The Gauley & Shavers Fork

A Loosely Inspired N scale Appalachian Railroad

Article by **Bob Ferguson**

Photography by **Lee Thomas**

Everyone's railroad was inspired by something... where you grew up, where a family member worked, your first train ride, or an article you read. My particular inspiration was growing up in Ceredo-Kenova, West Virginia. Kenova was a hotspot for train activity, as the Norfolk and Western (moving North and South) crossed over the Chesapeake and Ohio (which moved East and West). There was even a two-story station, which served the two railroads on different levels. There was a small yard for N&W just south of this station where coal trains were sorted to cross the Ohio River into southern Ohio on a beautiful steel trestle.

When I moved in the 1990s from HO to N scale, I chose to loosely model the Appalachian region and run trains labeled for the N & W, C & O, B & O, and Western Maryland. The Gauley and Shavers Fork Railroad loosely represent an alleged bridge route between the various sections of the above railroads. I have modeled the late 1960s as I like the look of smaller diesels and shorter rolling stock.

Among the decisions I have made, perhaps to make my layout a bit different than others, is to not have what most model railroaders choose to have on their layouts. I have little or no engine servicing areas, as they are loosely assumed to be "on the other side of that mountain. Also, the major yard areas are loosely assumed to be "over behind another mountain." My staging areas are wherever I choose to put cars on the rails. All of my Peco turnouts are manually thrown. To cover myself against charges of treason and heresy, I have very carefully mounted a "NO NITPICKING" sign centered on the layout at the bottom of my basement stairs.

Photo 1: An Atlas Western Maryland SD35, #7435, in circus paint moves across the Gauley River on a single track girder bridge by Kato.

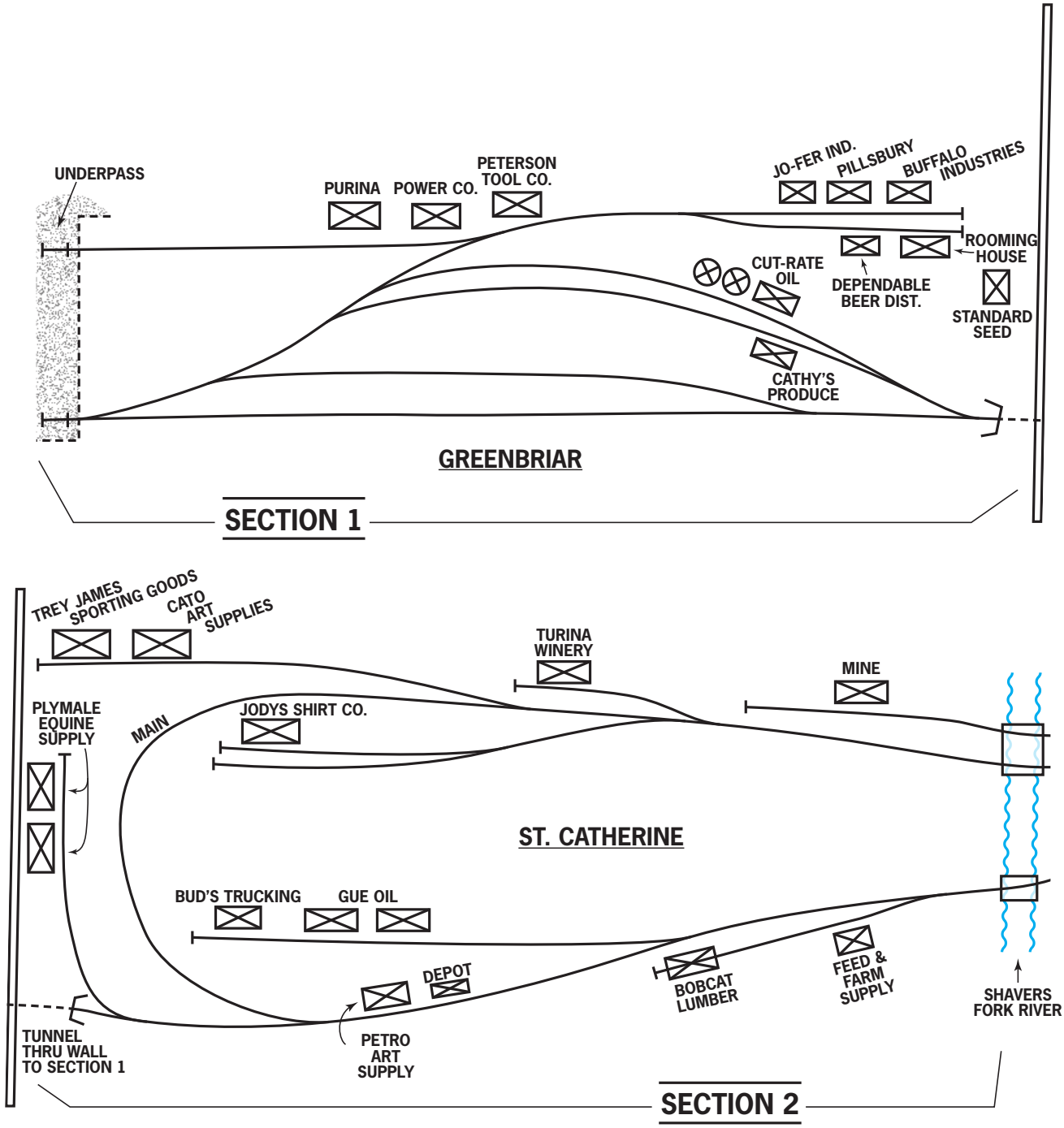
Early on, when I decided to begin an N scale layout, I decided to build a simple "folded dog-bone" style layout on top of some existing cabinetry. This

