

Lynn Zelmer — Modelling History



The HO exhibition mini-layout built by the SBSLA to promote the Canadian Centennial. It operated in the window of the Calgary Tourist and Convention Association for roughly a year. The train was permanently wired to the rails on a large disc rotated with a BBQ motor. The 'mountain' in the centre of the layout was cantilevered from the back. The display was built many months before the official Centennial Train was painted, thus my airbrushed and press-on lettered design was simply speculative,

Introduction

While I've been a National Model Railroad Association (NMRA) member for over 50 years, most of it as a Life Member, I've not been an active member/modeller for all of that time.

I started with a train set, built some of my own models and was introduced to club activities. An interest in branch line and logging operations led to several dioramas and micro layouts for exhibition use, but I never completed a significant home layout.

With other Calgary modellers and support from the Pacific Northwest Region (PNR) 7th Division, I became involved with the NMRA, helping form the PNR's 6th Division and serving as its first Secretary.

However university, then work and a family took me away from almost everything except armchair modelling and assembling a large rail oriented library. My work often took me overseas so I saw, and travelled on, a variety of foreign railways... good memories but only a few books and photos remain as reminders of these experiences.

I did help my pre-teen daughter build a 4' x 8' tabletop layout in her bedroom (c 1980) and with a friend she used our new computer to generate schedules, tickets, dockets, etc., and to operate in a most bureaucratic manner. What else could one expect from a youngster who had

waited for far too long a queue to purchase tickets, been checked off on a passenger manifest, etc.?

In the mid-1980s I finally managed to create a train room with a sloping ceiling out of a dead space over one of our bathrooms and completed the benchwork for a small shelf layout. Then a family decision was made to move to Australia.

In Australia I discovered the shire and sugar cane tramways and became an enthusiastic narrow gauge modeller, first in HO₃₀, then On₃₀. Following on from my work activities, I developed web sites to support sugar cane modellers and promote Queensland's rail heritage. I've been a frequent presenter at model conventions and a regular writer for Australia's narrow gauge modelling press.

Early Years

Born and raised in Calgary, Alberta my first train was an O-27 Louis Marx set with a steam locomotive, tender and several freight cars. My track, combined with that of a nearby friend, made a reasonable layout that slipped under the bed and provided us with many hours of fun.

The YMCA's Saturday swim and gym program was followed by a number of more creative activities, including building a small HO layout. Rick Campbell, the son of a noted Calgary modeller, led the group for several years before passing it on to me in my mid-teens.

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The YMCA group's layout was pretty basic, but it operated with some balsa and card structures, scenery (plaster and asbestos shorts, dyed sawdust for grass, etc.), and a selection of ready-to-run and kit built models.

Inexpensive freight car kits at this time generally had a wood floor, roof and four corner posts. The ends were metal castings, stamped tin, or heavy card; and sides were often heavy card with wire or stamped metal details (eg reefer door hinges). *Model Railroader* magazine

and other sources also provided car side printed on light card for scratchbuilding.

My family made regular summer shopping trips to the USA and I can still remember my pride in an Athearn GP-9 in Union Pacific colours...

Canadian liveries were not available at that time. I also acquired several freight car kits and enjoyed the comparative ease of construction with injection moulded styrene and 'airplane' glue.



Some of my models on the CMT's new mountain section with the Roland Gissing backdrop. The green coach on the upper track is the LaBelle kit that I'd worked on during an open house at the old Coste House layout.

The Calgary Model Trainmen (CMT) had a layout in the attic of the old mansion which also housed the local arts society. Juniors were allowed to visit on certain nights and encouraged in their model building efforts. They also assisted at the annual CMT Train Shows, where several thousand visitors had to be carefully shepherded through model exhibits on the lower floors and up/down the narrow access to the attic layout.

Sometime in my late-teens I ordered a LaBelle craftsman wood coach kit direct from the US manufacturer. With the appropriate Central Valley trucks and a pair of recently introduced,

thus expensive, Kadee couplers it represented several weeks of earnings from my part-time working.

