

NMRA BULLETIN

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rev 02/20/2022

ACHIEVEMENT PROGRAM

NMRA AP CERTIFICATE REPORT

JANUARY 2022

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MASTER MODEL RAILROADER®

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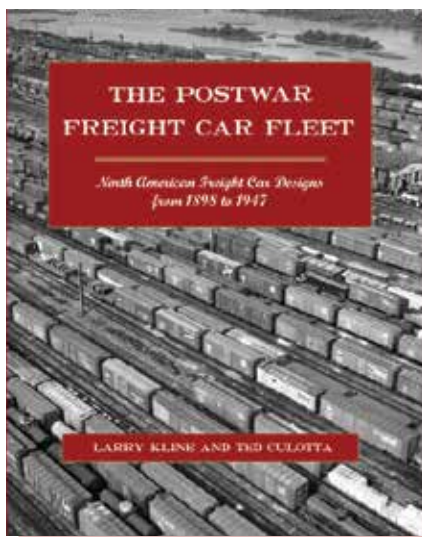
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MALCOLM HOUCK

EARNs

MASTER MODEL RAILROADER® #696

MMR – A Journey

I have always been a model railroader, beginning with the traditional Lionel tinsplate Christmas gifts, and devoted to HO scale since my pre-teen years. With hiatus from time to time, I have always been a modeler and builder, beginning with plastic models, then from trains to cars and hot-rod models, control-line and radio-controlled airplanes, ship models, and radio-controlled ships. In adulthood, updating and restoring a turn-of-the-19th-century house and barn, antique Fords, and antique Indian motorcycles; but always a builder, and always making something.

Early model railroad interests were scattered and haphazard but leaned toward model construction. As a railroad modeler, I have been especially interested in prototype modeling — accurate detail, long enough ago perhaps even before the descriptors of “superdetail” and “prototype modeling” became popular. To me, the term “superdetail” seemed a certain redundancy of expression. To my eye, detail is a matter of a model’s completeness.

Early impressions were formed, as I returned to railroad modeling after completion of graduate studies, in an association with an informal club operated, by invitation, in the home of a local hobby dealer. The steam locomotive roster consisted of well-painted and carefully weathered Chicago, Burlington & Quincy prototypes imported by LMB Models over the years. That modeling and “creation” of a coherent roster, along with a growing affinity to prototype modeling, refined a certain focus.

I was constantly stimulated by the *Model Railroader* articles of models comprising locomotive model rosters of specific prototypes: Bernard Corbin’s CB&Q roster, Tom Dressler’s Norfolk & Western models, Carl Appel’s “proto-freelanced” OO-scale roster, and Bill Aldrich’s New York, New Haven & Hartford roster. A long-time friendship with author-builder John Pryke (well-admiring his stable of scratchbuilt New Haven steam engines) who models different (albeit still prototype) locomotives further cemented my enthusiasm for building a locomotive ro-



ter rather than simply collecting an accumulation of unrelated engines.

Recalling brief mentions and articles in magazines back to 1955, I looked into the history of the late and lamented New York, Ontario & Western. One of my first detailed scratchbuilding projects was an NYO&W 1000-series milk car, following an article by the late Chuck Yungurth in the September 1963 *RMC* issue, which included a diagram of the prototype. Interest whetted, I answered a 1969 magazine ad and joined the Ontario & Western Technical and Historical Society (THS), then devouring its quarterly publication *The Observer*. On an early solo trip to Middletown, New York, I saw the stunning and impressive Bradford Lee Gilbert-designed depot and headquarters, as well as a number of the buildings forming the NYO&W car and locomotive shops (once among the largest in the Northeast). This

cemented a growing curiosity about the abandoned line. Increasing numbers of jaunts to tramp over and trek along the abandoned O&W right-of-way to capture its “texture” for intended modeling purposes were supplemented with the periodic THS-sponsored bus sightseeing trips to visit extant remnants and depots. That association introduced me to many other O&W cognoscenti — Bob Mohowski, Hank Treger, Rusty Recordon, Joe Bux, Bill Scott, Ray Wood, Ed Koehler, Ed Crist, and Manville B. Wakefield — each and all of whom became valued and long-time friends and correspondents (here apologizing for any names missed).

