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railroading to a friend, neighbor or family member. The benchwork is simple box girder construction of 1x4 boards topped with 2-inch foam and screwed to wall studs, with 1x4 legs added where necessary. The layout is L-shaped, about 25 feet down each wall with a terminal at each end.

Track and switches are Atlas Code 83 laid on cork roadbed. Power is supplied by Digitrax DCC, with reversing modules for the wye and balloon tracks. Other turnouts (switches) are thrown using a skewer stick or will eventually have N scale Caboose Industries ground throws.

The overall idea behind this layout (which replaced another like it in N scale) was to build something which looked good in a finished basement, ran smoothly and gave me an opportunity in HO to learn about DCC and scenery. It is what I call a “throw away,” so that when we move I can build another simple layout based on what I’ve learned from this one. At the same time, it won’t be hard to salvage the two main parts, the wye and balloon track, because they are roughly 4 x 8 feet in size.

Motive power

Power includes a pair of Bachmann 2-8-0s (one painted for Illinois Central to haul the excursion train), two 2-6-0s, an Athearn CP MP15 which handles interchange work from the main line connection, and a Watco CF7 for freight work on the short line. There is also an RDC-1 which handles a short commuter run from a distant city.

A RAILROADER'S RAILROAD

BY BARRY KARLBERG

'Throwaway' for a finished basement covers the basics ...

MY LAYOUT DOESN'T STRICTLY FOLLOW A true prototype. It is based on ideas I have seen and used on the prototype in my work. I choose what I like best and what I think will make a simple, realistic railroad.

The era is 2000 to the present. My theme is a very basic railroad which connects with the Canadian Pacific/Soo, a Class 1 railroad. The short line handles freight for a half dozen customers during the week. On the weekends it allows a local railroad museum to run steam passenger trains on its short main track, which is a little less than a scale mile long.

Construction

The layout is designed to be easy to build, maintain, and operate while at the same time doubling as a way to illustrate

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There are more locomotives and rolling stock available, but I try to keep the level of equipment to 3 or 4 locomotives and about 15 to 20 cars so the layout isn't overwhelmed. I see from my pictures I need to have more brown, black and gray freight cars to subdue some of the bright colors on the layout. I guess a little basic weathering wouldn't hurt either.