This kit introduced me to the intricacies of customs tariffs and the like. The Labelle kit was classified as a manufactured timber product because of the company name (wood products, not toy oriented), thus subject to Canada's ~200% import duty to protect the local lumber industry. Eventually the customs officer relented, reclassifying the kit with a fairly minimal duty and sales tax as I persuaded him the alternative was returning the kit without any guarantee of a refund.

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I had never been very patient, but the cost and complexity of this kit ensured that I work slowly and carefully. I spent all of the next CMT Train Show, a three day event, at the reception desk constructing the kit with the guidance of one of the senior members and answering questions about model building from visitors. All in all a useful experience.



A Pacific Pike '5900', one of the locomotives I custom painted in the early 1960s. I lived with my grandmother for part of this time and built this static diorama to use a section of Roland Gissing backdrop from the old Coste House layout. Trees were made from lichen and the scenery was a mix of asbestos shorts and plaster finished with an oil paint wash.

About 1960 the CMT and the Allied Arts Centre moved to new quarters nearer the city centre. I was one of several younger modellers who assisted with the move and the building of the new, much larger layout. We persuaded the club to allow us to hand lay the track near the display window at the front of the layout, as well as build a logging branch up a hill which partially blocked the view towards the back of the layout.

I often worked late into the evening with more senior members and had a metal fishing tackle box containing my personal tools. I had taken a shortcut through a lane to catch the last bus for home one evening, carrying my box of tools, when I was stopped by a cop. It seems that there had been a break-in nearby and I was carrying what might be break and enter tools.

My CMT membership card wasn't sufficient, and no one was in the Arts Centre by this point, so it took calls to an uncle and an ex-neighbour, both of whom were serving coppers, before I could go with a warning to avoid cutting through city lanes in the future.



My first large scratchbuilt structure. Located on the new CMT layout, it's made of balsa and card with a 'brick paper' finish. Thankfully brick textures are more realistic today, even for card models.

I was also involved in the two other Calgary model clubs. The Bow Valley group was a visiting club on the north side of Calgary with about a dozen modellers, most with young families. As well as sharing their modelling skills they usually made several summer excursions with their families to regional rail fan locations.

The South Bank Short Lines (SBSLA), my primary allegiance for several years, was also a visiting club—primarily young adults on the city's south side. We modelled Western Canadian locales, albeit freelance, with an emphasis on logging and mining. Among other activities, we mass produced several scratch built 'kits' for use on members' layouts and actively promoted modelling as a 100% NMRA club.

Modellers took over the whole of the Allied Arts Centre for the 1963 Train Show with participation from all of the Calgary Clubs. The CMT layout was relatively finished at this point and was supplemented with small layouts and dioramas from the other clubs.

The 1965 NMRA convention in Vancouver was attended by several SBSLA members, building our interests in the railroads of the Pacific Northwest. For me, those interests primarily involved geared logging locomotives, an interest that was financed through custom painting locomotives for Calgary modellers using a second hand airbrush and compressor.

The Canadian Centennial provided an opportunity to promote modelling with a year

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long exhibition featuring our representation of what the Canada-wide Centennial train might look like. The layout was ingenious, a BBQ motor powered a rotating disc with the track and train... and it never jumped the track in over a year of constant operation.

Calgary and Edmonton modellers normally organised an annual gathering, alternating between the two cities. In time this grew into more frequent contact, organising as the 6th Division of the Pacific Northwest Region, NMRA, and the addition of Red Deer and Lethbridge to the meeting venues.

A year at university in the United States brought my modelling to a halt, although it did provide an opportunity to visit several railway museums, etc., as part of my travels.

I already knew many local modellers when I moved to Edmonton for work in 1968. I helped scenic part of a large club layout, but became more involved with work and family, including frequent travel. I was also tiring of club politics and never got fully involved with a model club again.

As mentioned above, a semi-attic cavity space above one of the bathrooms was made into a layout space. A long and narrow space, the walls were lined with bookcases that formed the framework for a shelf layout. While some roadbed was installed, no track was ever laid, and everything was disassembled for the move to Australia.

