



The DERAIL

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Thoughts From the President

By Chuck Lind MMR

Never too early to start planning for the Fall Layout tour. As many of you know I have been working on expanding my layout. While we did have trains running in the new room, I had to finish up some scenery before I could finish the narrow gauge trackwork. That trackwork is now complete so need to rough in some scenery before the tours. Craig will be sending out an email to those who have been on the tour in the past later this year. If you have not been on the tour in the past, please contact him if you want to get on this year's tour.

Chris Roehl has set up our 3rd Annual Operating Session with SAMRA in San Antonio. It will be Saturday July 12 from 10AM – 4PM. They have a large 4,000 square foot building that features a single track 700' plus main line. It is set in the spring of 1959. SanJac members will pick up the cost of a pizza lunch, so Chris will be collecting \$10.00 as you arrive. For those of us that have operated there before it is a great running railroad that will keep you busy while enjoying the wildflowers as you travel from San Antonio to Fort Worth. Please contact Chris if you want to attend.

Look forward to seeing everyone at our July meeting. For those who want to join us for dinner before the meeting, we will be at the Whataburger on Post Oak at Belfort.

Thanks,

Chuck

Jim Long and the Gnaw Bone & Western

Some newcomers to the Houston area or to the San Jac Club may not know of or remember Jim Long. Jim was in every sense of the word a “Model Railroad Character”. If you met Jim, he looked the part of a Texas Farmer complete with his John Deere suspenders. But Jim grew up in Indiana and majored in math in college at either Indiana University or Purdue. I wish I could remember which because not knowing which is akin to Indiana folks as calling an Aggie a Tea-sip or a Longhorn and Aggie. He came to Texas to work for NASA at the Johnson Space Center and spent his career there, working on numerous manned spacecraft missions. But in his off hours he spent on his love of Boy Scouting, Model Railroading and collecting and restoring John Deere tractors. Jim built his own house on Dixie Farm Road in Pearland and it included a three car garage with a full room above for his railroad. And it was in every sense a miniature railroad.

The Gnaw Bone and Western was a large point-to-point railroad set in rural Indiana in the early 20th Century complete with small town stations, farms and rural industries. But the main attraction was Jim’s scratch-built freight cars: hundreds of them. Jim always had the GB&W on the fall layout tours and I tried to drop by every year to see what his latest freight car project had been. He didn’t just scratch-build a car, he gang-built a dozen of them. Each car would receive a different paint job and Road Name from his collection of old time dry transfers and decals. He practically kept the decal supplier Clover House in business. Not all cars on the GB&W were scratch-built. Jim built a lot of Ambroid, Central Valley and LaBelle kits. And as MMR Chuck Lind is fond of saying, “In an Ambroid Kit you get a Box of sticks”. All cars were of wooden construction and most had truss rods. Late in his life Jim relented and had a few plastic cars—the Model Die Casting 80’ Pullman cars that make up into a beautiful 1890’s car complete with truss roads.

The railroad was multilevel and it took a train a long time to travel from one end to the other. On one visit as I was about to leave I asked Jim how long it took to travel the length of the railroad. He said that a train was leaving one end at the time so why don’t you stick around and time it. Well, 22 minutes later the train arrived at the other terminal with no stops, meets or switching in between.

Jim passed away several years ago and the San Jac lost a long time member and true character of the club. Thanks to Craig Brantley’s visits to a huge number of Houston area layouts each year and taking his camera along, we have several good photos of the Gnaw Bone & Western. Enjoy the attached photos.



Jim stands at the yard on one end on the GB&W



Image showing town of Bean Blossom on the upper level and Oil City below



*The center peninsula had a large yard.
Note three level railroads on the
back wall of the room.*



*This image shows the multi-level bench
work and Jim's stable of GB&W cabooses.
The cabooses were Central Valley kits.*

A simple handle with a sharp pointed metal end doesn't sound like much of a modeling tool. But I use at least one on just about every modeling project. When we are building a model, we may need to maneuver a small item into the correct location. And our fingers may be too fat and clumsy for delicate work. Or we just need to mark a spot to drill a hole by making a small hole. A simple pointy tool may be the best solution. Here are a few in my toolbox.



