

NMRA BULLETIN

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2025 NMRA National Convention Dates and National Train Show Reservations:
July 14-19, 2025 – Novi, Michigan <https://nmra2025.com/>
Train Show Booth Reservations—Jenny Hendricks Registrar - P.O. Box 1328, Soddy Daisy, TN 37384-1328
423-892-2846 • ntsreg@nmra.org
• 2026 Chattanooga, Tennessee

rev 10/31/2024

VICTOR HAND

EARNs

MASTER MODEL RAILROADER® #774

Unlike many modelers, my model railroading odyssey did not begin with a Lionel train around the Christmas tree. My family did not celebrate Christmas, but in 1951, my father decided to buy some HO trains for my older brother and me.

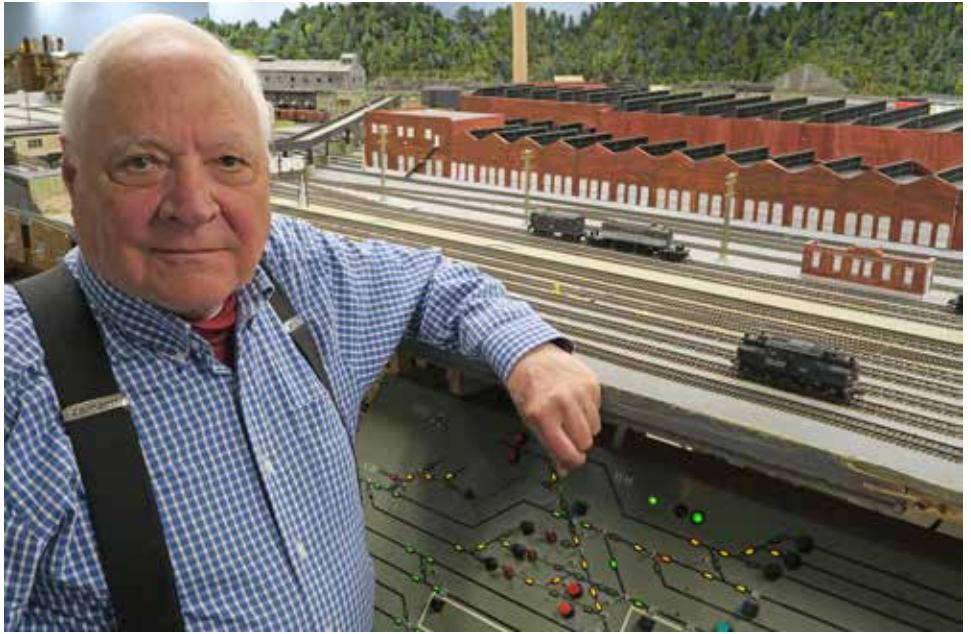
We bought the trains at a local hobby shop run by Bill Idell. Bill had been chased all over Europe by the Nazis, and after the war he settled in New York, married an American woman, and opened a small hobby shop in our neighborhood. Our first purchase included a power pack made by Model Rectifier Corporation, then located in Brooklyn. Car kits were from Athearn and Varney, and locomotive kits were from Mantua and Bowser. Track was made of brass rail stapled to fiber ties. Couplers were crude loop-and-link devices made by Mantua.

My brother lost interest within a few weeks and went back to baseball and girls, while I stuck with it. I built a very crude layout on a sheet of plywood with track so bad that a train could not run on it. But my modeling skills improved.

I started hanging around the hobby shop and reading *Model Railroader* and *Trains* magazines. In particular, I was struck by David P. Morgan's writing in *Trains*. My mother bought me a copy of Lucius Beebe's "The Age of Steam," and I became aware of the great railroad photographs of people like Shaughnessy, Steinheimer, Kistler, Hale, Furler, Hastings, and Link. I decided I wanted to learn to take pictures like these people and embarked on a lifetime quest for railroad photographs.

When I started taking railroad photos, I traveled to Buffalo, Toronto, and Montreal to see steam locomotives and became aware of the New York Central Railroad. I decided it would be a good railroad to model.

In junior high school, I started working part-time in Bill's hobby shop, and soon, I was performing his Lionel Trains repairs — most Lionel repairs involved replacing a burned-out reversing relay, which was a pretty quick job. If a piece of equipment had been dropped, it was necessary to replace the broken parts. It



was easy money, and I was paid in car kits and track.

