was an enjoyable hour spent with Nicholas.

Overall, it was a positive experience which both my son and I enjoyed together. We met many interesting people and the convention was worth the time and investment.

# Informal Operating Systems

by Harvey Heyser

Gentlemen's Agreement and Mother, May I?

*Introductory note – To my good friends Pete, Jane, Don, Bob, Steve, Ron, and Bill: I realize that some of the following ideas disagree with thoughts you have expressed to me about prototype-based operation. I thank you for graciously sharing your knowledge and for inviting me to your operating sessions. However, I feel that the current focus on prototype-based systems may not work for all layouts, their owners, and train crews. Less demanding operating systems may be the right approach for those intimidated by or stressed out by prototype-based systems. Consequently, I feel that informal systems, though not well regarded in our hobby at this time, deserve to be acknowledged, talked about, and evaluated on their own merits. The following is an attempt to do so.*

Most model railroaders respect the more formal, prototype-based operating systems: timetable/train order (TT/TO), track warrants, and centralized traffic control (CTC) for instance. After all, those systems are modeled after the prototype procedures we attempt to replicate. But what do you do if those systems result in stressful operating sessions for you and your crews? There are less formal alternatives. Many sessions I have participated in have used the informal systems described here. I have enjoyed those sessions even though, among serious model railroaders, the procedures used do not enjoy the same level of respect as prototype-based systems.

Recently, the SMD had a clinic presentation that categorized operations as either prototype-based or "fun run." While the latter term was certainly easy to understand, it was not particularly fair to anyone. Prototype-based systems are also "fun." (If they were not, no one would want to participate in them.) On the other hand, "fun run" sessions are not totally frivolous. Categorizing informal systems negatively ignores their potential as stepping stones into the joys of operating and as opportunities to learn about the prototype. Before we consign informal operating procedures to the trash bin of toy trains, it seems to me more useful to think of operating systems as falling on a continuum between prototype-based and "fun run" instead of fitting into one category or the other. A system that starts out "fun run" can easily slide along the continuum towards more prototype-based when those involved feel better informed and more comfortable.

This essay will examine two of the better known informal systems for managing the flow of traffic across a model railroad: gentlemen's agreement and mother, may I?

Gentlemen's agreement occurs when two or more train crews agree about how to resolve a conflict, such as three trains arriving in a town with only the main track and one siding not counting spurs. (The layout owner or dispatcher is not usually involved with the negotiations.) If the crews are novices, they might decide to let the local finish switching before allowing the other two trains to come into town. However, more experienced crews would consider the fact that the other two trains are likely more important (passenger trains or through freights, for instance) and would figure out a way to get the local in the clear so the other two trains could execute a pass (before the local gets back to work). While the prototype would probably endeavor not to let this situation happen, it is a good example of how learning what the prototype does can result in a smoother operating session. (By the way, trying to resolve a three-way meet by gentlemen's agreement can get stressful when you have only two tracks. Ballast conferences and brake clubs anyone?)

Using gentlemen's agreement places responsibility for resolving conflicts in many hands and encourages creativity from all participants. Bob Proctor handled mainline operations on his Western Antietam and Layabout using gentlemen's agreement. (His operators often accused him of sadism, but I think what he truly enjoyed was seeing the creative ways crews cooperated with each other.) Resolving conflicts creatively can be very satisfying. However, as seen by the three

train example above, the solution dreamed up by the novices failed to take into account the priority of the trains involved. So, that solution, creative though it might have been, was the wrong solution. Consequently, that situation became a learning opportunity reminding us of the railroad's primary mission of moving passengers and freight in an efficient and timely basis by prioritizing trains.

Another opportunity to learn about the prototype arises when instructions are given to the train crews. (Of course, you must first get the crews to read the instructions.) I was party to a similar (four train) situation where the gentlemen's agreement resulted in one local backing up to the previous town, one train holding on the main, one train moving forward, and the other local completing its work. We were so proud of ourselves, but we had completely overlooked the fact that the local, which completed its work (the afternoon local), was supposed to pick up a cut of cars from the other (morning) local. If we had read our train instructions, we could have avoided that unfortunate result. Even informal operating systems require following instructions to run the trains effectively.

Experiencing challenging situations similar to those described above is one of the ways informal operating systems give us opportunities to learn about the prototype. Experience is a powerful teacher. (Why did the prototype have this rule? Well, you have just experienced the chaos that can happen if they did not; that's why.)

Use of gentlemen's agreement with a common sense understanding of how a railroad operates and with knowledge of our train's operating instructions can be an effective way to run a model railroad. (A good set of nine basic, common sense rules for operating can be found in Mat Thompson's "Mark Me Up" column in the summer 2016 issue of the Potomac Flyer, the Potomac Division's newsletter.)