Further onto modeling, I had long enjoyed detailing steam locomotive models and greatly treasured those *MR* and *Railroad Model Craftsman* articles by Mel Thornburgh, Bill Schopp, and others. Encouraged by Herb Smith of the

Boston Model Railroad Company, I detailed and painted HO locomotives. An early NYO&W effort was the creation of a Class Y 4-8-2 starting with an old Knapp 4-8-2 mountain type (later offered by Bowser), which, much to my regret, I allowed to escape in a multi-item swap.

As increasing participation in NYO&W historical archive preservation efforts with National Railway Historical Society's Ontario & Western Chapter led to further and growing interest in the NYO&W. More, and increasingly frequent, trips to Middletown, New York, where the NRHS chapter was based and held monthly meetings, provided access to archival NYO&W information and prototype materials. Period photo images from multiple sources, continuing to the present, have resulted in an extensive personal NYO&W archive, which is a regularly consulted source for my continuing O&W "proto-modeling."

Beginning in 1971 and continuing through circa 1984–86, importer Nickel Plate Products produced, in brass, (with a single exception) all the NYO&W steam engines commercially marketed. Complementary brass models of the "signature" O&W 8300-series caboose and 1000-series milk car had preceded the stream of steam engines. The identifiable Osgood Bradley steel passenger cars, AC&F observation cars, and later (again brass models of) H&H wood coaches, and Middletown shop-built head cars followed from NPP — all of which represented a considerable roster inventory. Those brass models were a "jump-start" and modeling "tailwind" to further focus my efforts toward modeling NYO&W.

As models from the Asian Rim, the NPP imports were made when production was shifting from Japan to South Korea. A number of these models were wanting, both in terms of completeness and execution of detail. In collaboration with another interested modeler, we each built resistance soldering stations controlled by General Radio Variacs and, when plugged into "piggyback" foot pedal-controlled plugs, allowed very precise heat control — "hands-free"! Commercially available handpieces completed the soldering suite. Many of these NPP models were detailed and rebuilt both for myself and others.

Fine-tuning and motor replacement were encouraged by early model railroad control inventor, the late Abbott W. Lahti, developer of one of the first successful

plug-in-walk-around control systems and the successful Dynatrol "Command Control" system employed on several notable layouts.

Local availability of some extensive club layouts allowed easy opportunity for running and testing rebuilt and re-detailed locomotives, scratchbuilt cars, and rolling stock. Participation in club layout construction led to scenery skills, encouraged and influenced by another well-known modeler with whom Abbott Lahti and I became friendly: Dave Frary.

Beginning circa 1974, my annual display of models at the growing Amherst Railway Society led to creating transportable scenery dioramas. A deepening and long-term friendship with noted O&W modeler Joe Bux, of Queens, New York, encouraged the exchange of scenery and prototype modeling ideas — all, of course, dedicated to NYO&W. While initially prompted by the opportunity to exercise scenery technique in modeling along about 1980, long-term interest in photography, back to "wet" darkroom days, further developed into model photography. An early 1980 photo of an NYO&W Class E 4-6-0 I'd recently built graced the cover of the OWRHS *Observer*. Over time, my engine-builder efforts moved from improving and re-detailing commercial NYO&W steam engines to complete scratchbuilding of those prototypes for which there were no commercial sources. A fellow model railroad club member once observed, "You're now just filling in the blanks."

Over time, with scratchbuilt, commercial kit, and custom-built NYO&W prototype structures, I constructed several O&W dioramas for display and photography purposes. Collaboration with O&W modeler Bill Schneider (then of Branchline Trains) rendered two *RMC* cover articles in March 2004 and May 2005, set on dioramas of mine and at locations on Bill Schneider's layout. NYO&W steam power was my responsibility, while Bill provided the later diesel power (albeit decorated with O&W diesel decals I had produced in several print runs starting in 1982).

With that "deep background," let's move on to September 2016, when the Hub Division held its monthly "Railfun" meeting. As is custom, that first gathering after the summer hiatus is very informal, and, as Railfun Chairman Andy Reynolds likes to bill it, the simple topic was "What I did last summer." For the entertainment, the members speak of their summer mod-

el railroading activities, often with recently constructed models.