Figure 1 - This is my stash of pointy tools. Nothing fancy, just a handle with a metal pointy end.

When I need to mark or start a hole in some lumber, I used an icepick for years. When mine wore out after many years, I purchased a wooden handled awl at one of the train shows. It is beefy enough to push into pine lumber but being only 7" long, it is small enough to keep on my workbench.



*Figure 2 - This is the largest of the pointy tools on my workbench.
I use it to start holes in pine lumber and other applications where I need to push hard.*

The pointy tool I use the most often has a blue soft plastic handle with a well-worn metal end. I am not sure when and where I got it. It feels like it's always been on my workbench. It is great to unclog a glue bottle. It can press a part into place as the glue sets up. I am not too fussy about getting stuff on the tip. I use an X-ACTO® knife with an old No.11 blade to scrape off any glue buildup.



*Figure 3 - This well-worn tool has been on my workbench for a long time.
The point is not very sharp or straight, but it's the first one I grab when I need a pointy tool.*

A Modeler's Toolbox – Pointy Tools

By Pete Leach MMR

My oldest pointy tool is a dissecting needle from one of my kid's science sets. That would mean it's well over 30 years old! It has a plastic handle with a needle. It's not as heavy-duty as its bigger cousins. I use it to make a starter hole for a small drill bit in my pin vise.



Figure 4 - This dissecting needle from one of my kid's science sets is more than 30 years old!

It's also great when I need to push a small part to the right spot on a model. Once in position, the needle can hold the part in place as glue is applied.