Australia and Queensland's Cane Railways

I was only vaguely aware of Australia's tramways before immigrating in the late 1980s. My wife preceded me by some seven months, during which she discovered 'Tram Crossing' signs and narrow gauge tracks around Bundaberg. She communicated her surprise to me—to her 'tram' meant an urban transport system (eg Melbourne)—and by the time I arrived I knew a bit more about tramways/railways in Queensland and was soon hooked on sugar cane modelling.

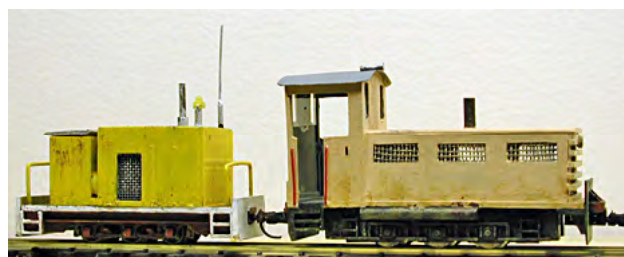
In many ways this was a natural outgrowth of my interest in narrow gauge, logging and branch line railways. Each of the Queensland sugar mills had independent operations and, in many

cases, locomotives and rolling stock were unique to each mill.

The only club in Rockhampton was very US oriented, as were many of the NMRA members I encountered in southern cities, but I discovered the *Modelling the Railways of Queensland Conventions* and was introduced to HOn30 cane modelling by Bob Dow and Greg Stephenson of Brisbane.



1999—My first Australian Narrow Gauge Convention display using a university computer (displaying cane railway photos) and an A4 sized diorama (to fit in my suitcase). The HOn30 loco and cane bins were built by Bob Dow or from his kits, the truck unloading the cane bins was my first kitbashed cane model. I still have the diorama and in 2011, with a backdrop, it won a best diorama trophy locally.



My scratchbuilt HOn30 cane loco (from Bob Dow's plans on an N scale mechanism), and a freelance brake van built on an N scale passenger bogie.

Through these contacts I became involved with ANGRMS (the Australian Narrow Gauge Railway Museum Society) and learned some of the differences between navy work in Canada and Oz. Eventually I became responsible for managing their web site and, off and on, editing their newsletter.

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One of the HOn30 dioramas built for the ANGRMS museum. The kitbashed loco has a plantation style cab, the tractor is an Australian kit, and the portable track components were scratchbuilt. A photo of stored museum locos forms the backdrop.

I developed two small dioramas for the museum at Woodford—a success model-wise but less so from the point-of-view of museum visitors as HOn30 is simply too small for effective viewing inside a display case. I haven't yet managed to replace these dioramas, but visitor comments were instrumental in my switching to On30.



This On30 Comeng locomotive model, built c2005, combines an HO mechanism with an On30 chassis and a superstructure scratchbuilt using styrene.

The HO to On30 switch was made easier by the amount of HO equipment and materials I had brought with me from Canada. While I couldn't use existing models (wagons, structures, etc.), track, mechanisms and modelling materials were still quite useable. I even have some thoughts of converting one or more of the HO geared locomotives by replacing their cabs, etc., with O scale components.



One of my more recent On30 dioramas with an A4-sized photo frame as its base and below with a custom built loco and kit-built bin.



The prototype for this scratchbuilt On30 meat wagon delivered supplies to company staff in Fiji.

I began an HO around-the-wall bedroom layout c2000. As with its Canadian predecessor, bookshelves occupied the space underneath the benchwork. Conversion to On30 was done here as well... and someday the layout may be completed.

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This 20" x 24" HO_n30 double-sided display layout dominated the train room for several years and saw much use at the Archer Park Rail Museum's 'gold coin' days. The equipment is a mix of kits and kitbashed models using both N and HO scale components. The cane plantings were my first attempt at modelling cane. The layout has since been gifted to a local HO modeller who wanted to start modelling the cane railways.

