

"SMALL THINGS THAT COUNT"

-Setting the Scene on a Layout-

by Jim Fainges

When people look at a Model Railway layout, they usually see the movement of the locomotives and rolling stock first, with some awareness of the buildings, if any. Whereas the layouts that attract the most attention at exhibitions etc. are those that set the overall scene with attention given to smaller details, people stop and look, and then look for more.

In the United States they call it "clutter", but it must be convincing. To just dump some assorted bits and pieces haphazardly, and then to proceed to paint the whole mess a rust colour, as many modellers are inclined to do, will stand out like the proverbial 'sore thumb'.

In the talk that I am giving at the Queensland Modellers Convention, I will give my remembrances of the small town scenes, that I have observed, and often sketched over the last 50 years.

The "clutter" will vary with the years and the Region, ie. in the 1940s and 1950s - the "Steam Era", scrap was allowed to accumulate, particularly around engine sheds etc.

In the 1990s - the "Diesel Era", the Occupational Hazard people and their various by-laws have removed all this, to many of us, a fascinating aspect of railways.

Also, such scrap that there is, is now considered valuable and collectable.

I am using some pages from my 'Sketch Book' drawn over the intervening years to reinforce my point.

The first sketch was drawn in 1952 at Kleinton, on the now long abandoned Crow's Nest line, north of Toowoomba.

The Station, such as it was, cum shelter, consisted of a shed on a sleeper retained earth mound, with a simple sign board giving the name.

There was also a passing siding, with a loading area. An outhouse, stood near the heavy wooden gate situated in the post and rail fence. A couple of cream cans, obviously empty were waiting to be picked up by the appropriate farmer (if they had of been full they would have been protected by wet bags thrown over them, and placed under cover).

The Railway house, near the crossing was obviously multi-purpose, has it had signage for Telephone - Bank and Insurance Co. (at that time Government supplied)

This was a small community with only a school and two residences nearby. The railway station must have served quite a successful, surrounding farming area, due with their presence indicating the need of a school. The school itself was interesting and quite unusual, having brick end walls, and not being built entirely in timber or brick.

Today the railway, school etc. are all gone. Children if any, go to school in Toowoomba by bus, so that this interesting group of buildings etc. are gone except in memory.

Although they may be gone, they are a wonderful concept to model. The fence is available in HO and could even be used in "S" gauge. Modellers in other scales would have to scratch build such a fence, but this is fairly easy. The buildings themselves are a good example of what can be achieved by scratch building with styrene sheets and shapes.

To move onto housing again, fencing around a house, particularly a house in the country may vary considerably from post and rail to wire mesh.

In the early years, the sketch shown covers the yard of a house with the various items that would have been found in this area.

Cooking was usually done on a wood fired stove, so there would definitely be a wood heap in the backyard, with a nearby chopping block, with often the axe left stuck in the block, waiting for the next pair of strong arms to chop the ever needed firewood to size to suit the stove or the copper. The weekly wash was done in the laundry, such as it was, often open to the weather, with either a series of large tin tubs on a bench, or three concrete tubs on a stand - for the wash-rinse-blue operation. Nearby would be a wood-fired copper in which to boil the clothes, and beside it often sat the wooden clothes trolley, often made by the oldest son at woodworking classes at school. The clothesline consisted of a series of wires strung across the yard, supported in the middle with a "prop" (a length of timber, often a thin sapling with a short fork in the supporting end). This rather erratic form of clothesline, particularly in windy

weather, was later replaced with the famous Hills Hoist, and the copper boiler and tubs with an electric washing machine.

Another important facet of a Queensland backyard for many years, was the galvanised iron water tank that stood near the back door to supply the family with its drinking, and washing water, and of course the occasional large green frog. Underneath the tank stand, would be either a greenery of Mum's choice - maidenhair, elkhorn or staghorns, and often the home of the family dog.

Up until the 1960s and even later, there would always be the inevitable outhouse - dunny - or whatever else you would like to call it, even now in many country areas, sometimes handyman-built which meant that it could attain many different shapes and disguises. When it came to disguising this piece of "architecture", these could be quite original, from a simple trellis, on which would be entwined either a passionfruit, bougainvillea which often was accompanied by unwanted long thin livestock, or even roses, or some other plant depending on the green thumb skills of the owner.

Also in the backyard there would usually be a chook (fowl) yard, for fresh laid eggs, a vegetable patch, maybe a rather lean-to arrangement designated as a garage, with all its inherent clutter.

The front yard, was often quite the opposite, with a more formal garden, with lawn, flowers and shrubs. The fencing at the front was often quite ornate, and of a different construction to that of the back. and side fences..

In the larger towns, two story buildings could be found in the main streets of the town, but in the sides and rear areas, there could be found all sorts of discarded or stored articles, such as soft drink crates, wooden and cardboard boxes, barrels, drums, discarded shop fittings, and other miscellaneous 'junk'.

Now-a-days, the Health department, the Fire Brigade ordinations and again the necessary occupational safety criteria, makes stores keep these areas clean and tidy.