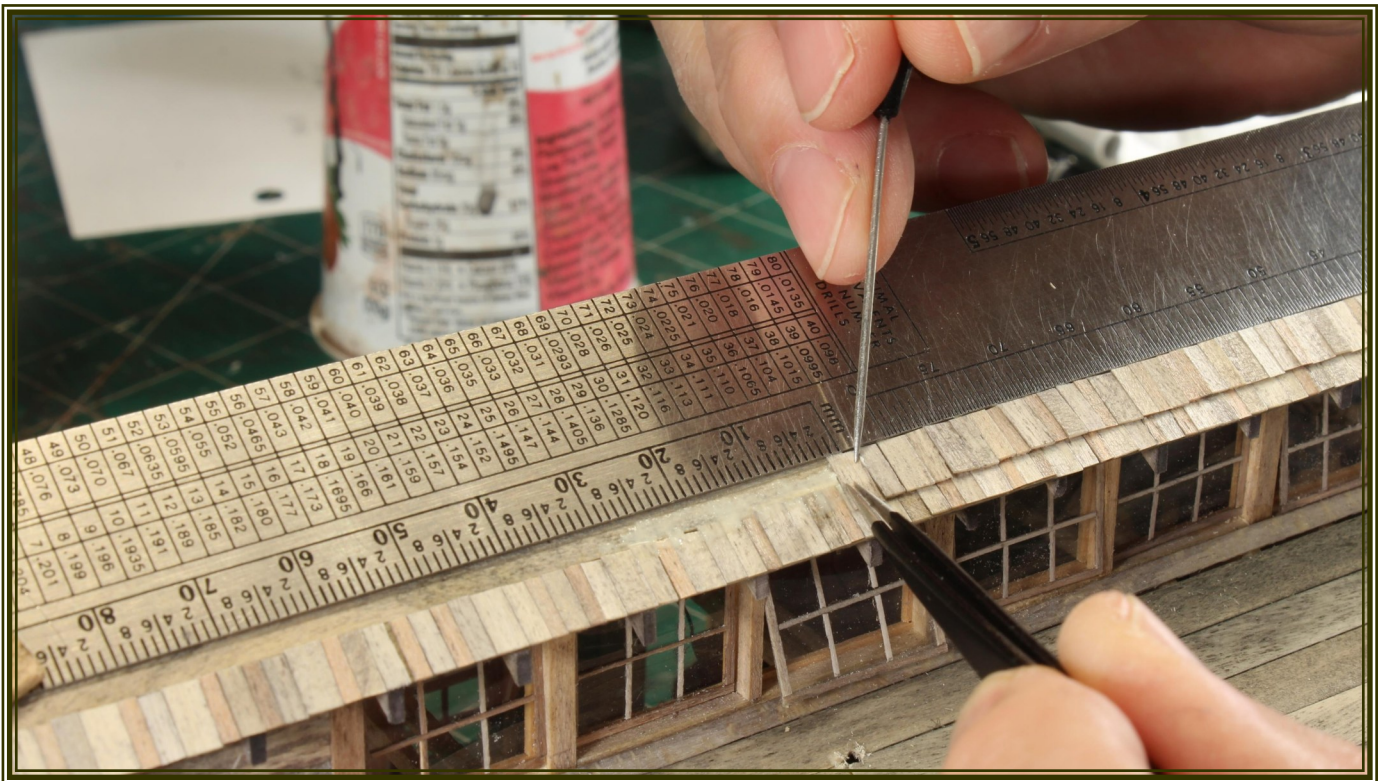


Figure 5 - The dissecting needle helped me maneuver and hold the small wood shingles during installation.

The final pointy tool in my toolbox is homemade. I drilled a small hole in the end of a wood dowel and inserted a sewing needle, secured with a little ACC.



Figure 6 - A needle inserted into a wood dowel is a great tool to make nail holes.

I use this to make nail holes on models by dipping it into brown paint.



Figure 7 - Flanger No 201 is getting some minor repairs. The added nail holes help give the model a worn look.

We don't always think these sharp pointy tools are important. But when you need to poke, push, or mark something in your modeling, they sure come in handy!

The San Jac and Gulf Coast Division Hold Joint Meetings

By Bob Barnett MMR

Following discussion and a vote at the June San Jac meeting the San Jacinto Model Railroad Club and LSR Division 8 (the Gulf Coast Division) will hold joint meetings. Division 8 members will also receive *The Derail*, the San Jac's monthly newsletter. Please note this is not a true merger of the two organizations as both are incorporated and have received 501C3 status. It may be advantageous in the future to have separate meeting dates, times and locations. So keeping the two groups legally separated will preserve this option.

The San Jac was incorporated in 1991 when I served as president and current Division 8 Director Phil Stewart was vice president. The club received its 501C3 approval just a few years ago thanks to the efforts of San Jac Treasurer Dick Louvet with help from then LSR President Donna Orr. Division 8 was formed in the early 1990s by Phil Stewart, Ben Pearlman (aka Papa Ben), Kelly Russell and Tom Marsh. At that time each model railroad club in the greater Houston area sent a Division 8 Rep to Division meetings. Over time participation by the various clubs has declined. At the more recent meetings most attendees at Division 8 meeting have also been San Jac members. I will rely on Phil Stewart to provide a more in-depth history of the Division.

Some reasons why we may want to have separate meetings in the future: As the recently elected President of the Lone Star Region I have begun to receive the official LSR/Division membership lists. The combined population of the Dallas-Fort Worth (D-FW) metropolitan area is approximately equal to the Houston-Galveston metropolitan area. However, the combined membership in Division 1 (Fort Worth) and Division 3 (Dallas) is larger than Division 8. I believe one reason for their success is that both Division 1 and 3 have monthly meetings on different dates and members from both Divisions are welcome to attend either or both. If you have a schedule conflict or are busy that Saturday, you can attend the other Division's meeting.

Editor's Note: Please see the August 2024 Derail for detailed background on this series.

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A Train Crossing a Bridge

What is more interesting and imposing than a majestic railroad bridge! Whether viewed by daylight or moonlight, from afar or from the structure itself, the bridge is a thing of impressive beauty and wonder. It is a symbol of man's conquest and triumph over the obstacles of nature. Is it any wonder that passengers turn to the car windows when the rumble of the train tells them that a bridge is being crossed?

Bridges make it possible for trains to run from one city to another, or from one part of the country to another, by the most direct routes, without being stopped or impeded by the numerous watercourses encountered along the way.

The earliest railroad bridges were built of blocks of stone and wooden timbers, fastened into place by cast-iron or wrought-iron bars and bolts. Gradually iron replaced wood, and finally steel replaced iron.