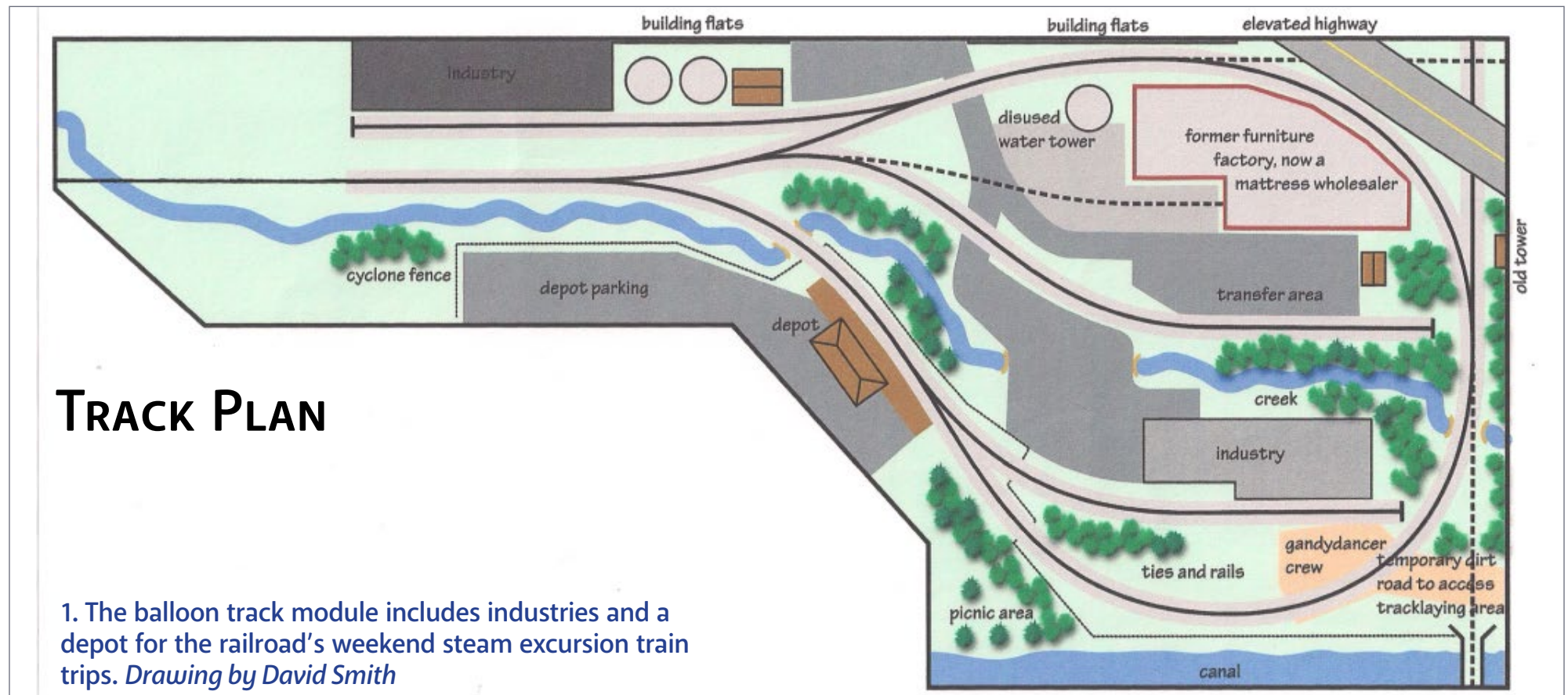
Business

Industries, built or planned, include a grain elevator and flour mill, and a lumber yard at the wye end. Other industries include

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a transload center, a jelly/jam/fruit preserves plant, a small chemical distributor, a plastics plant, and a paper distributor at the balloon track end.

I have found that most short lines these days have a plastics plant, some type of grain industry, often a tank car customer, like a chemical, propane or fertilizer distributor; and sometimes a lumber yard or other boxcar/reefer industry.



Behind the design

Because I have railroaded from the ground, cab and classroom I designed the layout to have at least a wye, a loop, interchange, a siding-runaround track, facing and trailing point spurs, and engine facilities ... the basics of railroading. I wanted it to be something I could operate as a "lone wolf," with my grandkids when they visited, and as a way to illustrate "how it all works" to non-railroaders.

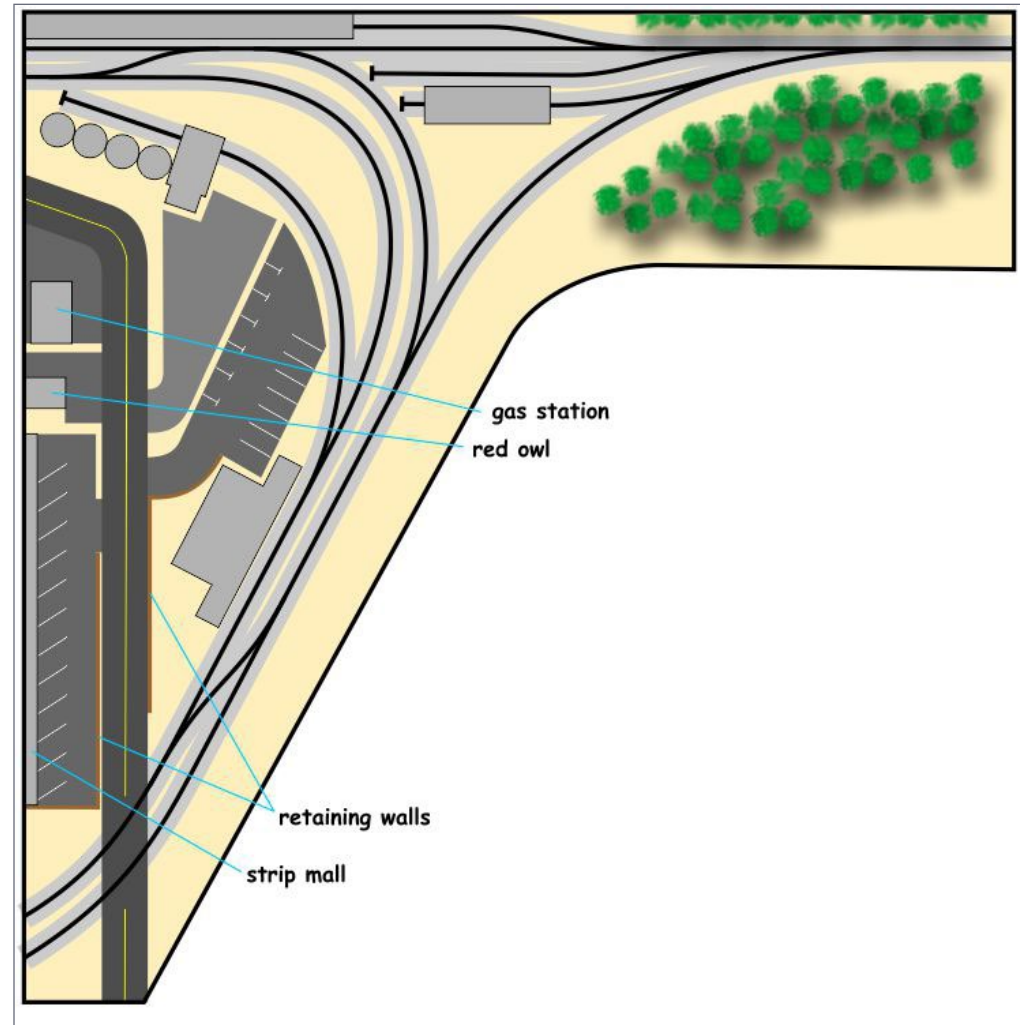
Since a part of my career has been spent teaching and training railroaders I have come up with methods to describe railroad operations to "new hire" conductors and I have incorporated some of those ideas into the layout to help non-railroaders understand what a real railroad does and how it operates using a simple format.

