

The Semaphore



THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE
WNC MODEL RAILROADERS, INC.

A 100% NMRA CLUB



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Our next meeting is on August 4th at 7 PM.

Send comments about and contributions to this newsletter to [editor](#).

Please keep us informed of changes in your address, phone number or email address.



DIV 15 AP CHAIR BEN BARTLETT, MMR, PRESENTED CLINTON SMOKE WITH HIS GOLDEN SPIKE CERTIFICATE AT THE DIVISION MEETING.



NEWS FOR OUR MEMBERS

OUR NEXT MEETING

Our next meeting will be starting at 7 PM on Thursday August 4th.

Clinic: Basic Electricity for Model Railroaders

Synopsis: Gordon Fewster will present a program on Basic Electricity for Model Railroaders in two parts. Part 1 covers basic principles, both general electrical and model railroad wiring, and Part 2, theory, how some common electrical devices work. Estimated 30 minutes for each part. **See you there!**

REPORT ON THE LAST MEETING

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM by Superintendent Fred Coleman.

The modules were at the Metrolina Expo Trade Center on June 25. Thanks to all that helped.

Upcoming events are July 3 -9. NMRA National Convention Sacramento, CA (www.nmra.org), and Narrow Gauge Convention in September 7—10 in Hickory. The NMRA Mid-East Region Convention is coming to Cary, NC on October 27—30, see the [website](#) for details.

Fred expressed condolences should be given to Ben Bartlett on the death of his wife Jan. He would pass on detail of the funeral when he finds them out. Please show your support to Ben a former member and friend to many of us. Bill Siebert is in the hospital. Put both of the people in your prayers.

John Williams gave a short Paymaster report, basically we are solvent!

With the brief business report done, Jim Fuqua said grace, and the picnic part of the meeting started. Thanks to all who brought some delicious food, and refreshments. We hope you had a good time.

NATIONAL CONVENTION

Well the 2011 National Convention is now history. We will see reports of this great event in the next issue of NMRA magazine. It not too early to start thinking about the next show, or even the one after that. So, here is the info:

- **2012: Grand Rapids, MI. July 29 - August 4, 2012** For info go to www.gr2012.org
- **2013: Atlanta, GA July 14 - July 20, 2013.** For info go to www.nmra2013.org

The event in Atlanta is sponsored by the Piedmont Division., SER. They always put on a great show, so this should be their great accomplishment to date. Its close and you have had plenty of warning.

While the 2011 NMRA event is now history, it is worth noting that the site is still worth visiting. The convention was in Sacramento, California. Sacramento has long been a railroad town. The Central Pacific Railroad began building eastward from Sacramento in 1863, and celebrated the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad at Promontory, Utah, five years later.

It was home to the vast Southern Pacific Railroad Shops. It is now home to the California State Railroad Museum, one of the premier railroad museums in the country, located in Old Sacramento. With 53 historic buildings, Old Sacramento has more buildings of historic value condensed into its 28 acres than most areas of similar size in the West.



A REPORT ON THE LAST MEETING OF DIVISION 15

The meeting was called to order at 9:30 am by Superintendent Frank Pearsall at the Public Library in Fletcher. Among the events of the day:

- MMR Ben Bartlett, our Division AP chairman, presented Clinton Smoke with his Golden Spike Certificate. See photo on page 1.
- Gordon Fewster presented an interesting clinic on making Local Control Panels for Your Model Railroad

PLASTER FOR MODEL RAILROAD SCENERY

By Gordon Fewster

Plaster is commonly used for model railroad scenery, both over wire screen or cardboard forms or as a top coat for foam. The plasters that we use are usually gypsum, calcium sulfate, based. They come as a dry powder and form a crystal structure with water when they are mixed. Note that they don't dry, they react with the water, so increasing the amount of water will have little effect on the setting time, but will make the final result weaker. Fresh plaster works best. Any that has been around for a while, especially after the bag has been opened, can be very unpredictable in its behavior. Usually it will set very quickly, but I have seen a ceramic tile installation with old grout where the grout didn't set at all. If you start a second batch in a container with residue from the preceding batch, that residue will accelerate the setting of the new batch.