Photo 2: Downtown Ceredo, featuring the local service station and Pats' Garden Center.

Photo 3: Gauley and Shavers Fork 8012, an ex-Burlington F3A, crosses 12-Pole Creek on a stone-arch bridge which is tucked behind the girder bridge.

had an inherent problem of making the underside of the layout hard to reach. I somewhat solved this problem by setting the base plywood on top of some 2" × 4"s, set on edge, which gives at least some space to run wiring and do some cutouts for rivers and other scenic features. The other major problem in building on top of these existing cabinets was being forced to have small radius curves at each end of the loop, so the railroad would not protrude too far out over the front of the cabinets. These tight curves ended up influencing my choice of era and rolling stock, but all ended well as I was more interested in modeling the early diesel era and 40-foot rolling stock anyway. Any rolling stock over 50 feet tends to look a little awkward on the loop curves. I have attempted, where I could, to disguise the tight curves with foliage and tunnels. Later additions to the Gauley and Shavers Fork have been primarily built on bracket-supported shelving running off each end of the original dog-bone loop. I have officially run out of layout real estate, which led me to develop the idea of mini-modules, which was covered in an article in the September/October 2014 issue of *N-Scale*. This process allows me to keep building scenes as long as my under-layout storage allows.

As to the construction of the railroad itself, I chose early on to use Atlas Code 80 flex track and Peco turnouts. I especially like the Peco products because of the firm spring action that holds the points in position. As to the code 80 track, I feel with proper weathering and



