



April 2021

From Your WISE Superintendent...

— Mike Slater



What a year it has been, however there seems to be a light at the end of this long tunnel. However, we still have a bit to go to get to that end. We now need to start to look at how we can get services back to our membership. First is our Video Library, Videos will be available to be checked at the Sturtevant Caboose Museum (next door to

Castlewood Restaurant 2811 Wisconsin St, Sturtevant, WI 53177) . This will allow Members to have access to a service we offer to our members,

- ⇒ Saturday, May 1st, Noon till 3PM
- ⇒ Sunday, June 6th, Noon till 3PM,
- ⇒ Saturday, July 3rd, Noon till 3PM
- ⇒ Sunday, August 1st, Noon till 3PM.

Next, we need to look at having in-person meets again, however I also understand if some members might not feel ready to be with other people. We need your feedback on this. I suggest we have an in-person meeting in October. This meeting can also be streamed via a zoom call for those that do not feel it is time to meet face to face yet.

Finally, we are looking into how feasible it will be to

Next WISE Board Meeting

All WISE/NMRA members are welcome to attend our monthly board meetings. All meetings will be virtual until Fall of 2021 due to the current status of Covid.

Our next conference call meeting will be held on Wednesday, April 14, 2021 at 7:00 pm.

If you are not on the Board and want to listen in please email Mike Slater at superintendent@trainfest.com for login information. You will need to have downloaded and installed the free program Zoom in order to participate.

have Trainfest in person at State Fair Park next November. Having this show is not without risk. We are looking at ways to reduce the overall cost of having the show, recognizing that if folks still have a fear of attending the show, it may not make enough revenue to cover the costs. If Trainfest takes place this would be the first of the big three national shows to take place since the shutdown occurred a year ago.

On a closing note, we cannot get the Division restarted again without you, we need your help—we have several open board positions and many volunteer opportunities. Many of these tasks do not require a lot of effort. Some just involve talking to others or saying hello to new people. Just a reminder that our April membership meeting is just around the corner and will be on Zoom on Sunday April the 25th, please keep an eye on your email for the zoom meeting link. You can also call into the Zoom meeting via a regular phone line to hear the meeting.

Thanks

Mike Slater

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The Frugal Modeler Thinks Out Loud

— Dave Nelson

Want to start a good, rousing argument? Ask a group of model railroaders "what is the correct height for a layout?" You'll quickly hear demonstrations of Mark Twain's famous quip: "In all matters of opinion, our adversaries are insane." Even if two agree on the same height, it might not be for the same reasons.

I think, however, that it is uncontroversial to say that the height of model train layouts has been increasing over the years. By way of examples, consider the photo of Gary Children operating at the late Stan Olander's Cornbelt Northern layout, or the photos of the late Mike Ziegler's Conowingo Central layout (which had varying heights) -- both good examples of modern layout design, and both fairly tall. Such taste-makers as Tony Koester have been encouraging this trend, but of course Koester is also a strong proponent of double deck layouts which automatically involve a rather tall upper deck. But even the lower decks of modern double deck layouts are as tall or taller than many of the layouts I visited during my beginning years in the 1960s.



Above, Stan Olander's Cornbelt Northern layout. Shown below and at the upper right are shots from the last operating session on Mike Ziegler's Conowingo Central railroad.



In Kalmbach's 1952 book "Practical Guide to Model Railroading," Linn Westcott wrote "the favorite average height is about 43" above the floor, but it is customary to make the grid tops lower than the track by about 6" to allow for scenery ... You can use 36" legs" But that book shows something else -- nearly every layout had the old-fashioned central control panel to run the trains and throw the switches (with two, count them two, throttles) and the proud owners were usually pictured sitting on a kitchen chair, puffing on a pipe, running their trains. Most track plans were some variation of an oval with the yard conveniently near that control panel. Very few linear track plans, no walk-around control, certainly no wireless control, so few if any manual turnouts. I remember visiting many layouts of this type (some likely started in the 1940s or earlier): about kitchen table height, some no taller than 3 feet or so, with a light bulb or two suspended over the layout being about it for lighting. By keeping the layout low you could see the entire (oval) layout in a glance, and there were good practical reasons for needing to see where every moving train was from your chair at the central control panel.

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The Frugal Modeler *(continued)*

By 1979 when Westcott wrote his book "How to Build Model Railroad Benchwork," he somewhat changed his tune. "Relatively low benchwork with track no more than 40" off the floor provides good visibility over the entire layout. You can lean over without stretching to reach things far from the layout edge."