For example, I can show bringing an engine from the engine house, lining up a few cars off the interchange, and then making



2. Barry brings a railroader's eye to modeling, with track layouts and shippers based on places he has worked over the years. *Barry Karlberg photo*

a run up the line to pick up and set out cars at industries before heading around the balloon track and returning back home to the wye junction. I also wanted the layout to be simple, with each switch and track designed for a purpose and not just as a



3. The wye module incorporates the short line's connection with the Class 1 CP/Soo route. *Drawing by David Smith*

model. Definitely with no “switching puzzles.” This layout had to be simple to build, maintain and operate with only a few detailed pieces of equipment and structures.

One of my favorite prototype operations was the Milwaukee Road's Fox Lake branch in Wisconsin, which came off a wye on the main east of Beaver Dam, WI and headed north a couple of miles to terminate in a balloon track with several industries tucked inside. Model Railroader and Gordon Odegard did a neat article with track plan on this branch back in the late '70s and I have always liked it, even though I don't model the Milwaukee Road or Wisconsin.

Through years of working in the field as an engineer/conductor I saw many prototype track situations which could be modeled, and I would always file them away in my memory for possible use in a layout.

Alas, the Milwaukee's Fox Lake line now exists only as a place to store cars. The industries and loop are gone, with the track removed to within a half mile of the town. However, there are plenty of new balloon track operations today as a result of unit train operations, for unloading/loading, oil, sand, grain, gravel, perishables, and so on..

The concept

Although I haven't found an exact prototype for my model balloon track, such places did exist. The reasoning behind mine is that it was once the location of a crossing between two secondary main line railroads. Neither had much local business but together they handled a handful of industries where they crossed.

After the abandonment of both lines, a local museum railroad wanted to run steam and bought the wye and stub branch up to

the old diamond crossing. Along with the track came the right to serve the two remaining industries: a food processor and a paper warehouse.

There being no room for another wye or even a runaround track at the crossing, they did the only logical thing by creating a balloon track by using the curved interchange track (right top corner of the loop plan) and then constructing additional track to come off the old north/south right of way and connect up to a new switch into the paper distributor. This created an easy way to switch the industries and “turn” the freight and passenger trains to return to the wye. It allows a handy one-switch runaround.

As the history continues, the museum was so successful hauling a few cars of freight that it set up a separate company to handle and market the freight operations. This resulted in the addition of a plastics plant, a chemical distributor and, midway between each end of the line, a transload center to handle any commodity from truck to rail or rail to truck.