When Athearn discontinued its stamped metal car kits and went to plastic, I was upset, so I ordered a case of 48 of the metal kits. They had excellent graphics and (with added detail) compare with some cars available today. Many are still in operation on my layout.

I bought my first brass locomotive in 1958 for \$50, which was a lot of money back then. I learned to solder and modified a few engines. Once, I took a perfectly good NYC Niagara and turned it into a likeness of a Rock Island 4-8-4, which I thought was a particularly attractive engine.

During high school, I built a fairly large layout on the third floor of my parents' house. My modeling skills had advanced to the point that the layout was operable, and even had some structures. Couplers had advanced to the so-called NMRA horn-hook type. Eventually, Kadee solved the coupler problem, and I have used their products ever since. This layout included a hump yard. Since there were no retarders, most cars going over the hump lost their couplers on impact. I never tried that again.

When I went away to college and later law school, my model railroading was limited. Still, I kept up with the periodicals, bought brass locomotives, and built an occasional car kit.

During these years, I was very active in railroad photography, particularly of

steam locomotives. I eventually photographed railways in 53 countries on 6 continents. My collection of 46,000 images has been donated to The Center for Railroad Photography and Art, and many images are available on the internet. I have authored four books of railroad photos, and have contributed hundreds of images to periodicals and other books.

In 1967, I took my first railroad job as a locomotive fireman for New York Central. Over the next few years, I worked for Penn Central, Erie Lackawanna, Central Railroad of New Jersey, and Amtrak. I was fortunate to spend 18 months in Penn Central's Management Training Program, which provided me with an invaluable education in practical railroading. Later, I served as an Assistant Trainmaster and Trainmaster in central Pennsylvania. As a part of the Management Training Program, I worked with the transportation and maintenance-of-way departments in the New York area, and decided that the Hudson Division and Harmon in particular was what I wanted to model.

Penn Central went bankrupt in June 1970, and six months later, I decided there was no future with that company. I headed west to California, but Southern Pacific and Western Pacific were not hiring. I took the opportunity to travel around the world during that year, taking railroad photographs.

When I returned, I went to work for Central Railroad of New Jersey as Manager of Passenger Services. CNJ ran

156 passenger trains a day, and I also had the opportunity to organize a number of steam excursions. I later took a job with Amtrak in Washington, D.C.

When I moved to Washington, I got married and bought a 19th-century row house with a 19x64-foot basement. My first priority was to install a grid ceiling and walls. Over the next 28 years, despite constant travel for work and railroad photography, I managed to fill that basement with track representing NYC's facilities at Harmon and Croton-on-Hudson. The layout never got to the scenery stage, but it was operational. I installed a "Route Cab Control" system described by Paul Mallery, which utilized multi-gang rotary switches to route power to blocks ahead of trains. Running trains was tedious with this system. A crude Command Control system called Dynatrol became available, and I experimented with it. Dynatrol worked but left much to be desired. When DCC was introduced, I bought an NCE system and have been very satisfied with it.

While living in Washington, I took a job with the United States Railway Association, which the government had formed to clean up the mess left by the bankruptcy of Penn Central and seven other Northeastern railroads. I helped design the operating plan for Conrail and later managed the real estate conveyance process, which transferred properties to Conrail and other railroads. After Conrail was formed, I joined a major consulting firm that was developing a railroad practice and worked on projects involving most of the mergers that occurred in the 1970s and 1980s. When the work moved overseas, I was involved in projects for railways on all six continents.

But I digress. Back to model railroad-ing. During my time in Washington, I built a sizeable layout despite constantly traveling for business and railroad photography. I also amassed a sizeable collection of brass locomotives. At first, I bought engines I found interesting, but soon narrowed my focus to New York Central prototypes and engines I had seen running on various railroads. As brass production migrated to Korea and later to China, the engines got better and better (and more expensive). Recently, I decided to sell off many of my earlier models, keeping only the best.

My layout in Washington taught me two things:

- Hidden track is bad news.
- Small electric locomotives do not like grades.

In the early 1990s, I purchased property in rural Maine and began constructing a basement with a house on top of it. The new basement was irregular in shape, 100x46 feet. Since I did much of the finishing on the house, this occupied me for about 10 years. By 2004, work on the house had progressed to the point where I felt justified in starting construction of my dream layout.