**M**other, may I? is a system of obtaining permission to move your train from one person, usually the layout owner or a designated "dispatcher." Mother, may I? is not really a fair name for this system, since mothers (of crew members) are rarely the designated permission givers. The name might derive from a problem frequently encountered. With every crew wanting permission from a single person, mother, may I? can get quite hectic. Sessions can easily get out of hand and resemble a bunch of children squabbling for their mother's attention – not what we want in a relaxed operating experience. Regardless, where train crews request permission to move from a single person, responsibility for resolving conflicts between trains rests in that person's hands.

Mother, may I? is frequently spoken of with disdain. Before we condemn it, we should consider its similarities with both track warrant and CTC systems – prototype-based systems which also place sole responsibility for permission to move in the hands of a single person – the dispatcher. Clearly because of their wide use, these systems demonstrate that the prototype has had a great deal of experience making single person responsibility work. (Perhaps, a better, more railroady name for mother, may I? might be dispatcher, may I?)

Model railroaders have also used systems similar to mother, may I? For instance, in the past, DC block control often required calling the dispatcher for block assignments allowing a train to proceed. More recently, roving dispatcher systems using verbal authorization have been used successfully on simpler, more compact layouts. With this system, the roving dispatcher makes decisions based on his observations of the current situation from within the layout room. Dave Moltrup's Beaver Falls and Shenango (aka Moltrup Steel) operates using a roving dispatcher system.

A mother, may I? system can serve as a stepping stone to more prototype-based systems like track warrants or fill-in the blank train order systems (such as the one Tony Koester used for a while on his Allegheny Midland). In fact, the problems encountered with it may encourage adopting one of the prototype-based systems.

**Disadvantages of these informal operating systems:**

a) Not prototypical - a common complaint.

b) Not suited for complex, high traffic layouts. (Consider TT/TO)

c) Requires creative thought and consideration from the layout owner to set up the operating system. Crews will need good, clear instructions.The challenge of coordinating crew efforts is still present whether the system is formal or informal.

d) Can get quite chaotic.

**Advantages to these informal operating systems:**

a) Low intimidation factor because there is much less to learn and put into practice.

b) Simplicity: less paperwork, fewer reporting requirements (minimal O.S.-ing), and less dependence on time.

c) Stepping stone to more prototypically based systems.

d) Relaxing.

e) Less administrative oversight during the session. (Everyone, including the layout owner, gets to run a train.)

f) Operations come naturally to crews. (I've noted that when stressed, crews often fall into using informal procedures regardless of the operating system. Crews working at the same station agree to who gets to work first; calling for help from the owner or dispatcher when the rules in place don't give enough direction to address a problem.)

g) Gives crew members (especially beginners) firsthand experience of the challenges encountered in coordinating the work of countless people needed to keep trains moving.

**Conditions under which these informal operating systems might be appropriate:**

1) Smaller and simpler layouts where it is easy to get an overall idea of the status of operations at any given time.

2) Layouts where only one or two trains run at a given time.

3) Layouts with crews who are well acquainted with the layout.

4) Layouts with good sets of instructions and crews willing to read those instructions (a script for their train, for instance).

5) Layouts where the owner wants to run trains also.

6) Layouts that feature switching (not much mainline traffic and few potential conflicts between trains).

Potentially these informal operating systems offer not only an easy introduction to operating but also for the system to become more prototypical while continuing to offer relaxing, enjoyable operating experiences. Three things are necessary for that to happen. First, a commitment to learn more about how the prototype runs trains. Second, a willingness to set up a trial and error process. And third, a continuing effort to implement what is learned both from the prototype and by trial and error.

In conclusion, I want to put in a good word about operating systems that have brought me many happy and informative moments. Before we condemn these informal operating systems, we should be aware of their advantages and of those situations where their use might be appropriate. We also should be aware that informal systems do have some similarities to prototype practices.

While informal systems are not currently regarded highly in our hobby, I hope to foster tolerance for those modelers who prefer to operate that way. While they might not be doing what we prefer, they may be having just as much fun as we are. Furthermore, exposure to the joys of operations may lead them to learn more about prototype practices and to adopt more of those practices for their own operations (no encouragement from the model railroad police necessary).

# Train Rides

- **B&O Railroad Museum**, Baltimore, MD.
  Phone: (410) 752-2490
  Web: www.borail.org
  - Magical Holiday Express, December 1-31.
  - Historic Roundhouse Turntable Demonstrations January 12, Noon.
  - Celebrate Black History Month at the B&O, February 1-28.
  - For more events, see website.

- **Ma & Pa Railroad Heritage Village**, Airville, PA.
  Phone: (717) 927-9565
  Web: www.maandparailroad.com
  - Christmas City Express, December 1-2, 8-9 &15-16.
  - For more events, see website.