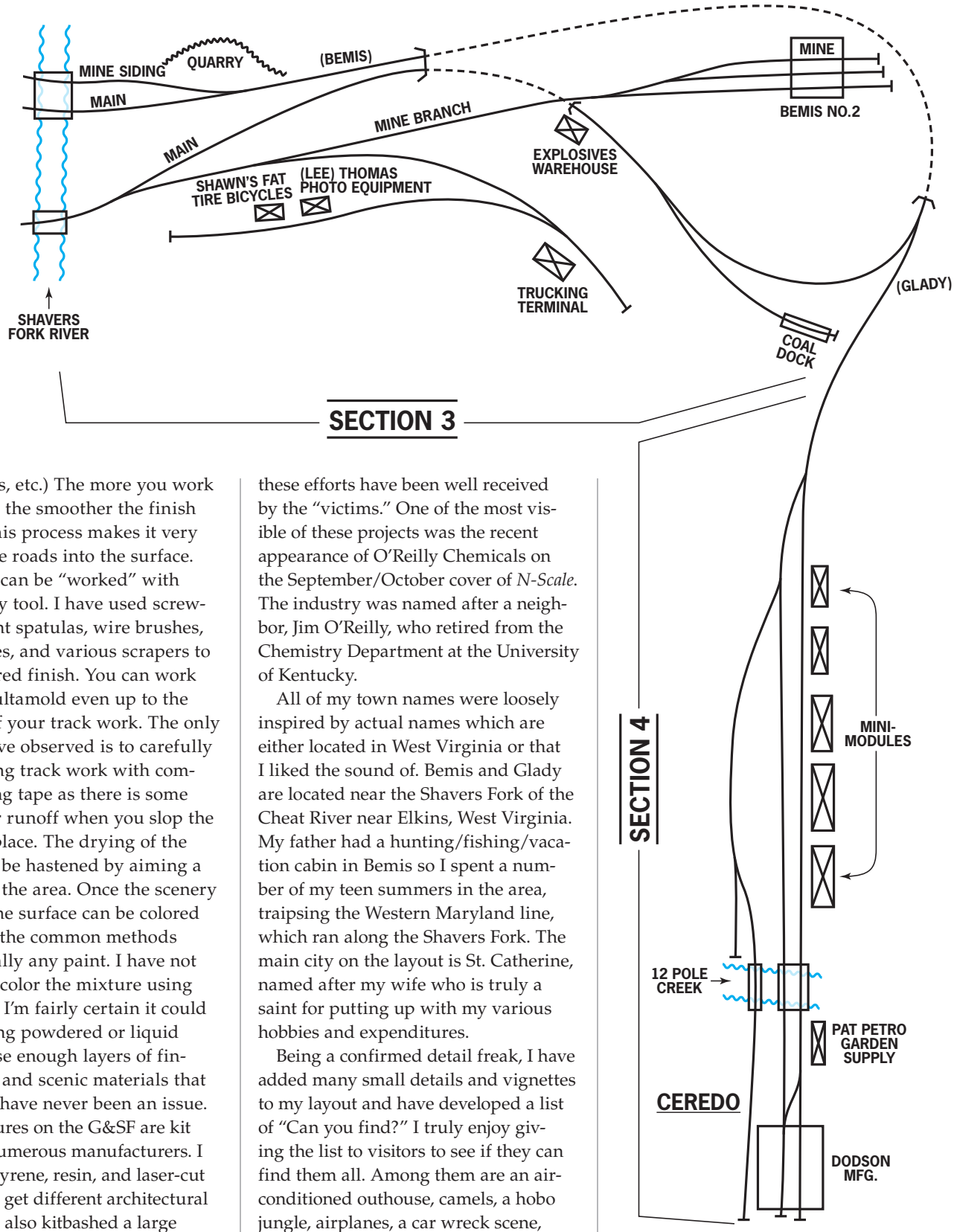
ballasting, it takes a sharp eye to realize it is oversize. And the tradeoff in size results in smoother running with fewer derailments. I have used code 55 experimentally on a couple of sidings and found I had more problems with derailments and wheel bumping than I could live with. All of my code 80 flex track is weathered before installation by spraying the sides of the rails with a mix of grimy black and roof brown. The tops of the ties are treated to alternating sprays of various shades including dark gray, dark earth and medium gray.

(Authors note: I'm sure going to miss Floquil sprays when they leave the market.) Before installation, all the tips on the track and turnouts are buffed with a Dremel metal brush and all rail joints are soldered.

Almost all of the scenery features (mountains, hills, roads, ponds, etc.) on the Gauley and Shavers Fork are created from Sculptamold. I wish I had discovered this product earlier in my modeling days.

Sculptamold is a dry, somewhat fibrous, non-toxic material that typically comes in three to five pound bags. I have seen it displayed at numerous hobby and craft shops. To create scenery, I mix up a couple of spoonful's with water in a disposable plastic cup and slop it on the area I want to work. You can make a scenery feature solid or apply the Sculptamold to a foundation of plaster cloth to make larger features.

The true beauty of Scultamold is the workability for a good period of time. Once the Sculptamold has set up slightly, I begin to carve in desired features (river banks, rock faces,



ponds, roads, etc.) The more you work the product, the smoother the finish becomes. This process makes it very easy to carve roads into the surface. The surface can be "worked" with virtually any tool. I have used screwdrivers, paint spatulas, wire brushes, X-acto knives, and various scrapers to get the desired finish. You can work with the Scultamold even up to the very edge of your track work. The only caution I have observed is to carefully cover existing track work with common masking tape as there is some minor water runoff when you slop the product in place. The drying of the scenery can be hastened by aiming a small fan at the area. Once the scenery has dried, the surface can be colored with any of the common methods using virtually any paint. I have not tried to pre-color the mixture using acrylics, but I'm fairly certain it could be done using powdered or liquid acrylics. I use enough layers of finish coloring and scenic materials that white spots have never been an issue.