BUT - 30 years ago -

The front footpath had displays especially the shops selling hardware and fruit and vegetables. Also on the curbside of the footpath could be found Telephone Boxes, Letter Boxes, sometimes large personal Scales stood outside a Chemist, and other coin operated dispensers.

Streets were full of various posts and fittings, such as fire hydrants, and in country areas, hitching posts to tie up horses persisted well into the 1950s. Industrial sites often had discarded machinery and parts, leaning up against the building, or in piles, usually well rusted and half covered with weeds. With the coming of electricity, boilers, steam engines, pumps and line shafting, pulleys and belting were no longer needed, and left to rust and rot away in the surrounding area of the factories. On the electricity poles outside a factory was often a transformer to supply the three phase power needed for machinery.. Some products could be found stacked, often under tarpaulins. These were all little interesting details, that would add so much to the life of a model railway.

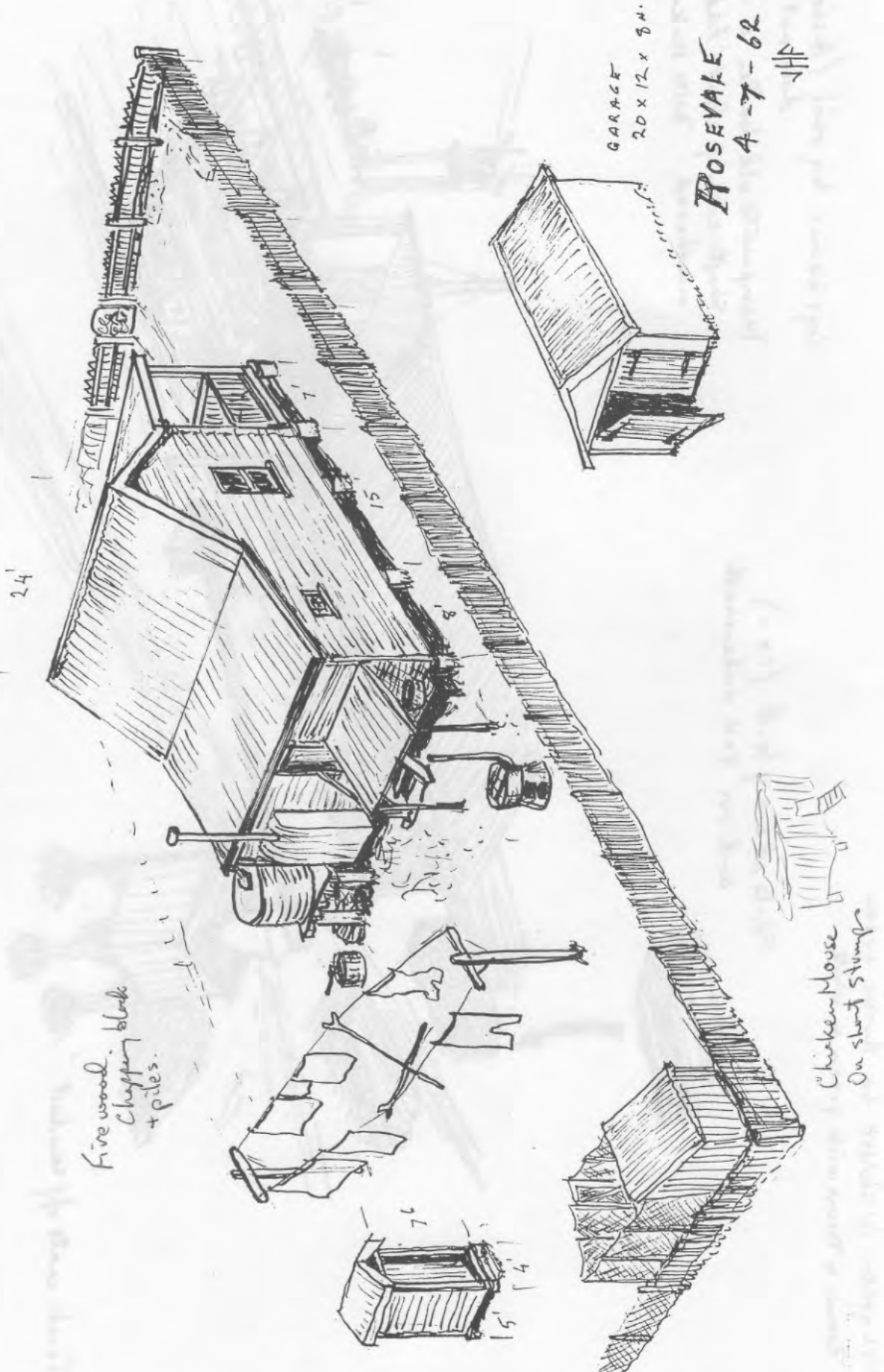
One very important factor that many modellers forget, and which adds considerably to setting the scene. Does the house or shop premises etc., contain a child or children. If so there would be evidence of a child's occupation, such as children's toys - like trolleys, pedal cars, soap-box trolley, prams, scooters, swings, cubby houses, sometimes a tyre swing, or tree house situated in a suitable sized tree - such as a mango tree. Today there could be found metal framed swings, trampolines, and even a swimming pool. Look out onto your own backyard to see what is there, or in that of your neighbours - that is the now high fences allow..