Plaster of Paris: This is common and readily available. The problem is that it sets so quickly that it is difficult to do any shaping of it. Quoted setting times are 15 to 20 minutes, but it is essentially unworkable much sooner than that. The only place I use it now is for rock castings.

Ultracal 30: Hydrocal products have long been recommended for model railroad scenery. Ultracal 30 is similar, except that it sets to a grey color, is somewhat slower setting than the white hydrocal, may be stronger, and is available locally. It is much stronger than the usual plaster products, with 2 to 3 times the compressive strength claimed. 30 minutes is the claimed setting time. Practical working time is less, but mixed with cold water there is time to do a modest amount of shaping. The grey color doesn't appear to be an issue, although it might be if an area is to be stained rather than painted.

Ultracal 30 is stocked at Highwater Clays, 600 Riverside Drive, Asheville; about \$26 for a 50# bag. US Gypsum catalogs an Ultracal 60 (60 minutes setting time) which might be worth trying, but I am not aware of any nearby source.

Setting type Joint Compound: Joint compounds that we are accustomed to (the kind that come pre-mixed in 5 gal. buckets) are water soluble, and tend to crack unless applied in thin layers. I had been searching for a plaster with a longer setting time, and stumbled onto "setting type joint compounds". They appear to be mostly plaster of paris, modified to give a longer setting time. They are available in nominal 20, 45, and 90 minutes setting times.

Lightweight setting type joint compounds are available for about \$10 for 18# at Lowes and Home Depot. Ace Hardware has 25# for about \$13, but it is not listed as lightweight, so it's hard to tell which is the better value. Remember, searching for a slow setting plaster may not find anything, but searching for "setting type joint compound" will.

My scenery starts with 1" mesh chicken wire, and then a layer of paper towels soaked in 50/50 Elmer's

(Continued on page 4)



(Continued from page 3)

white glue and water. (Bounty brand towels work well. Some of the Walmart cheapies become a use-
less mush as soon as they get wet. Use a drop cloth; some of the water/glue mix will end up on the
floor.) I apply a layer of Ultracal 30, mixed with cold water, over this. My batch size is an 8 oz. Cool
whip container, about 2/3rds full. I try to work quickly and shape the surface as best I can before the
Ultracal starts to set. Sometimes this is good enough. When it isn't, I apply a second layer of a 90
minute setting joint compound, which gives me plenty of time to shape, carve, etc. This joint compound
should also make a good overcoat for foam scenery. There may be easier ways, and your mileage may
vary, but this works for me.

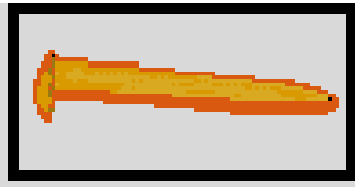
If you color the plaster, you won't get white spots if the surface is chipped later. I have tried this by mix-
ing plaster with cheap brown paint, adding water based (acrylic) artists' colors, and adding a pigment
sold to color concrete. They all work, but for me, it isn't worth the trouble. Especially with the concrete
pigment, which is a very fine powder, any spillage makes a mess that is very hard to clean up. Except
for rock castings, I paint the plaster with a good grade of brown flat acrylic latex paint before adding any
ground foam. Most paint stores have a free color matching service, and my brown was matched to
Polyscale earth painted on an index card.

I hope some of this is useful. As I said, your mileage may vary.

MY MODEL RAILROAD

By Clinton Smoke

Your editor was recently honored with the presentation of the Golden Spike Award,
Here is a brief report about the award, and the model railroad.



Background: **The Golden Spike** is the easiest, and for many people, the first AP award that they earn. It is designed to demonstrate familiarity with differ-
ent areas of the hobby, rather than expertise in a particular area. So take a
look at the requirements on the NMRA website - you may find that you have
met most or all of them already.

There are four main elements:

Rolling Stock (Motive Power & Cars) Display six (6) units of rolling stock (Scratchbuilt, craftsman, or
detailed commercial kits). Notice that the re-
quirement is to "display" them. Nowhere does
it say that they must earn a minimum number
of points in judging - just that they must be
displayed. (In the contests at your division
meetings, for example. Even having them set
out on your layout, or a table in your base-
ment counts as "display"). These models
need to show a little more effort than a
"shake the box" kit. For example, by itself a
freight car kit straight out of the box, is not
enough to qualify. However, by painting and
decaling it, adding a little detailing, perhaps
some weathering, etc., you'll have a qualifying model in no time!