All structures on the G&SF are kit built from numerous manufacturers. I have used styrene, resin, and laser-cut wood kits to get different architectural looks. I have also kitbashed a large number of buildings to get the look I was after. I have also taken great delight in constructing and naming buildings and industries after friends and neighbors, trying to use their careers or interests as an inspiration. All of these efforts have been well received by the "victims." One of the most visible of these projects was the recent appearance of O'Reilly Chemicals on the September/October cover of *N-Scale*. The industry was named after a neighbor, Jim O'Reilly, who retired from the Chemistry Department at the University of Kentucky.

All of my town names were loosely inspired by actual names which are either located in West Virginia or that I liked the sound of. Bemis and Glady are located near the Shavers Fork of the Cheat River near Elkins, West Virginia. My father had a hunting/fishing/vacation cabin in Bemis so I spent a number of my teen summers in the area, traipsing the Western Maryland line, which ran along the Shavers Fork. The main city on the layout is St. Catherine, named after my wife who is truly a saint for putting up with my various hobbies and expenditures.

Being a confirmed detail freak, I have added many small details and vignettes to my layout and have developed a list of "Can you find?" I truly enjoy giving the list to visitors to see if they can find them all. Among them are an air-conditioned outhouse, camels, a hobo jungle, airplanes, a car wreck scene, palm trees, deer, black bears, a pregnant lady, aliens and so forth. The pregnant lady with her dented VW is a nod to my wonderful wife who tried to blame a minor bumper-bender on our unborn son who allegedly kicked, causing my wife to lose control and bump a post at a gas station. As my layout is essentially complete, the addition of layers of small details is one way to keep myself busy.

The scenery on my layout is 99%

Photo 4: The ambulance crew is loading a victim of the three car wreck into the wagon. Both the medical crew and the local cops are excited, because they were able to turn on their flashers and sirens today.

Photo 5: Bemis Mine #2 is serviced by the N&W, C&O, B&O, WM, and the G&SF, depending on what power and hoppers the president decides to run that day.

Photo 6: Dairy farm on the mountain above Bemis.