As before, I chose to model the New York Central Railroad in the Hudson Valley. I had saved some of the complex trackwork from my earlier layout, including the nine slip switches at Harmon and the yard leads at Croton West yard. Since I had so much more space, I could extend the tracks at Harmon to handle longer trains. I developed a plan to model the NYC Hudson Division between mileposts 32 (Harmon) and 54 (Breakneck Mountain at Cold Spring). I also had enough space in the new basement to include a scene from the Electric Division. I chose to model Spuyten Duyvil, where the line to Grand Central Terminal diverges from the West Side Freight Line.

Over the next 20 years, track construction progressed through Croton-on-Hudson to Oscawana, Crugers, and Peekskill. I moved a temporary reversing loop as the railroad expanded. I designed and built a relay-based signal system replicating the signal system NYC used in the 1950s. It currently depicts three major interlockings and the automatic signals between them. The system currently contains 118 detection blocks, more than 1100 relays, over 3300 diodes, and 24 flasher modules. Signals for the major interlocking at Harmon are a work in progress.

Rather than build more track, I decided to finish scenery and structures on the part of the layout already built. About half of the layout has scenery, and dozens of structures have been scratchbuilt, including five major bridges. Plans have been drawn for the extension of the railroad to Breakneck Mountain. We will see if I live long enough to get there.

Two other modelers I met through the New York Central System Historical Society were modeling the same area as I was, proving to be very helpful. Larry Faulkner did lots of prototype research and provided much data and numerous

photos of the Hudson Division. Manuel Duran-Duran is skilled in laser-cutting and 3D-printing and has made many special parts that aided my modelbuilding.

I joined the NMRA in the early 2000s. The late Larry Cannon, MMR[®], suggested I participate in the Achievement Program, and Peter McKenney and Tom Oxnard, MMR[®], continued to urge me to complete the requirements for Master Model Railroader. I had written enough articles for the model railroad periodicals over the years to qualify for Model Railroad – Author. Work already done on my layout qualified me for Master Builder – Structures, Master Builder – Scenery, Master Builder – Prototype Models, and Model Railroad Engineer – Electrical. The last two categories needed for MMR[®] presented me with a problem. I scratchbuilt several turnouts and crossovers, but I used cast frogs and points with bolt detail because it looked better. The Model Railroad Engineer – Civil requirements specified that frogs and points be handmade. I built three track components using Fast Tracks jigs to meet this requirement. It was fun, but since I had no use for this trackwork on my layout, I gave it to a friend who could use it.

I had never scratchbuilt any rolling stock since most everything I needed for my NYC layout had been available as kits or ready-to-run. The one exception was work equipment. Working from photographs, I scratchbuilt four NYC work cars that had been converted from obsolete equipment. This modeling qualified me for the Master Builder – Cars certificate and Master Model Railroader.

My wife, Patricia, deserves my thanks for putting up with my railroad obsession for over 50 years.

Railroads and model railroading have been an important part of my life, and I have made many good friends along the way. I have had a good run.

Certificates Earned
Victor Hand, MMR[®] #774

Model Railroad Author
Master Builder – Structures
Master Builder – Scenery
Master Builder – Prototype Models
Model Railroad Engineer – Electrical
Model Railroad Engineer – Civil
Master Builder – Cars

DAVID LOWELL

EARNs

MASTER MODEL RAILROADER® #775

What a day! I recently received an e-mail informing me I had been bestowed with Master Model Railroader No. 775. What could add to that honor? Later that night, I attended the city council meeting for Kirkwood, Missouri. At that meeting, they approved all the funding and contracts for the historic renovation of Kirkwood's Missouri Pacific Depot (and Amtrak station), built in 1894. For that restoration project, I will represent the City of Kirkwood and oversee the project as their construction consultant. Kirkwood is named after James P. Kirkwood, the Chief Engineer for the Pacific Railroad (Missouri Pacific, Union Pacific), who laid out the route west from St. Louis to Pacific, Missouri.

I have frequently taken the path less traveled for many things in my life. My path to achieving my MMR®, as well as my involvement within the NMRA, has been one of those journeys. I started my interest with trains in a big way, with a cab ride in a Chicago & Illinois Midland SW1200 at the ripe old age of 4, compliments of my maternal grandfather, Frank S. Breed. He worked for the C&IM's Mechanical Department from 1927 through 1961. I can still vividly remember what occurred when the engineer loaded up the prime mover and the big green beastie roared to life in vibration, the smell of diesel exhaust, and the hiss of air as the engineer released the independent engine brake. All that combined to just plain scare the poop out of me. I also remember the immediate comfort of my dad's laugh as he scooped me up to ease my fear. The hook was set, and that experience has stuck with me for many years. Some 46 years later, I got the opportunity to drive a real steam engine — an awesome experience! That time, I savored the smells, the noise, and the vibration of that particular beastie.