CaneSIG and QldRailHeritage

One of my problems getting started as a cane railway modeller was the seeming lack of information about the mills and their railways, regardless of where (Australia, Fiji, USA, Indonesia, Egypt, etc.) they operated.

As part of my employment I was exploring the uses of the Internet and this seemed like an inexpensive way of sharing what materials were available. The result was CaneSIG, a virtual Special Interest Group affiliated with the NMRA to which anyone could provide photos and other materials for sharing. The site was established in 1997 and has includes historical materials as well as modelling tips, photos and descriptions of sugar cane railway models from around the world, equipment plans and a limited number of free downloadable card kits.

As I became more involved with the cane railways I continually stumbled across Queensland's shire tramways and more

conventional railways. QldRailHeritage.com is a web site developed to provide details of both the railways themselves and the heritage organisations running museums and other tourist-oriented organisations.

QldRailHeritage.com shares access to the rail heritage image library and includes more extensive details for several museums and heritage railways (especially Archer Park Rail Museum in Rockhampton and the Australian Sugar Cane Railway in Bundaberg) without their own web sites.

The Association of Tourist Railways of Queensland (ATRQ) web site provides a similar link for member organisations but there are dozens of other non-member organisations.

Image Library

The rail heritage image collection is a significant complement to the web sites. Currently (2013) numbering over 11,500 images, the

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collection includes materials from more than 100 modellers, railfans and photographers.

The collection (primarily photos, plans and maps) is indexed and searchable using the caption information provided by the photographer. While this means that specific images may be hard to find the index is relatively easy to maintain and doesn't require me to catalogue each image to professional library standards.

Narrow Gauge Down Under

This magazine started as an Aussie response to the American-oriented *Narrow Gauge and Short Line Gazette*. However the main interests of Aussie narrow gauge modellers have always been towards US prototypes and NGDU reflected that focus for many years.

More recently the magazine's focus has broadened and at the end of 2013 I had contributed more than thirty articles on sugar cane railways and their modelling. NGDU deadlines have driven my own modelling and encouraged me to explore new techniques.

The articles have also provided a way of promoting CaneSIG and the efforts of sugar cane modellers worldwide.

Capricorn Sugar Rail Museum (CSRM)

I'm essentially a freelance modeller, partly because my interests are broader than any single prototype, be it country, railway, industry or mill.

CSRM was developed to explore On30 modelling techniques—both for my own learning and to promote both On30 and sugar cane/shire railway modelling. Its micro-layout was exhibited at Brisbane's annual Train Show as well as the *Australian Narrow Gauge Convention*.

When asked 'Where is the Museum?', I answer 'You see it here right in front of you'. The museum concept gives me the freedom to have a wide variety of equipment on display... from different countries as well as from different mills... equipment that in real life would otherwise never be seen together.