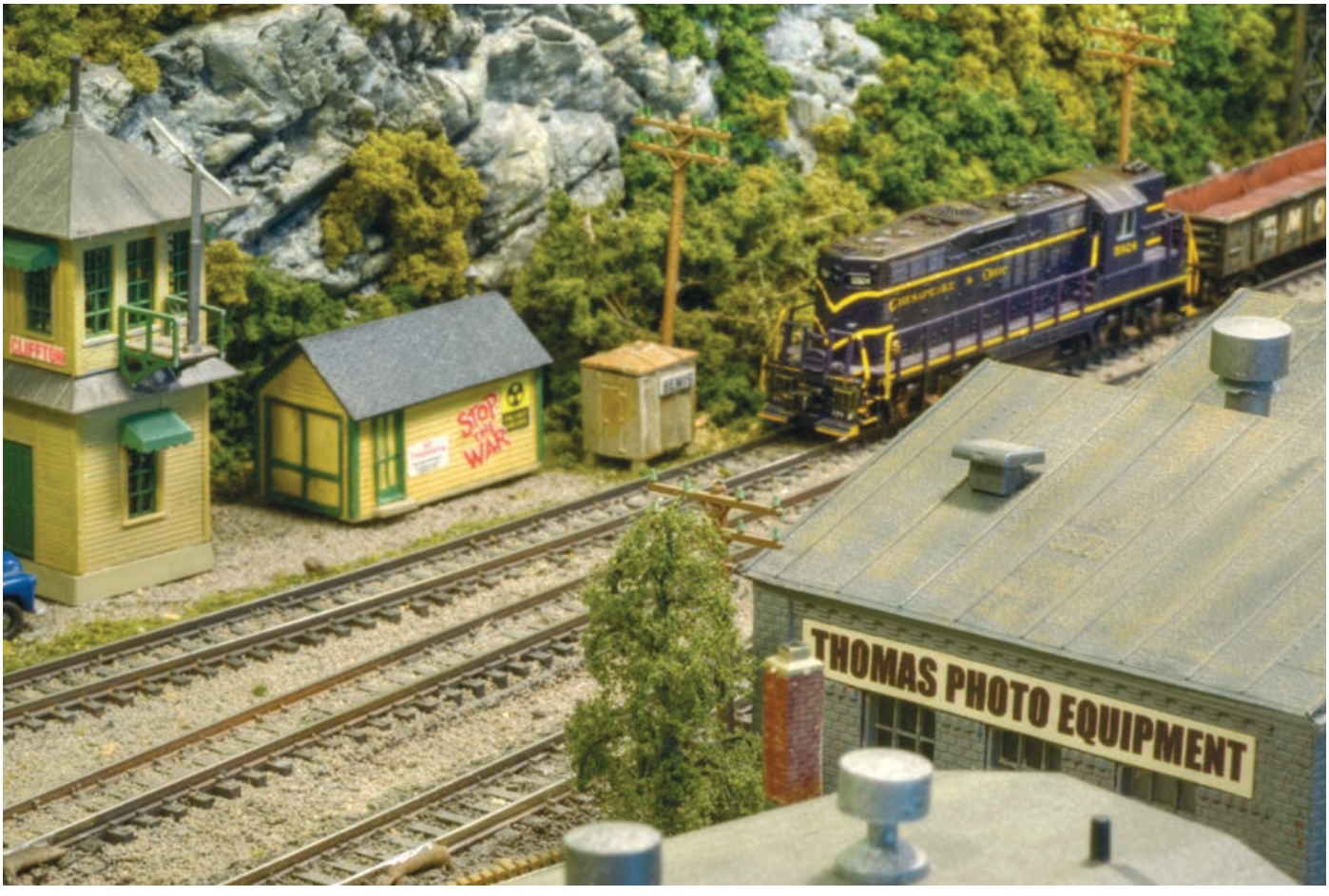


Photo 7: A C&O GP 9, pulling a mixed freight, passes Bemis Junction. Across the tracks is the world headquarters of the Lee Thomas Photo Equipment Inc.

Photo 8: A C&O GP 9 moves onto one of two girder bridges spanning the Gauley River. The river, below the falls, is a hot-spot for recreation, featuring swimmers, fly fishermen and surfers.

Photo 9: The mounted patrolmen are keeping a wary eye on the nuns protesting for women's rights at the Calico Cat gentleman's club. Meanwhile, the rest of the St. Catherines' Police Department is observing a donut break at the Parkette across the street.

Photo 10: Views of downtown St. Catherine. The grey building to the left and the red-brick hotel are kit-bashed and stacked DPM kits. The bank tower to the right is a Lunde Studios structure, featuring a working clock mounted at the peak.

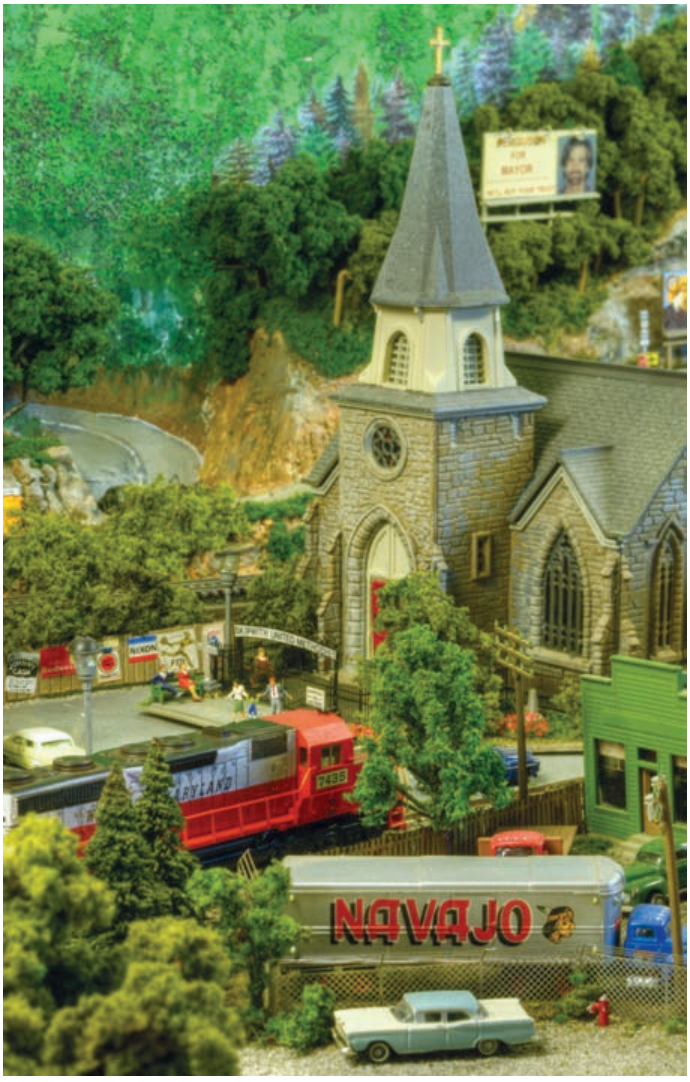


Photo 11: Western Maryland SD35 #7435 pulls a mixed freight hookup past the Skipworth United Methodist Church in downtown St. Catherine. The church is an HO model with the doors re-sized to N scale and is pastored by Rev. Steven Plymale.