"But," Westcott went on, "this height is murder when work must be done underneath the layout." What had changed? Well consider this: between 1950 and 1980 the average age of a model railroader more than doubled, and now it has about tripled. The agility and endurance of upper-middle-aged backs and knees have become layout design factors. Yet Westcott also mentioned in passing that he had *lowered* the height of his own layout twice.

Compared to even the nicest layouts I recall visiting in the mid-1960s, today's layouts have more complete and realistic scenery, including backdrops to the ceiling, larger structures, more imposing industrial scenes with local switching, more realistic track, and they all are better lit. Linear layouts invite walk-around control; first we had tethered cabs, then plug-in throttles with memory, and now, wireless. Walking with your train itself encourages a higher layout level, for the benefit of your back and shoulders if not for the greater realism. You want to look *into* a detailed scene from the side, as a railfan photographer would, rather than look *down* as if in an airplane.

"Operations" were different then, too; modelers concentrated on the yard, ran their passenger and through freights (from that central control panel) out of the yard and then back into the yard. Those that did have peddler freights and local switching made use of Kadee's uncoupling magnets and "delayed action" feature to uncouple and then shove a car into a siding -- all could be done without leaving your control panel. Local switching is now more prominent on large layouts, and uncoupling is more likely manual using a small pick -- which again encourages greater layout height, somewhere around the middle of the chest at least.

But Westcott made a valid point that cannot be ignored: we work above and below our layouts, and while the higher the layout level the easier it is to work under the layout, at some point it becomes "murder" to work above it, and that work can include not just laying track and creating scenery, difficult enough, but worst of all trying to solder feeder wires to the side of the rail that faces away from you. You feel your arms become numb as the odor of melting plastic ties fills the air

Of course there are many variables in arriving at a height for the layout that works best for you. Are you tall

or short? I am quite tall (6'7") and my domino benchwork is about 53 inches high (see photo). Will you stand or sit while operating (and are you sitting on a chair, or sitting on a stool)? Is the layout for only you, or is it also for kids or grand-kids? Are you modeling the flatlands or modeling varied topography with hills and valleys and heavy grades? How high is your ceiling? There still can be reasons to prefer a relatively short layout.

Another factor is lighting. I built my layout pretty tall, and my fluorescent light fixtures are in every other suspended-ceiling tile, with exceptions due to ducts and the like. (I'd love to replace all those tubes with LEDs, mostly because of the harm fluorescent light does to scenery.) The layout is tall enough that even my very generalized fluorescent lighting tends to shine more brightly right below the fixture (incandescent is even more directional that way). If the layout was a bit lower it would be more evenly lit. But my back would rebel.

Regardless of your choice, the irony is that the "ideal" height for building your layout - laying and wiring the track (which can involve leaning over a good distance), making the scenery, painting the backdrop, that sort of stuff -- may not be as ideal for operating, particularly if you need to see the reporting marks on the sides of cars, or want a realistic "scale person's" view of the trains. This quandary has not changed since Westcott's time.

If you have yet to decide, I suggest setting up a card table and then piling on large cardboard boxes of various heights and perhaps setting a foot or two of track on top, maybe with a snap switch or whatever, with freight cars on the track. Try re-railing the cars; try coupling and uncoupling and throwing a switch and reading the reporting marks on the cars. Imagine standing for a three-hour operating session at a given height, then imagine needing to crawl under benchwork of that height. I think you'll quickly find a "right" height for you, or at least a good height range. And I predict it will be taller than Linn Westcott's old 43" average.

Dave Nelson's domino benchwork.



\$\$\$ From the Cluttered Desk of the Paymaster

— Dennis Janssen

Something New from the IRS for You

The IRS has now given taxpayers a new tool to help prevent tax-related identity theft: an Identity Protection Personal Identification Number, better known as an IP PIN. And the best news? This tool is now available to all taxpayers, not just people who have previously been victims of identity theft.

What is an IP PIN?

Starting in 2021, the IRS is making IP PINs available for all taxpayers. In the past, only taxpayers who had been victims of identity theft were eligible for this tool.

IP PINs are designed to make it more difficult for thieves to file false tax returns in the names of other taxpayers. These PINs are unique six-digit numbers. When you file your return with an IP PIN, it provides the IRS with additional information to verify your identity.

Identity thieves, then, would need to know not just your Social Security number, but your IP PIN, too.

IP PINs are only temporary. Each taxpayer's IP PIN lasts for a year. The following year, taxpayers will have to sign up for a new IP PIN that they will use when filing that year's income tax returns.

How to get your IP PIN

Getting an IP PIN is an easy process, but you won't be able to start the process until the middle of January. That's because the online portal offered by the IRS to get one of these numbers was down for maintenance at the start of 2021. The IRS says the tool will be online again starting in the middle of January.