While my membership in the NMRA was spotty at best, with intervening periods of lapse, I was then in good standing and retained membership in the Hub Division. Similarly, my attendance at Hub Division events had been uneven, but I ventured on with my two most recently scratchbuilt steam locomotives — an NYO&W Class P heavy 2-8-0 Double Cab and a delightful NYO&W 4-4-0 "Eight Wheeler" Double Cab. An enthusiastic Andy Reynolds invited me to present a clinic — PowerPoint slide show at the November 2016 meeting, which I heartily agreed to do.

In an ensuing discussion following that meeting, Andy and AP Chairman MMR® Pete Watson suggested I follow up and complete the submissions for Master Builder — Motive Power. Both Andy and Pete offered that, whereas I had been a serious modeler and model builder since the 1960s, I was very likely to have completed qualifications for more than one additional AP Certificate. That was indeed prescient on the part of both. For me, this late-commenced pursuit of MMR® recognition presented an opportunity for a metaphorical victory lap for something on the order of 50-plus years of modeling and model building, to which I then directed some serious effort.

A spring 2017 Railfun presentation by Andy Reynolds and his column in the monthly Hub Division "Headlight" newsletter describing efforts to research a specific prototype and build out a diorama to qualify for Master Builder — Prototype Models inspired me, with an invitation from MMR® Mike Tylick, to haul along to a Railfun meeting a 24x63-inch diorama of the NYO&W's Monticello, New York, depot and yard area. Mike and Peter graciously agreed to judge the diorama for AP certification. The result was NER AP Certificate #733 "Master Builder — Prototype Models" dated August 1, 2017.

Now casting thoroughly through the categories of AP Certifications, and truthfully never before having considered it, I realized my share of two cover articles for *RMC* (in collaboration with skilled prototype modeler and NYO&W enthusiast Bill Schnieder) and another 53 articles for my OWRHS website column "Modeling the O&W" qualified for Model Railroad Author, which I received on April 1, 2018 (NER Certificate #750).

Having built NYO&W dioramas back to 1986 for display at the annual Amherst Railway Society Railroad Hobby Show at Springfield, Massachusetts, and display hobby shows in New York, the sum of the areas more than added up to an area needed to qualify for Master Builder – Scenery. Peter Watson and *Hub Headlight* Editor Bill Barry came to my house to judge six NYO&W prototype-themed dioramas (Monticello Depot-yards, Liberty Depot, Bloomingburgh Depot, High View Tunnel South Portal, Summitville Depot and yards, Hawk Mountain Tunnel North Portal, and the NYO&W – Lehigh Valley interlocking and bridge crossing of the New York State Barge Canal), comprising over 60 square feet of completed scenery. NER AP Certificate #755 is dated June 21, 2018.

Although having attended NMRA National Conventions and several NER Regional conventions, where I had delivered clinic discussions, I had never participated in model contests or displays. Despite my model contest neophyte status, I completed Merit Award entries for two scratch-built and one parts-built NYO&W steam locomotives, scratchbuilt NYO&W parlor car *Oriskany*, and scratchbuilt NYO&W Official Car #30, *Warwick*, at the NER Regional convention in Mahwah, New Jersey. All those entries qualified for Merit Awards.

With three Merit Awards for locomotives, I promptly completed the SOQ submission for AP Certificate Master Builder – Motive Power. Peter Watson and Mike Tylick came to my house to judge cars built several decades prior. Along with the two passenger car NER Merit Awards in hand, that was sufficient for AP Certificate Master Builder Cars. Both certificates (NER AP Certificate #771 and NER AP Certificate #772) are dated October 21, 2018.

Qualification for Master Builder – Structure also engendered another home visit from Peter and Mike to view and inspect NYO&W structure models of brick and wood freight houses, three NYO&W ice houses (each from different prototype locations), and two creameries, along with a diorama footbridge and three different design NYO&W water tanks. NER AP Certificate #786 Master Builder Structures is dated April 21, 2019.