(Continued from page 4)

Model Railroad Setting (Structures & Scenery) Construct a minimum of eight (8) square feet of layout. Again, there is no requirement about how good or how elaborate your layout must be - just that you must "construct" it. On the other hand, you may have trouble convincing someone that a loop of track nailed to a piece of green painted wood constitutes a "layout" How much is 8 square feet of layout? Well, a typical module is 4 feet by 2 feet, and would easily satisfy this requirement.

Construct five (5) structures (scratch built, craftsman, or detailed and commercial kits). These structures may be separate, or one or more of them may be part of a single scene. The same comments apply here about the type of kits. The idea is to show that you can do more than glue a simple plastic kit together. Painting or weathering are good things to consider. Remember that "structures" aren't just buildings. Things like bridges and trestles



also fall into this category.

Engineering (Civil & Electrical) Three (3) types of trackage are required (turnout, crossing, etc.). All



must be properly ballasted and installed on proper roadbed. Commercial trackage may be used. This requirement sounds a lot harder than it is. First, notice that last sentence about commercial trackage; you don't have to hand-lay anything - you can just install a

store bought turnout. "Types of trackage" can be just about anything: turnouts, crossings, and grade elevation (a change in elevation of the track) are all examples of "types of trackage". Also, note that the three types DO NOT have to be different. For example, just having three simple turnouts will qualify.

(Continued on page 6)



(Continued from page 5)

The "proper roadbed" requirement can be met by laying the track on a raised roadbed, (such as cork) and ballasting it. The purpose of this requirement is to show that you understand roadbed profile, drainage, etc.

All installed trackage must be properly wired so that two trains can be operated simultaneously (Double-track main, single-track main with sidings, block or command control, etc.). This requirement can also be easier than it sounds. Notice the option for a single track main with sidings. This means that as long as you can cut power to the sidings individually, you can run one train, park it on a siding while you run another, then park it and run the first again. This meets the requirement.



Provide one additional electrical feature such as powered turnouts, signaling, turnout indication, lighted buildings, etc. Don't read more into this than is there. A powered turnout can be something as simple as an Atlas turnout with a switch machine. Think in terms of anything that runs off the 'Accessories' terminals of a power pack and you 're half way there.



One other thing to remember: Not all of these requirements need to be met on the same layout (or piece of layout). They don't even need to be met in the same scale! If you want to build G scale rolling stock, an N scale Model Railroad setting, and an HO scale layout for trackage and wiring, go ahead.

Note that some of these requirements are scaled down versions of the requirements for the AP certificates. With a little planning you can make your work serve double duty – it will satisfy the requirements for a Golden Spike Award, and may meet some of the requirements for other awards.



EVENT FOR MODELERS

SATURDAY, AUGUST 13, 2011

41ST ATLANTA MODEL TRAIN AND RAILROADIANA SHOW

Show Hours Are 9:00 AM To 4:00 PM

North Atlanta Trade Center, 1700 Jeurgens Court, Norcross, GA
30093

SEPTEMBER 7-10, 2011

NARROW GAUGE DOWN SOUTH,

at Metro Center, Hickory, NC. See the [website](#) for details.

OCTOBER 8, 2011

FRENCH BROAD E" N" PIRE TRAIN SHOW

October 8th from 10 AM to 4 PM, Whitmere Act. Ctr., Hendersonville,
NC See the [their website](#) for details.

OCTOBER 27TH - 30TH

NMRA MID-EAST REGION CONVENTION

this Fall at the Embassy Suites in Cary, NC. See the [website](#) for details.

JUNE 1-3, 2012

'TRACKS TO THE SMOKYS' 2012 SER CONVEN-
TION, GATLINBURG, TN
HOSTED BY THE SMOKEY MOUNTAIN DIVISION, SER.
CHECK [OUT THEIR WEBSITE](#) FOR LATEST DETAILS.