If this sounds too “far-fetched” to be true, I can provide many examples of working on and managing short lines where this was accomplished, although not always with a passenger operation. One which comes to mind is the Strasburg Railroad in Pennsylvania, which primarily hauls passengers but recently started hauling more freight and has built a transload track off to the side of their yard.

What's next?

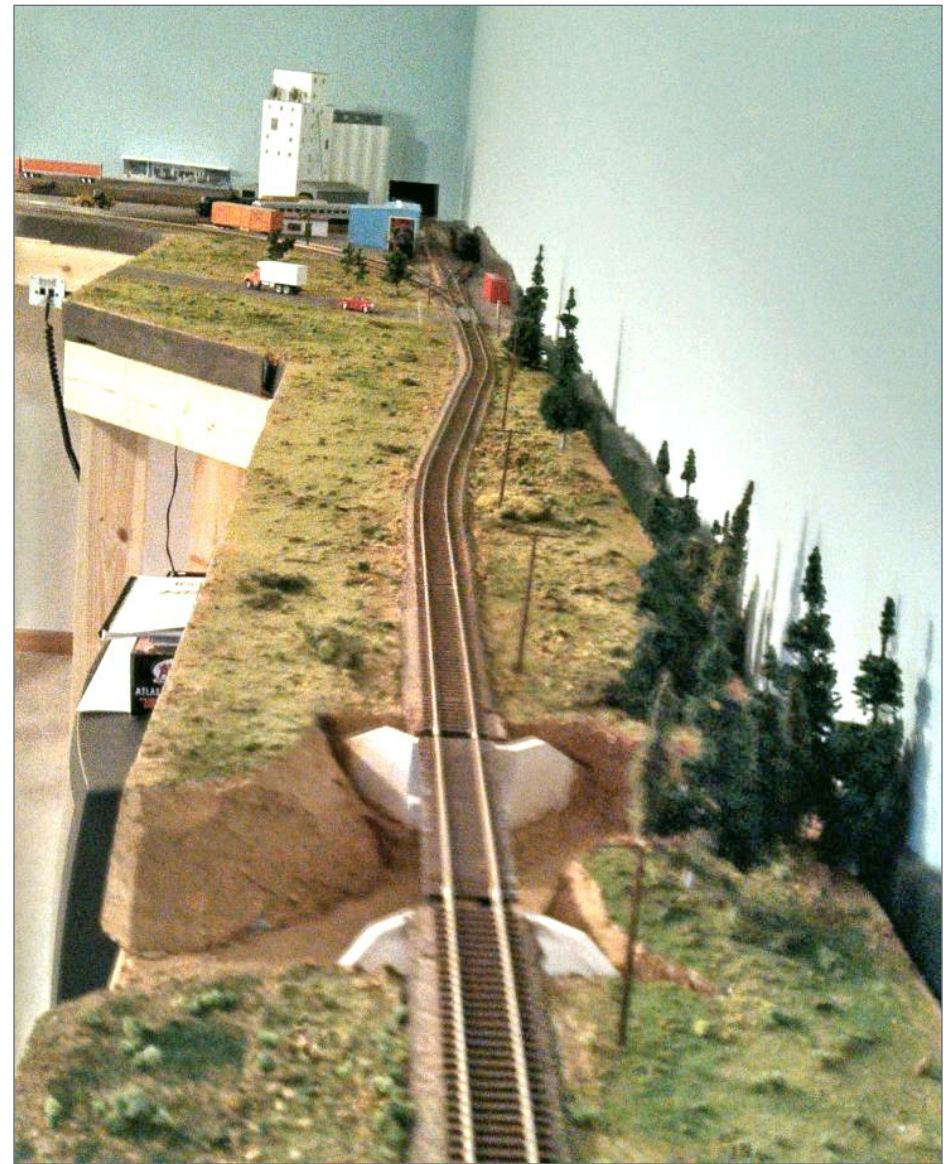
Retirement and a home move will be happening by the end of 2015. When we relocate to Minnesota I plan to move both the wye and balloon modules to have the beginnings for a new layout. This railroad was dismantled in June, with key pieces saved.