Starting then, you can log onto the [Get an IPN](#) tool offered by the IRS. You will have to verify your identity. This means that you'll have to [register an online account](#) with IRS.gov, a process that the IRS says takes about 15 minutes.

To register, you'll need to provide your email address, Social Security Number or Individual Tax Identification Number, tax filing status, mailing address, and one financial account number linked to your name.

This can be the last eight digits of your credit card, as long as it's not an American Express, debit, or corporate card; the account number listed on your student loan statement; the account number on your mortgage or home equity loan; account number of your Home Equity Line of Credit; or the account number of your auto loan.

You will also need to provide a mobile phone number linked to your name so that the IRS can send you an activation code. If you can't provide this, the IRS will send your activation code to you by mail.

If you are a confirmed victim of identity theft, the IRS will mail you a [CP01A Notice](#) with a new IP PIN each year. This process will be automatic.

Your IP PIN will be valid for one calendar year, so you'll need to obtain a new one each year if you want to remain in the program. The IRS says that its Get an IP PIN online tool is usually unavailable from the middle of November through the middle of January each year.

How to request an IP PIN offline

If you can't register for an IP PIN online, you can ask for one through the mail, though there are limits. If your income is \$72,000 or less, you can file [IRS Form 15227](#), Application for an Identity Protection Personal Identification Number.

To do this, you'll need a Social Security number or Individual Taxpayer Identification Number, an adjusted gross income of \$72,000 or less and access to a telephone.

You can also make an appointment for an in-person meeting at your nearest Taxpayer Assistance Center. You'll need one picture identification document and another identification document to prove your identity.

The IRS will, after verifying your identity, send you your IP PIN through the mail within three weeks.





Upcoming Division Events

April 18, 2021—WISE Division Meet and Annual Meeting

Watch for virtual meeting information

May 2, 2021— Annual DuPage Train Show Bus Trip (cancelled)

November 13-14, 2021—Trainfest

Event dependent on Covid and restrictions

* Denotes extra fare event

For more event details go to our website: WWW.WISEDIVISION.ORG



WISE Division NMRA Officers & Board of Directors

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Open—Membership Director

Open—WISEops Director

Video Library Update

— Burnell Breaker, Video Librarian

With the switch from in-person to virtual meetings, it will be a bit difficult in the near term checking out items from the Video Library. Those of you who have Division DVD's, hang onto them until we can again meet in person.

I am hoping to have DVD's from our VHS tapes available when we resume meeting again.

See the Superintendent' column on Page 1 of the Owl Car for a summer pick-up schedule in Sturtevant.



Upcoming National And Regional Events Of Interest

April 17-18, 2021—Tittletown Train Show 2021

KI Convention Center, Green Bay

July 4-10, 2021—NMRA 2021 Convention—Santa Clara

Cancelled due to Covid issues

www.nmra2021.com

Sept. 16-19, 2021—Midwest Region NMRA Convention

Rockford Railway Convention—175 Years of History

Rockford Holiday Inn, Rockford, IL

Rescheduled from May

www.mwr-nmra.org

May 18-22, 2022—NMRA Tri-Region Convention

“Indy Junction”, Marriott East, Indianapolis, IN

www.mwr-nmra.org

August 7-15, 2022—NMRA 2022 Convention—St. Louis

Historical Society Meetings

May 20-23, 2021 -Chicago & North Western Hist. Society

*2021 Mankato “Rails and River” Convention **Cancelled***

Virtual Event being planned for same dates

www.cnwhs.org

August 12-15, 2021—Milwaukee Road Historical Association

2021 Convention, Holiday Inn & Suites Chicago Northwest

Elgin, IL www.mrha.com

August 6-8, 2021—Missabe Railroad Historical Society

www.missabe.com

September 8-11, 2021—Soo Line Historical & Tech. Society

2021 Annual Convention

Holiday Inn, Manitowoc, WI

www.sooline.org

September 18-22, 2021—Great Northern Railway Hist. Society

*2021 Convention, Willmar, MN **Cancelled for 2021***

www.gnrhs.org

October 7-10, 2021—Burlington Route Historical Society

2021 Annual Convention,

St. Louis Union Station, St. Louis, MO

Joint Meeting with Missouri Pacific Historical Society

www.burlingtonroute.org

Meetings Pending

Green Bay & Western Historical Society

2020 Annual Meeting Postponed—Check Website

www.gbwhs.com



Car Float Operations on the Rock Harbor

— Mark Willmering

The Rock Harbor Railroad (RHR) is a fictional railroad located on an island and wholly owned by the Rock Harbor Transportation Company (RHTC). Late in the 19th century when the RHR was built, ships would dock at Rock Harbor and transfer their goods to the railroad cars. In the early part of the 20th century the RHR was having financial troubles and went into receivership. A group of investors, realizing the potential of the RHR, created the RHTC and bought all rights to the company.