A stone arch bridge, the Carrollton Viaduct, built near Baltimore in 1829, is the oldest railroad bridge in service anywhere. Its first loads were locomotives weighing but 3½ tons. Now, without change in construction, it carries locomotives weighing upwards of 500 tons.

Many years passed before railroad bridges were built across the larger rivers. The first railroad bridge across the Mississippi River, built of stone piers and wooden trusses fastened together with iron bolts, was completed at Davenport, Iowa, in 1856.

The first railroad bridge across the Ohio River was completed at Steubenville, Ohio, in 1864.

An historic milestone in railway bridge progress was the completion of the Eads Bridge across the Mississippi River at St. Louis, Mo., in 1874. This bridge was the first to span the river at St. Louis and was the first in the world to use steel in truss-bridge construction.

Today there are about 190,000 railway bridges in the United States, ranging in length from short spans of 100 feet or less to huge steel and concrete structures several thousand feet in length.

A bridge's foundations, or "legs," standing in the river bed and supporting the main structure are called *piers*. Each section between two piers is called a *span*. The structure at either end leading up to the bridge proper is called the *approach*. The "floor" of the bridge on which the railway tracks are laid is called the *deck*. The foundations and piers form the *substructure*. That part above the piers is called the *superstructure*.



A Train Crossing a Bridge

The bridge in the picture includes four types of construction: The spans at the left, resting upon steel pier structures, or viaduct towers, are of *deck plate girder* construction. The span resting upon the first two concrete piers is a *deck truss* span. The first arched span and the third to eighth arched spans, inclusive, are *through truss* spans. The second arched span from the left, between the two towers, is a *lift span*, a form of drawbridge, which is moved up like an elevator between the towers to admit the passage of vessels which cannot pass under the bridge in its usual position. The large black square objects near the tops of the two towers are concrete counter-weights, attached to cables which operate over large pulleys, visible at the tops of the towers. The counterweights move down when the span moves up, and vice versa.

There are several other types of railway bridges, including *suspension* bridges, *cantilever* bridges, and *arched concrete viaducts*. Bridges across shallow streams, bays, inlets and lakes are sometimes built of pilings and timbers and are called *trestles*.

In addition to the lift span type of drawbridge, shown in the picture, there are *swing drawbridges*, which open by swinging on a central pivot somewhat similar to a turntable, and *bascule drawbridges*, which open upward on huge hinges at one end, or which open similarly at both ends (known as single-leaf and double-leaf bascules) by the aid of counterweights, on the principle of a teeter.

The bridge in the picture is of double-track construction. The through truss spans are 526 feet in length and provide a clearance of 70 feet above mean high water. The lift span, when raised, provides a Clearance of 135 feet above high water. The concrete piers rest on bedrock 120 to 143 feet below low water. The bridge contains 42 million pounds of steel.

A Train Entering a Tunnel



A Train Entering a Tunnel

Imagine yourself seated in a luxurious air-conditioned dining car enjoying a delicious breakfast of bacon and eggs, toast and milk, while your train speeds merrily along hundreds of feet underground. This is happening every day in parts of our country where railway tunnels pierce great mountain ranges.

Many passengers entering and leaving New York City pass directly under huge ocean liners steaming to and from their piers on the North River. In Washington, passenger trains pass through a tunnel that carries them almost directly beneath the Senate Office Building, the Supreme Court Building and the Library of Congress.

The tunnel ranks with the bridge among the most interesting features of the railroad. There are more than 1,500 railroad tunnels in the United States, ranging in length from a hundred feet or less to several miles carrying railway traffic beneath city streets and skyscrapers, under busy rivers and harbors, through hills and beneath rugged snowcapped mountains.

The tunnel is the direct opposite of the bridge. The bridge carries the railroad above the earth's surface; the tunnel carries it beneath the earth's surface. Both are difficult and expensive to build, therefore, both are avoided whenever possible. There are many instances where tunnels are necessary to provide a more direct route between two points than would otherwise be possible, to enable the railroad to traverse mountains at fairly level grades, or to gain favorable entrances to large cities and obtain adequate terminal areas in those cities without seriously disturbing surface traffic.