Once I determine my available space and its shape, I may use the balloon with an added siding for hidden staging behind a wall and move its industries to a simple switching layout on an 8-inch wide, 8-foot tall door. This will feature a hollow-core door with plywood sub-roadbed, Homabed, Atlas code 83 track, and foam scenic features.

The track plan will include a runaround track, a siding to meet and pass trains, three industrial spurs using various car types, a coach track with depot, 90-foot turntable, and a two-stall engine house for the steam excursion operation. This would replace the loop as the last station before entering the hidden staging balloon. The advantage of the hidden loop is that it permits more “through” movements for a regional railroad on trackage rights, while the short line provides the local freight and excursion service.

The wye module would be the same with a small engine facility for the freight diesels, a pair of interchange tracks with the CP/CN and two crossovers connecting the short line to the Class one carrier at both ends of town. If possible I would also extend the CP-CN trackage by four or five feet to show more of the higher speed main line, provide a better depot both for Amtrak and short line passenger trains, and to include a pair of CP-served industries at the junction.

As far as the connecting layout between the wye and “terminal” town, it would be an around-the-walls shelf, probably very narrow (about 8 inches) with only a couple or three industries on line and maybe another siding at a tiny rural town. I'd emphasize rolling Midwest scenery, Minnesota's lakeside trackage, a small river, and lots of trees including a couple of “tree tunnels” plus a longer run between terminals.



4. The connecting layout between the wye and balloon track modules proved a good place to learn scenery techniques, and is simple enough it could be sacrificed in a move. *Barry Karlberg photo*

The focus would be on a simple, easy to build, easy to maintain, and easy to operate, simple, free-lanced prototype short line railroad.

That's the dream. We will see how it turns out.