One of the first cost saving ideas was to reduce the amount of labor used for loading and unloading rail cars at the docks. Constructing a causeway and bridge to connect the RHR to the mainland proved uneconomical so a car float system was developed. Many of the goods that are imported and exported for the island use this system along with an occasional tramp steamer at the old docks.

The Railroad:

The RHR serves many industries including mining, manufacturing, agriculture, and forestry. The industries on the island can export many end products as well as raw materials. Tourism has been a growing industry lately, so part of the old port has been converted to pleasure craft use. Swimming is not recommended in the harbor due to the pollution, after all, this is the 1950's.

There are 5 towns on the island that the railroad serves. Oak Ridge and Richmond Heights are out on the peninsula, which include 27 loading docks between the two. Mt. Carmel is located on a bluff overlooking the harbor, and is more compact than the other towns with 12 loading docks. Jamestown is not only the largest town with 17 loading docks, but is also the location of the classification yard and the engine service

facility. Rock Harbor is the fifth town with 14 loading docks and the car float dock.

Most of the Class A roads of the 1950's share access to the mainland yard of the RHTC. At this yard, all other railroads would drop off or pick-up cars. The RHTC has a switch engine here that will sort cars and load/unload the floats.

The RHR takes advantage of used equipment by purchasing engines and cabooses from other companies, and re-branding them with their own logos. Having the ability to re-brand equipment also gives them the flexibility to make changes in the future if needed.

The RHR runs RS3's, F3's, and one Pacific class steam engine for the town runs. They use HH660's, SW7's, SW2's, 45 ton, 70 ton and a 0-6-0 steam engine for switching needs in the yard and towns. The float docks on the mainland and island use dedicated FM H10-44's. The RHR also runs one passenger train, consisting of one coach and one baggage car, pulled by a 2-4-0 steam engine. The passenger train runs to all the towns twice a day down from a high of 6 runs. This is done to continue the pick up of milk that the farmers drop off at the towns. Passenger ridership is falling as more citizens buy cars.

Building the floats:

There are 8 identical floats that I use for this system and 1 car float dock due to space constraints. This presented a challenge because I must switch out the floats during operating sessions. Of the 8 floats used, one is for the logging operations and the other 7 are set up as staging tracks.

I decided that using wood for my floats would be easier and more durable than styrene. I only need to lift one float at a time, so weight is not a problem. I started with a 2x6 clear pine board cut to 28 inches long. Next, I cut an angle on the ends about ½ inch down from the top. This represents the bow and the stern. Although my floats can only hook up to the dock on one end, they can be moved around the harbor in either direction.



Having the floats line up in the same position every time is a requirement, these are working floats not show

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Rock Harbor ... continued

floats. I drilled two 3/8-inch holes in the bottom of the floats 1 1/4 inch deep. These holes must be in the same spot on every float because they are for the locating pins (see photo below).

I used a 2x4 pine board to create a locating pin block at the dock area. Once the pins were glued into the 2x4, I put one of the floats on the pins and set it onto the basin that would represent my dock. I then shimmed up the float to the height of the loading apron. I put shims on the loading end and the side that would sit against the harbor wall. The loading end was straightforward because I already had the apron in place. On the side of the float I had to consider the potential for future detail along the wall, pilings, and bumpers. Once I had the shims in place, I lifted out the float and pin block. I applied epoxy glue to the bottom of the pin block and put the pin block back on the float and set it back into the basin. I made sure the float was where I wanted it and let the epoxy dry overnight. I then removed the float and shims. My pin block was secure, and all floats fit perfectly.

I sanded the floats and used a gray primer to seal them. I should also add that I had the 2x6 cut blanks drying in my basement for about 9 months before I started working them. There was no special drying method used. This was simply to rid the planks of their "greenness" from the lumber store.

I wanted the tracks on the floats to be recessed, which makes loading and unloading easier because it acts as a rerailer track. As I was researching information about railroad car floats, I did find some pictures where the track was recessed but most of them are above the deck. I believe maintenance would be easier if the tracks were exposed. I used a router and a jig to cut



slots on the top of the wood blanks to lay the tracks in (see photo to top right). These slots are cut to the same depth as the track is tall. I used flex track and a short switch on all the floats.