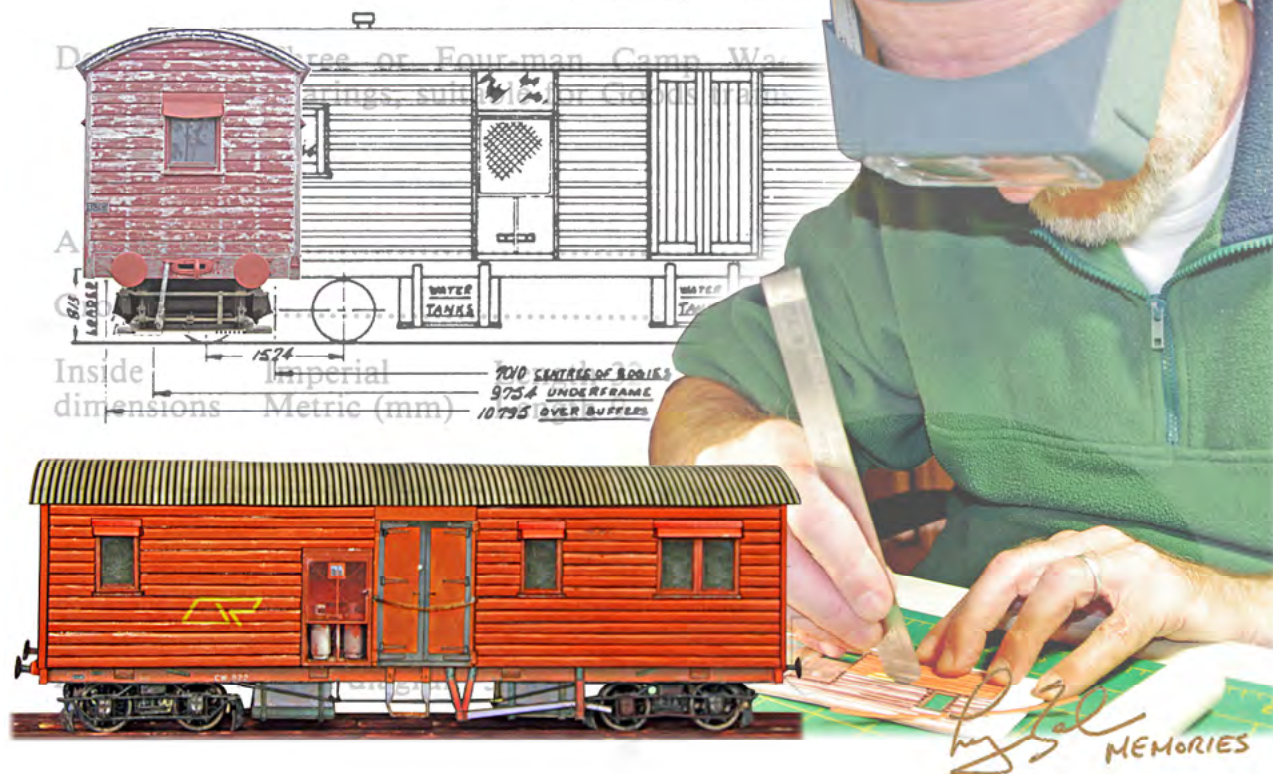
Further details can be found on the CSRM's web site: www.zelmeroz.com/csrm/.



This Queensland country cottage was originally a schoolmaster's house. Modelled here as an O scale (1:48) photorealistic card model it is now available as a free downloadable card kit from my web sites (albeit without Jennifer taking a picture from inside the front window). Model was the subject of NGDU articles as well as being part of an Australian Narrow gauge Convention competition, and was awarded an NMRA Achievement Award.

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Queensland Railways (1982). Rollingstock Book, December
CW (CAMP) WAGON



This Queensland Rail camp wagon was the most ambitious and challenging of the photorealistic card models I'd built to date (2012), Fortunately the challenges were met and its construction provided a NGDU article.



This ~1" deep photorealistic model has been created from the ends of a warehouse kit. The open doors, with the stack of pallets behind one, give depth. While not obvious in this view, the pallets on the right are set out in front of the building, again adding depth. The pallets and safety signs were all downloaded from the web.

Photorealistic Card Kits

In recent years I've combined my computer and photographic skills to develop unique models of Queensland structures and rolling stock. Conventional card models tended to be very two dimensional, but photo textures add detail and realism, especially when a three dimensional surface is created through window and door

openings, layering with individual 'boards' and other components, etc.

Each model takes a considerable time to create, yet the computer files are easily distributed and reprinted. I have no desire to become involved in online commerce, thus I've made the models available as card kits for free download and printing by the user.

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This On30 background 'flat' has been kitbashed from a commercial photorealistic card kit. Aside from only building a slice off one end of the structure, my

additions included the front signage and the forced perspective on the side.