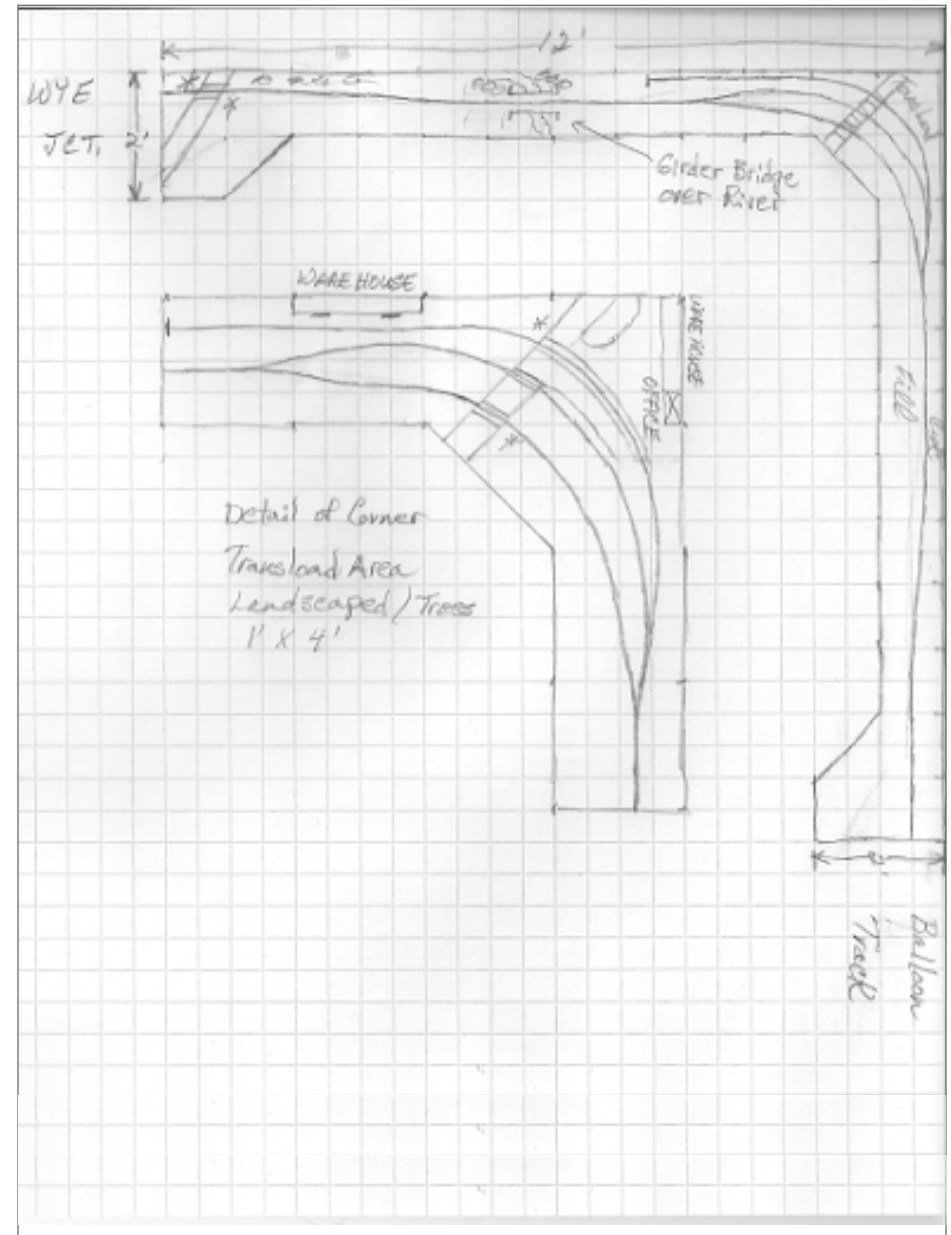
How I got started

I began model railroading at the age of 4 and moved up to a family S gauge American Flyer train set which my dad sold in the model railroad section of the family music store. Dad was a railfan back in the 1940s and the '50s, and even tried to hire out as a locomotive fireman on steam engines when he was young man. But being of slight build and wearing glasses (both of which were not permitted in train and engine service back then) it was not to be. So he managed the family music business and took me along with him to watch trains, with the result of me later choosing the railroad for my career.

My dad gave me his HO trains about the time I entered high school: Atlas fiber-tie track, Athearn and Varney cars and locomotives (fairly crude compared to today). I built a few small layouts adding Tyco trains and buildings.

These pikes were a variation of roundy-roundy fill-the-board layouts but I was becoming increasingly aware of real prototype track layouts: wyes, turntables, balloon tracks, runaround tracks, yards and industrial spurs. This led to more realistic layouts. I spent hours upon hours drawing layout plans based on various railroads.

The real breakthrough for me came in the late 1960s when Model Railroader presented its "A Railroad You Can Model" series based on prototype track plans, and ran an article on a short point-to-point Missouri branch line on the Wabash which featured diesel passenger and mixed passenger-freight trains.



5. Pages of sketches roughed out plans before cutting wood or shaping foam insulation board. *Barry Karlberg drawing*

The bonus was that instead of producing an entire track plan for a layout, they provided three separate plans, for the main line junction at Centralia, a mid-point village, and the end of the line town of Columbia with its varied small town industries. They also explained in good detail how the line was operated, what industries were served, types of freight cars, locomotives and passenger equipment.

This was the first time railroading was explained and illustrated for me. From then on, all my layouts were point to point with an option for continuous operation. While I was in college and working as a switchman, my dad – who had been out of the hobby for many years – began to show interest in the new N scale. He and I built a few layouts together, with me continuing in that scale for the next 30 years before moving to HO 10 years ago.



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BARRY KARLBERG



Barry began his railroad career 48 years ago on the Illinois Central, then worked as a Penn Central brakeman and switchman through college.

After graduation, he worked for CNW, Soo Line, and the Columbus & Greenville as a consultant; for the Milwaukee Road as a carman and agent/operator, as an Illinois Terminal clerk, and then as a switchman on the Illinois Central Gulf.

From there, he went to the Soo Line to train new-hire conductors and

became a manager in the control center, and manager of special projects. After that, to Wisconsin Central as a trainmaster, engineer, and conductor, and the Minnesota Commercial before going to Progressive Rail at its start-up with the MN&S Highline, and Wisconsin Northern as manager, engineer, conductor.

After that it was the Kansas & Oklahoma as trainmaster, engineer, and conductor, before going to Watco as a regional safety and rules manager.

He and his wife Chris have recently left Wichita, Kansas for a retirement home near family in Minnesota.

More about Barry's modeling at: mrhmag.com/node/17086. ■