There are 3 tracks on each float. The two outside tracks



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Rock Harbor ... continued

are 200 scale feet and the middle track is about 150 scale feet. The middle track only has about 90 scale feet of available storage because of the angle to the outside track, however, my railroad primarily consists of cars 40 feet or smaller, so I am still able to have 10 cars to each float.

As I mentioned all the floats are working, 2 of them are my interchange tracks and 3 of them are my staging yard, the tracks must line up. I set a cut and primed float on the locating pins and set the track in the slots. I lined up the track on the float to the track on the apron and nailed them in. I then repeated this for the other 7 floats. At this point I waited until I had 6 operating sessions before I went any further. I wanted to make sure the system would work the way I envisioned before I filled in the basin and the track slots.



To fill in the slots on the floats I used drywall compound tinted with some black fabric dye. This produced a gray color, which won't as easily show any white scratches after the final paint job. I filled in the slots covering the track and ties using a straightedge to make things as smooth as possible.

I let the floats dry for a couple of days and cut grooves on the inside of the track for the wheel flanges. I then sanded everything down and painted them with an ultra-flat paint used

for camouflage. The floats were then numbered, detailed, and weathered.

The seams in the harbor basin were then sealed with black caulk and allowed to dry for 24 hours. Next, I painted the basin black and added my har-



bor wall and pilings. I put some rocks and sand along the edge and filled the basin with a layer of clear polyurethane, about an inch thick. This was left to dry for about a month. I added 5 more layers of polyurethane, each one thinner than the last, letting them dry for a couple weeks each. The final layer was about 1/16 of an inch.

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Rock Harbor ... continued

I wanted to store the floats somewhere easily accessible and not in the way of the rest of the operation. My solution was to build 4 drawers and mount them to roller glides directly below the float basin. I used 1x2 clear poplar for the frame and masonite for the floor. The drawers are 16 inches front to back and 32 inches side to side. When a loaded float is in the drawer there is about an inch of clearance between the top of the car and the drawer above it. Each drawer can hold 2 loaded floats.

Operations:

I like to have friends over for operating sessions and I can usually keep 5 people occupied and 10 if we double up. As I mentioned earlier the RHR has only one passenger train so most of the activity is moving freight. I don't have very long runs between towns but if you like to switch cars around, as I do, this is a good place to do it.

I use the JMRI program for operations on the Rock Harbor. I have set up the program so that every car must leave the island after it has been to an industry. All of my trains have a maximum of 10 cars, not including the caboose. This ensures that any train going back to the float won't overload it.

Of the 7 floats, numbers 1, 3 & 6 are the morning, afternoon, and evening transfers from the mainland to the yard in Jamestown. These 3 floats have been set-up as interchange tracks. Jamestown yard has 5 tracks. Tracks 1, 2 & 3 receive the cars from the floats and the yardmaster builds trains from the switch list to go to the towns. All the towns and the engine facility receive trains this way. When the trains finish switching the towns, the returning cars are put on tracks 4 & 5. The yard master will then build trains from tracks 4 & 5 to return to the floats.

Floats 2, 4, 5 & 7 have been set-up as staging tracks. These floats are only set-up to set out and pick-up from Mt. Carmel, Richmond Heights, Oak Ridge and Jamestown. Float 8 is specifically for my logging operation. All cars loaded or unloaded, go to or from the main logging camp. At the main camp goods must be transferred to old time 32-foot box and flat cars for the trip to Camp 2. When returning from Camp 2 the logs are on logging disconnects so they must be transferred to 40-foot flat cars or spline cars.

Incorporating a car float system into your layout can be a rewarding project. Not only does it add a unique feature that may not be seen in other railroads, but it can also make better use of space compared to using a staging yard. I have had a lot of fun designing and building my own and now think of it as one of the highlights of operations on my layout!



In Memorium ...

— Mike Slater

Former Board Member and Volunteer Ed Kofroth

November 18, 1939 - June 15, 2020

We at the WISE division recently found out that Ed Kofroth had passed away last June. Ed was a feature at our membership meets as the person who organized the clinics at the meets, always alerting us with his train whistles. He had done this for many years. He also was a member of our Board of Directors, serving until two years ago when he resigned due to health issues.

The last time I saw Ed was at Trainfest in 2019 where he volunteered at the WISE Division booth. I personally have known Ed for many decades. He was a kind and funny person, always showing kindness to my mother who used to sell tickets at one of our local swap meets. He always had a joke for my mother—of course, the type of joke depended on whether his wife had come along with him.

Ed was also a long time member of the Milwaukee Light Engineering Society. Ed will be missed by all of us and we thank him for all he did. May he rest in peace.

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