The Future

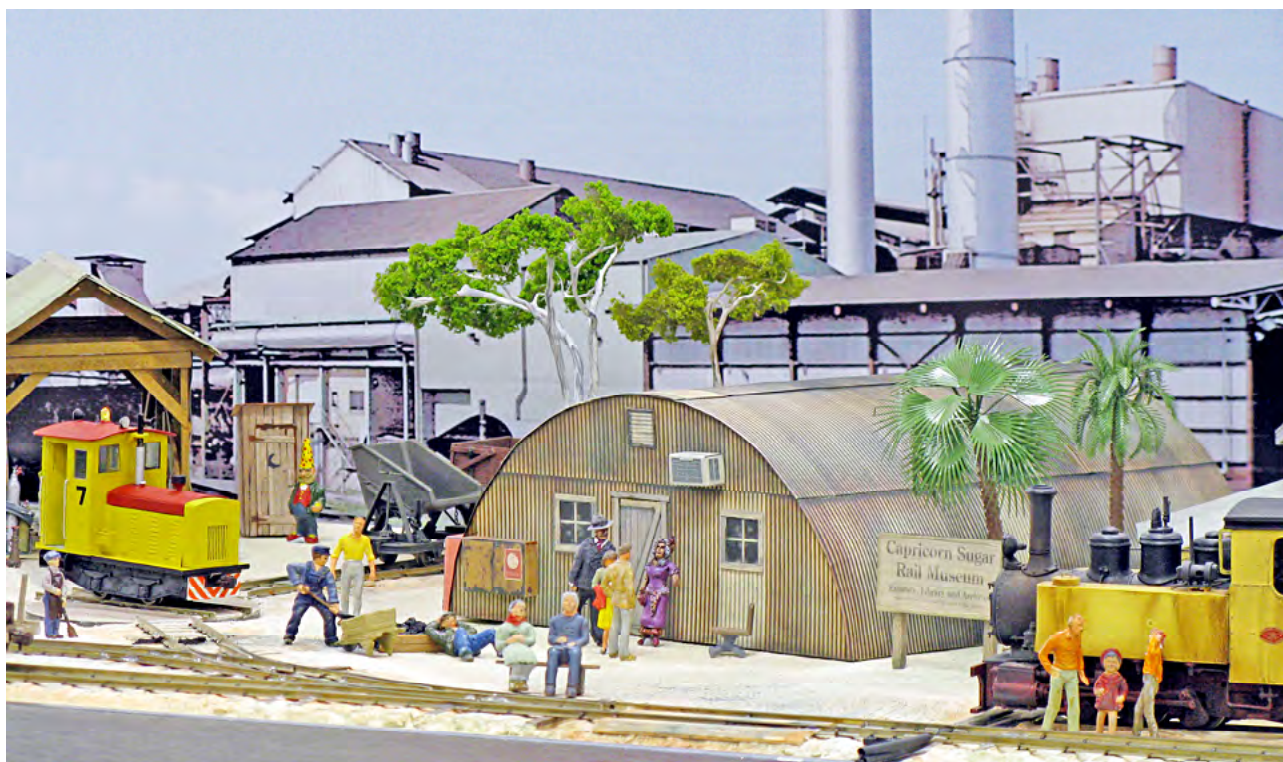
It's hard to say what the future will bring: certainly more card modelling, perhaps some rapid prototype modelling using 3D software, flexible moulding and resin casting, etched brass kits to assemble, a home layout to 'complete' and perhaps even a railway in the garden (SM32, 1:19).

Of more concern is succession planning: what will happen to the paper-based library, image and model collection, and the web sites when I'm no longer able to look after them?



The three module of the Capricorn Sugar Rail Museum mini-layout on display at the Brisbane Train Show 2011. Two of the modules have since been broken up and discussions in 2013 may lead to specifications for a multi-member modular cane railway exhibition layout. Posters such as the one to the left of the picture are another of my contributions to promoting Queensland's rail heritage. The computer on the far end of the display table is running a continuous display of railway photos from Queensland railfans.

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The loco shed end of the CSRM layout with the large mill photo poster as a backdrop as it appeared at the 2011 Brisbane Train Show and the Australian Narrow Gauge Convention in Ipswich. The Quonset hut was one of the first photorealistic kits I built/kitbashed. The scratchbuilt loco shed is a more conventional dimensional timber model with commercial corrugated iron sheathing and roofing.



Queensland NMRA members inspect the layout's development in August 2009. While the basic scenery was in place, and trains could run, neither the backdrop nor most of the structures had been yet been completed.