I'll skip the recital about my first train, school, Scouting, cars, girls, marriage, career, etc. I want to share my thoughts about the influence that the NMRA has had, and still has, on my enjoyment of model railroading and, spe-



cifically, how the Achievement Program has been a large part of that equation. After 20 years in a non-NMRA club, followed by a hiatus of about five years after the club folded, the itch returned to start enjoying my trains again. I was looking for a method by which to do so. Initially, I had an inaccurate view of the NMRA. That changed over time as I did some research and learned more about the organization.

That time out of the hobby made me realize I was not only looking for modeling and operations, but also fellowship. Therefore, I decided to attend a monthly meeting of the Gateway Division, and the experience was positive. So, I “marked up” in February 2015.

The monthly meetings were nice. Each one had a clinic by a member or guest. Most were educational in nature and sometimes quite entertaining. As time passed, I noticed the camaraderie amongst the old heads and was pleased with how they welcomed me into their community. I took advantage of the opportunity to volunteer and become an active member, which improved my enjoyment and accelerated the opportunity to bond with the old heads. Bingo! You spend time at an event talking trains, and the next thing you know, you are sharing a commonality with someone, melting

barriers, and you start making new friends and experiencing fellowship. My experiences were moving in the direction I had hoped for.

In the fall of 2015, I tried my hand at an entry in the Celebration of Models Room at the Division's annual Fall Meet. I did well enough that it further energized me. I then attended my first Region Convention in the summer of 2017 and my first National Convention in 2018, which provided me with more fellowship, modeling, and adventures. In late 2017, I was asked to run for (and was elected) Division Director. Some of my new friends soon began to encourage me to work to achieve AP Certificates with the possible goal of receiving my MMR®. Honestly, I was hesitant at first. I didn't understand what that would do for me. After all, I was doing okay in contests. I was active in my Division. Once again, as time passed, I learned what I was missing.

One of the many qualities of the MMR® program is that it encourages you to push your skills as a model railroader to transform yourself into a better modeler. It does that by educating you and exposing you to new aspects of the hobby you might not have otherwise explored. It really is more than just a destination of a certificate and a plaque. It's a journey.

The first AP Certificate I completed was Chief Dispatcher. After marking up with the NMRA, I quickly got involved in the local Tuesday Night Operating Group. That was fun, sometimes stressful, and a deeply educational experience. I toted my form from operating session (OP) to OP session, documenting my qualification hours in different operating positions on various local model railroads. My local Division has many gracious local hosts willing to share their model railroads with others. I was eventually invited to the Webster Groves and Fenton Railroad. The owner, an MMR® recipient himself, encouraged me to get my Dispatcher (DS) hours on his railroad. He and his crew patiently accommodated my learning curve while mentoring me. Apparently, he has done this for several guys. The host and crew were great; merciless in their ribbing at times, but great. Some 10 years later, it's still a regular trick once a month. I also continue to DS on several other model railroads in the area. After all this time, now it's my turn to enjoy helping less experienced operators learn the ropes.

Next up was the AP Certificate for Master Builder – Cars. I already enjoyed modeling and had built several kits. This certificate expanded my horizon via superdetailing and the general improvement of my skills. One of the requirements was to scratchbuild a car, which was something I had yet to try. I dove straight into the deep water by scratchbuilding a heavyweight private executive passenger car, which included a top and side that could be removed to expose a completed interior. Now, I model a coal road. So, I didn't know third base from my rear end about passenger cars. During the research that followed, I learned about steam signal lines, queen posts, Baker heaters, clerestory roofs, and so much more. What an experience! The model earned respectable judging scores at local and Region Conventions. At the 2022 National Convention in St. Louis, it received First Place in the passenger car category and the *NMRA MAGAZINE'S* Most Photogenic Model Award. If that wasn't enough of a reward, an article I subsequently wrote about the journey from research to build was published in the September 2024 *NMRA Magazine*. How can an experience like that not energize you about the NMRA? The con-

ference that experience gave me led to several other highly detailed scratchbuilt models, which I probably would not have attempted otherwise.