The first railroad tunnel in America was built in 1833 to carry a railroad line through the Allegheny Mountains in Pennsylvania. In the years that followed many other tunnels were opened.

All of them were eclipsed by the Hoosac Tunnel, more than 25,000 feet in length, completed in 1875 to carry a railroad line through Hoosac Mountain in western Massachusetts. This tunnel is still in use.

Since 1900 two longer railroad tunnels have been built in this country. One of these is the Moffat Tunnel, carrying a railway line for more than 32,000 feet through James Peak in Colorado. This tunnel was completed in 1928. At its highest point, Moffat Tunnel is 9,257 feet above sea level.

The other tunnel, the longest in the Western Hemisphere, is the Cascade Tunnel, 41,152 feet in length, piercing the Cascade Mountains in the State of Washington. It was completed in 1929.

The most stupendous tunnel project in the history of American railroading, from the standpoint of total cost, was the twin-tube tunnel under the Hudson River and the four-tube tunnel under the East River in New York, together with terminals and yards under the rivers and under the teeming city itself. This project, completed in 1910, employed many thousands of workmen and great quantities of equipment, tools and machinery. It cost in the neighborhood of \$113 million dollars.

The construction of a great railway tunnel calls for engineering skill of the highest order, for an error in reckoning might prove extremely costly. In the construction of the Cascade Tunnel, boring through solid rock was carried on from both the eastern and the western portals. When the construction forces met, each nearly four miles from their respective portals, the engineers found that they were only a fraction of a foot out of perfect alignment. This small error in reckoning was easily rectified.

Many tunnels are bored through solid rock by the aid of pneumatic and electric-drills and explosives. A temporary railway track is extended from the portal into the bore as fast as the drilling proceeds, and this is used to carry off loose rock and boring dust. It is also used to transport workmen, equipment and materials. Electric fans or ventilator pipes keep fresh air circulating in the bore. Pumps draw off seepage water.

Some tunnels are built for one track only, others are built for two or more tracks, depending upon anticipated traffic and other operating conditions. Many tunnels are lined with concrete, brick or timber, or a combination of these materials, and many are made waterproof to prevent seepage. Linings strengthen the walls and ceiling and increase the safety of train operations.

Many railroad tunnels are electrified and trains are operated through them by electric locomotives.

Mark's Minute

By Mark Couvillion

Setting Minimum DDE Settings

Soundtraxx Tsunami-2 sound decoders have an adjustable feature called Dynamic Digital Exhaust or DDE. This feature keys off the motor load, or back electromotive force (back emf), to help give a more realistic sound to the engine. As the electric motor in the engine loads up, back emf increases, indicating more “work” done by the engine. As the engine coasts or unloads, back emf declines, resulting in less “work” for the engine. DDE is adjusted to help the digital sounds either “load up” or “drift”, as would realistically happen to a real diesel or steam engine.

As delivered, DDE is turned off. There are 7 “settings” to turning it on. I remember setting it up several years ago and thought it sounded great. I recently did it for a new decoder installation and had to look back on the historical installation to know what to set it to. As I do not have hills or helixes where I can load up or unload the electric motor, I had to guess originally. I copied the numbers and used them on the new installation. The customer called me after running it on his layout and raved about how accurately it sounded, loading up on hills or tight curves, drifting going downhill, leveling out on flat track. If you have ever installed a decoder and had no clue where to set DDE, the numbers I used are below. Five of the settings are defaults from the factory!

Throttle Sensitivity	39
Load Sensitivity	48
Attack Time Constant	215
Release Time Constant	215
Prime Mover Low Volume Limit	0
Prime Mover High Volume Limit	255
DDE Load Offset	60
DDE Load Slope	150

Next Month: Color-Match LEDs Before Installing

Know Your Railroad: The Caboose and Rear-end Crew

This is the second article in my “Know Your Railroad” series, which are designed mainly to help model railroaders understand more about how the prototype operates.



A Missouri Pacific bay window caboose, courtesy of Tom Cobb

Some people might be under the impression that the rear-end crew on a caboose didn't have much to do, but that was not really the case. They had many duties to execute, which I will now go into great detail about. At the end of this article, I will describe some of the more interesting experiences I had when I was riding a caboose as the rear brakeman.