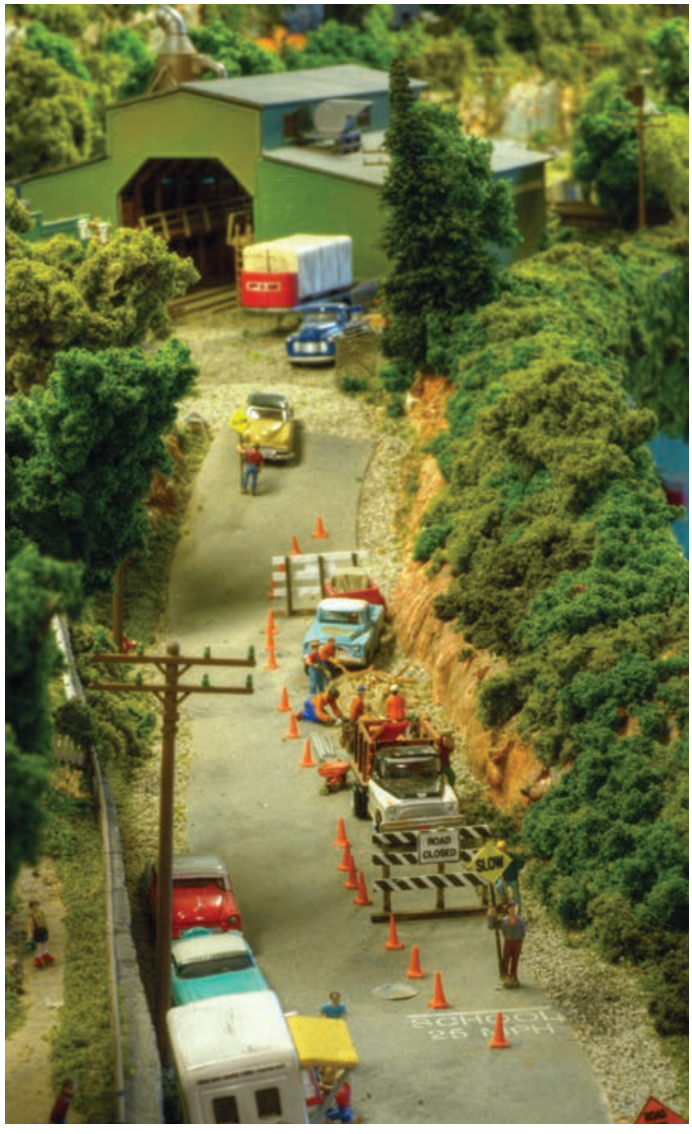


Photo 12: Schoolhouse Road in St. Catherine, leading up to the local lumber dealer. Local crews have the right lane torn up for utility work.

complete, and I recently installed a Digitrax DCC system, with much help from local modelers, particularly Tom Bensberg and Pete Birdsong. Both are fellow members of the local NMRA Division. I am now in the process of having all my locomotives converted to decoders, with that work being done by John Gorman. The addition of a heavy buss loop and additional feeders to my earlier-described track work has resulted in a very good electrical setup with electrical problems being very rare. I have also been thinking recently of developing an operating system, rather than running trains in a random fashion. Most of the operations will be local switching among the numerous industries, with some trains disappearing off-line "behind that other mountain," on their way to other parts of the N scale world.

If you are ever in the central Kentucky area, you are welcome to stop by and try out my "Can you find?" list. Until then, keep modeling and searching for inspiration.

In addition, the Gauley and Shavers Fork RR will be one of the tour stops during the NMRA Division 10 convention on May 14-17, 2015. The convention will be based at the Campbell House Hotel in Lexington, KY. Additional information is available at *thoroughbredlimited2015.yolasite.com*.

Bob Ferguson, President and Chief Operating Officer of the Gauley and Shavers Fork, is a retired sales rep in the textbook wholesale industry. He lives in Lexington, KY with his wife, Catherine, who is the Chautauqua and Speakers Bureau Coordinator for the Kentucky Humanities Council. In addition to being gainfully employed, Catherine serves as Chief Financial Officer for the G and SF. Bob is a member of the Bluegrass Model Railroad Club, NMRA Divison 10 and the National Railway Historical Society.