It is up to you what you consider to be worthwhile "clutter", if you can't think of anything, look at old family photographs, even paintings, such as those by Dárcy Doyle, or visit your local historical Society or Library, all are excellent sources of material.

BUT remember to try and keep in time with the era that you are modelling. .

Sometimes 2nd tank for roof water
from front, otherwise pipe back
to rear tank.

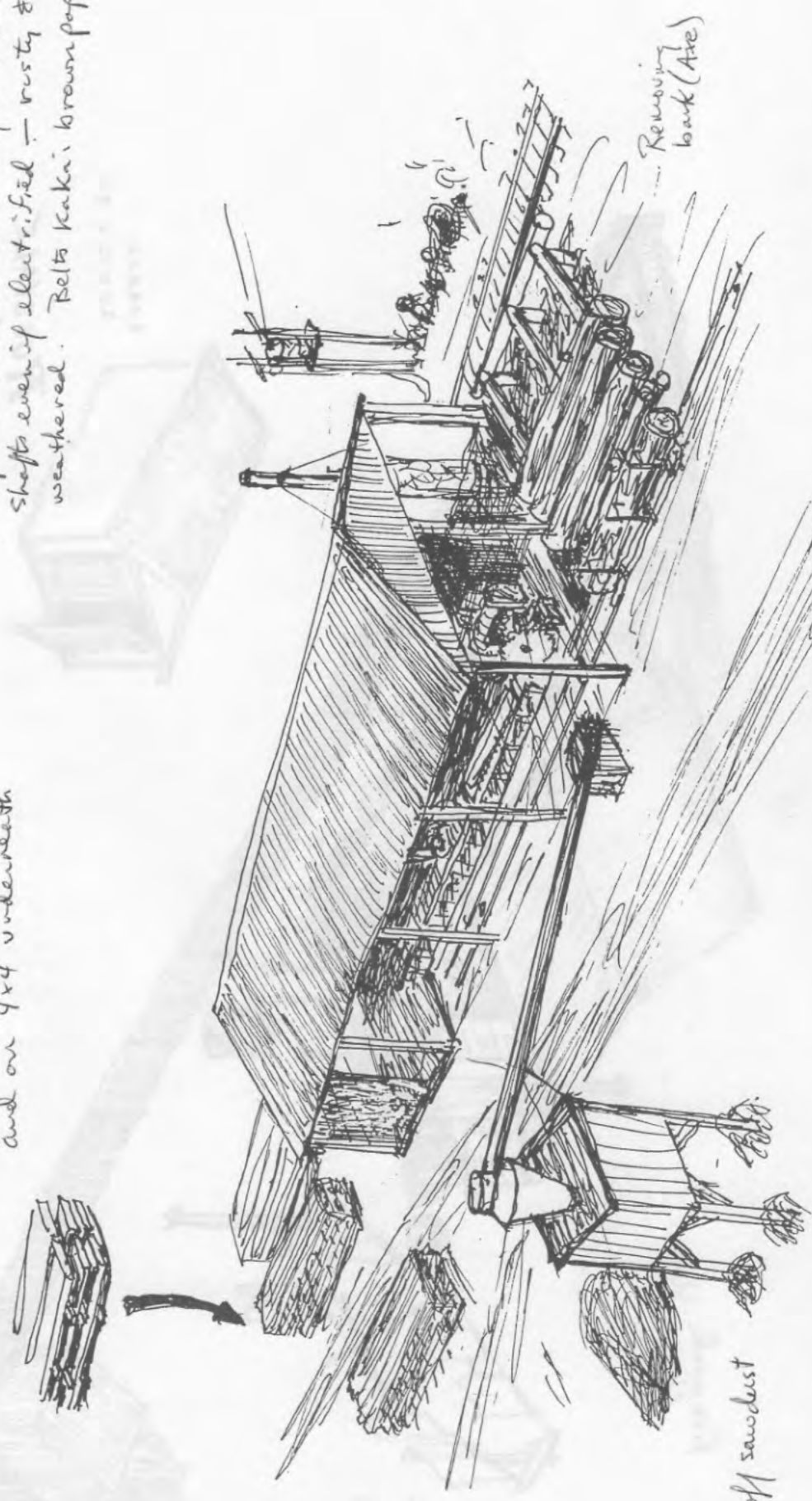
Spare vessels
esp corrugated metal.



Olive green is closest to Aussie green
Brown + Drums with green + white.

Slats at every level (1x2)
and on 4x4 underneath

Logs arrive by rail (Aussie hardwood
does not float)
Incorporate old boiler & engine & line
shafts even if electrified - rusty &
weathered. Belts Kaka brown paper.



Truck carts off sawdust

Removing
bank (Ave)

Composit
3-7-82.

Corrugated - foil like top of yoghurt - aluminium
& press on copper wires laid side by side
Spray clear lacquer/fixative before painting.