- **Mountain Rail Adventures**, For rides out of Elkins, Cheat Bridge, Cass, and Durbin, WV.
  Phone: (877) 686.7245
  Web: www.mountainrailwv.com
  - Polar Express; Elkins, December 1-2, 5-9, & 12-16.
  - Elf Limited; Cass, December 1-2 & 7-8.
  - For more events, see website.

- **National Capitol Trolley Museum**, Colesville, MD.
  Phone: (301) 384-6088
  Web: www.dctrolley.org
  - Holly Trolley Fest, 1-2, 8-9, 15-16, 22, & 23.
  - For more events, see website.

- **Potomac Eagle**, Romney, WV.
  Phone: (304) 424-0736
  Web: www.potomaceagle.com
  - Christmas Trains, December 1, 7-8, & 14-15.
  - For more events, see website.

- **Rockhill Trolley Museum**, Rockhill Furnace, PA.
  Phone: (814) 447-9576 *weekends*
  Phone: (610) 428-7200 *weekdays*
  Web: www.rockhilltrolley.org
  - Polar Bear Express, December 1 & 7-8.
  - Santa's Trolley, December 1.
  - For more events, see website.

- **Steam Into History**, New Freedom, PA.
  Phone: (717) 942-2370
  Web: www.steamintohistory.com
  - Tannenbaum Christmas Tree Trains, December 1-2.
  - Santa Singalongs, December 7-9, 14-16, & 21-23.
  - For more events, see website.

- **Strasburg Railroad**, Ronks, PA.
  Phone: (866) 725-9666
  Web: www.strasburgrailroad.com
  - Christmas Tree Train, December 1.
  - Santa's Christmas Trolley, December 21.
  - For more events, see website.

- **Walkersville Southern Railroad**, Walkersville, MD.
  Phone: (301) 898-0899
  Web: www.wsrr.org
  - Santa Trains, December 1-2, 8-9, 15-16, & 22-23.
  - For more events, see website.

- **Western Maryland Scenic Railroad**, Cumberland, MD.
  Phone: 1-800-872-4650, x105.
  Web: www.wmsr.com
  - Christmas City Express, Weekends, December 1-23.
  - Romance on the Rails, February 9-10, 14, & 16-17.
  - For more events, see website.

*[Highlights are posted below each listing. Call or visit on the web for comprehensive, up to date schedules and ticketing information. -Ed.]*

# Train Shows | Meets

- **Greenberg's Great Train and Toy Show**
  Show: December 1 & 2, 2018.
  Times: 10 AM to 4 PM.
  Address: Maryland State Fair Grounds, 2200 York Rd. Timonium, MD 21093.
  Web: trainshow.com

- **Frederick County Society of Model Engineers**
  Operating exhibit (large scale): Weekends, December 1-30, 2018.
  Time: Saturdays 10 AM to 4 PM, Sundays 12 PM to 4 PM.
  Address: 5 East Main Street, Thurmont, MD 21788.
  Open house: January 6, 13, 20, 27, & February 3, 2019.
  Time: 1 PM to 4 PM.
  Address: 423 East Patrick Street, Frederick, MD 21701.
  Web: facebook.com/Frederick-County-Society-of-Model-Engineers-Fcsme-266885386669323/

- **KofC, 4th Annual Brunswick Christmas Train, Toy, & Collectibles Sale & Show**
  Show: December 15, 2018.
  Time: 9 AM to 3 PM.
  Address: Bruswick Volunteer Fire Company, 1500 Volunteer Drive, Brunswick, MD 21716.
  Web: facebook.com/KOC11715/

- **DCNRHS RR presentations**
  Presentations: December 21, 2018, January 18, & February 15, 2019.
  Time: 8 PM.
  Address: Various. See website.
  Web: dcnrhs.org

- **Waynesboro Model Railroad Club**
  Open house: December 23, 29, & 30, 2018.
  Open house: January 5, 6, 12, 19, & 20, 2019.
  Time: 1 PM to 5 PM.
  Address: 3291 Waynescastle Road, Greencastle, PA 17225.
  Web: waynesboromrrc.com

- **Great Scale Model Train Show**
  Shows: February 2 & 3, 2019.
  Times: Sat: 9 AM to 5 PM; Sun: 10 AM to 4 PM.
  Address: Maryland State Fair Grounds, Cow Palace, 2200 York Rd. Timonium, MD 21093.
  Web: gsmts.com

- **Hagerstown Model Railroad Museum**
  Sale: February 19, 2019.
  Time: 9 AM to 2 PM.
  Address: Washington County Agricultural Education Center, 7313 Sharpsburg Pike, Sharpsburg, MD 21782.
  Web: antietamstation.com

*[If you don't see your activity listed, please send future press releases to southmountaindiv@gmail.com -Ed.]*