Whereas most of my model building to qualify for the several AP Certificates was done well (and often years) in advance of submission, it was not so with respect to my final AP Certificate: Civil Engineering.

Asked any number of times in multiple conversations and interviews regarding this category was “Haven’t you built those trackwork elements?” “Sure, I have, but none of ‘em live at my house!” I had completed many track-laying efforts at three different club layouts and several private layouts — but none then available for AP judging. I had plenty of trackwork on my NYO&W dioramas, but those were a mix of custom and (for the economy of time in building) commercial switches and track.

To produce the track elements for AP judging, I had to “unlimber” my inventory of home-built jigs, more recently updated with Fast Tracks brand templates and assembly jigs. Then deciding to construct a more elaborate test track than on my bench, I crafted three switches (using Fast Tracks fixtures) and laid out a double-track run with crossover and a single track with switch and siding in parallel. Done then were two of three required track elements. In completing this construction, I decided to revisit all the methods of track construction I’d accumulated over the decades, making use of CVT tie stripes, Micro-Engineering flex track, Fast Tracks fixtures, and rail laid on individual ties. The last element using the method shown me 30-plus years ago by the late builder, MR author and Boston & Maine Railroad expert Don Clerke, namely cementing down rail by applying Pliobond to the bottom of the rail, aligning it, then curing and fixing the cement via careful and judicious heating of the rail with a soldering iron.

Needing only a third element, I built a small diorama of the NYO&W Oneida, New York, scale track. I did so by making a double-ended set of switch points only to divert from running track to scale track — a gantlet track in the strictest sense of the expression! Both switch points are controlled by a single manual throw and connected by a long reach rod actuated by small bellcranks at each switch point throwbar. Unable to leave well enough alone, I scennicked the track and surroundings and built a model of the Fairbanks scale house as employed by the NYO&W at Oneida, New York. AP judge Pete Watson was especially tickled with the single throw-toggle-reach rod-bellcrank mechanism working points at both ends of the scale track proper.

Never especially being a “planner” even for track layout on any of my dioramas (with both Summitville and Monticello having many switches and sidings), I then set to drafting a plan of the single-track NYO&W

line from Kingston to Summitville and the branch from Summitville to Monticello. Even though my NYO&W engine roster includes scratchbuilt 2-10-2 types and much rebuilt and recrafted light and heavy NYO&W 4-8-2 types never to run on these branches, the “retail” railroading of the NYO&W down its branches has always been a source of interest. This planned and proposed single-track line running with many small Double Cab (“Camelback” – “Center Cab”) locomotives can employ many of the Dickson, Cooke, and Brooks locomotives I have crafted over the years.

As peculiar as all of this “journey” may seem, and notwithstanding that nearly the entirety of AP model building well preceded any consideration of rounding all up for MMR® qualification, I rather enjoyed the build-for-the-purpose trackwork modeling and layout planning needed for this last AP certification.

Along the way, I have immensely enjoyed the authorship and presentation of clinics, sharing some decades of model building at both the HUB Division “Railfun” meetings and NER Conventions (and yet only just recalling in the final edit of this narrative a long-ago initial clinic presented at the NMRA National Convention in Boston and a more recent clinic at the National in Hartford, Connecticut).

I continue to build models since, after all, that’s what I do. I continue to share in clinics to provide guidance for other modelers. My recent NMRA participation has been most gratifying, and I value greatly the friendships and camaraderie developed with well-known modelers. Again, apologizing for omissions, those folks include MMR® Pete Watson, MMR® Mike Tylick, MMR® Dave Metal, and (more recently) MMR® Chuck Diljack, and MMR® John Feraca. My prototype modeling efforts have brought valued acquaintances with Tony Koester and Dave Owens. Beyond this more formal modeling community, I cannot forget Joe Bux, Marty Feldner, and Bob Mohowski. To conclude, this “journey” has been and continues to be immensely gratifying.

Certificates Earned
Malcolm Houck, MMR® #696
Master Builder – Prototype Models
Model Railroad Author
Master Builder – Scenery
Master Builder – Motive Power
Master Builder - Cars
Master Builder – Structures
Model Railroad Engineer – Civil