My third AP Certificate was Model Railroad – Author. I am sure my dear departed mother, an English teacher, probably would not have believed this one. She couldn't get me to read a book as a kid, even if she glued it to my forehead, and was exasperated beyond belief at my indifference to grammar. As it turns out, it is fun to tell the stories of how I built a bunch of my models and share other NMRA experiences. Keep in mind that most Divisions and Regions (and even the *NMRA MAGAZINE*) are always looking for unique content. So, tell your story. What might be old hat to you may be enlightening for someone else.

I stumbled into my next AP Certificate, Association Official. It came along with the completion of my first three-year term as Director for the Gateway Division, a rewarding role in itself. It involved helping to guide the Division along with a great set of guys and meeting folks from across the Region.

Next came the AP Certificate for Structures. Again, it expanded my horizons by increasing my knowledge of prototype techniques to build a representation of a battered pile wood trestle and several other highly detailed buildings from scratch. I also learned new modeling, painting, and weathering skills. That resulted in more stories to tell, submissions to the Division newsletter, *The RPO*, to the *NMRA Magazine*, and bragging rights after contests.

Number six turned out to be a shocker: Model Railroad Electrical – Engineer (pun intended). I am an analog guy living in a digital world. In fact, what I know about electricity can be summed up as, when you touch both wires it can tickle, or just plain hurt. Yet, in the process of building a modest-sized model railroad, I learned about DCC wiring, electrically controlled turnout control with LED position indicators, DCC decoder installations, how to solder, reverse loop wiring, signal systems, and, probably the most important of all, that letting the smoke out is bad.

Lucky number seven was the Association Volunteer AP Certificate. Lucky not only because it was the final one I needed to complete my MMR, but

also because it has been the most rewarding by far. I did not set out to pursue this one. Yet, as I periodically reviewed all the AP Certificate options, I noticed more and more that the fun I was having volunteering with the NMRA might also earn me enough credit for this AP Certificate. Volunteering comes in many forms:

- Staffing a table at a train show to introduce others to the NMRA.
- Taking on the chairmanship of a committee.
- Joining a committee.
- Participating in a special interest group.
- Presenting clinics.
- Mentoring others.

I have been lucky as to what has been made available to me because I chose to volunteer.

My journey to date in the NMRA and pursuing my MMR® has been a great adventure. It is one that I am glad to have taken and one that I hope will continue for many years. I plan to stay active within my Division and Region and be involved with the group that hosts the annual St. Louis Railroad Prototype Modelers event.

While the journey has been mine, it would not have been possible if not for my wife Madonna's support and all the great NMRA people I have met along the way. To my Division brothers and sisters, to the friends I have made at the Regional level, and to all those stalwart icons on the National stage, whose dedication forms the pillars of this organization, I thank each of you for all the joy you have afforded me. It is truly an honor to become a Master Model Railroader. In closing, I believe becoming an MMR® is not just something earned, it is also a commitment to pay forward all the great experiences that I have been fortunate enough to enjoy because others have already paid it forward to me.

Certificates Earned David Lowell, MMR® #775

**Chief Dispatcher
Master Builder – Cars
Model Railroad Author
Association Official
Master Builder – Structures
Model Railroad Engineer – Electrical
Association Volunteer**

ACHIEVEMENT PROGRAM

NMRA AP CERTIFICATE REPORT OCTOBER 2024

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Pacific Northwest Region

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Pacific Southwest Region

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Mid-Eastern Region

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Rocky Mountain Region

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MASTER MODEL RAILROADER®

MMR® #776 Benjamin Maggi, Loudonville, New York

MMR® #777 Dave Croshere, Sebastopol, California

MMR® #778 William Botkin, Centennial, Colorado

AP QUESTIONS: If you have questions about the AP program or requirements, start with your local or Region AP manager. If you still have questions, contact Ray Persing at achiev@nmra.org.

THREE BIG BENEFITS OF NMRA MEMBERSHIP:



Those are the discounts that manufacturers and hobby shops in our Partnership Program are giving us right now. Partners like Micro-Mark®, Model Rectifier Corporation®, Badger Airbrush®, Unreal Details®, Hot Wire Foam Factory®, Logic Rail™ Technologies. And over 30 more companies. It's savings that can actually pay for your membership!

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We make it more fun.