Personnel on the caboose: The rear-end crew normally consisted of the conductor and rear brakeman. The conductor would usually ride the caboose, but sometimes, especially if there was work to be performed somewhere along the way (namely, setting out or picking up cars), he might ride the headend. I also remember a conductor or two that were good buddies with the engineer, and they tended to ride the headend regardless, unless there was work to be handled from the rear-end.

Radio communication to the headend: The rear-end crew had a lot of things to communicate to the engineer. These communications were handled by radio. On the Missouri Pacific's Kingsville Division, we used two radio channels: Channel 1 for mainline trains, and Channel 2 by yard switcher crews, though if two switchers were working at the same time, one switcher would be on Channel 1. Locomotive and caboose radios only had a range of about 35 miles, maybe more, maybe less, which depended on the radio and the weather. Often times, on a train out on the mainline, we would hear the dispatcher talking to another train on the radio, but we could not hear the other train's responses. I believe that was because the dispatcher's part of the conversation was broadcast from many points along the rail line. Busier divisions also had a Channel 3 and Channel 4 to utilize, which was probably handy to use in large yards where there might be more than two switchers working at the same time. I don't know if our radios' Channel 3 and Channel 4 worked, but we never used those channels.

Radio communications to the engineer from the caboose included the following, which would normally be done by the rear brakeman, unless it involved communication to the dispatcher or yardmaster/trainmaster:

1. The rear brakeman would tell the engineer when the rear-end of the train started moving after the train had been stopped. Sometimes, after the engineer had kicked off the train brakes (as opposed to the engine brakes), the rear brakeman would report the rear-end was moving, even though the engineer had not notched out on the throttle. This occurred perhaps if the train had made a stretch-stop, and drawbars on cushion underframe cars were retracting, or maybe the train was stopped on a slope. The communication was short and simple, usually, "Moving, 359." (I'll use the train number "359" in my examples, but the actual number or name of the train would be used, such as "ACX", for a train whose name indicated it was running between Angleton and Chicago, with the "X" meaning it was a chemical train.)
2. The rear brakeman would inform the engineer when the caboose had passed the end of a slow order. Such communication was again short and sweet, such as "Over the slow, 359," which meant the engineer could now resume maximum authorized speed. Some rear brakeman might get a little poetic if they were in a good mood, which I occasionally did. My favorite was something like, "Over the slow; let 'em roll, 359."
3. The rear brakeman would likewise let the engineer know when the train was entirely out of a siding, or past the switch at a junction, so that he could notch out to maximum speed. Such a communication would be, "Straight track, 359." The term "straight track" was used, even if the track was on a curve at that point. A poetic version might be, "Straight track, don't look back, 359," or, "Straight track, watching the slack, 359." Another purpose this communication had was enabling the engineer to verify the length of his train, by making note what lineside telephone pole the engine was at when the communication was made. Sometimes, the train manifest would be missing cars or have extra cars. The milepost number was displayed on the pole for each mile. After that, the tenth pole had about a 6-inch-wide silver ring around it, and the twentieth pole, a double ring, with the rings a few inches apart. On the Missouri Pacific, each mile had 30 poles, more or less, though trackage and lineside buildings might require more than 30 poles per mile. The ATSF, where we had trackage rights between T&NO Junction and Algoa, had 35 poles per mile. I suppose the ATSF thirtieth pole might have had three silver rings, but I don't remember.
4. The rear brakeman would let the engineer know if the hotbox and dragging equipment detector had indicated a problem. If no problem, the rear brakeman would radio, "Highball the white light, 359." If there was a problem, a rotating red beacon and flashing white lights on the detector indicated quite visually that there was a defect, and he would tell the engineer and conductor what number was displayed on the detector's panel readout. The number indicated the number of axles (not cars) from the defect to the rear of the caboose, if I remember correctly.
5. At points where the train passed another train that had crew members on the ground looking our train over on both sides, if there was no problem (indicated by highball signs from the crew members on the ground), the rear brakeman would radio, "Highball both sides, 359." The signal from the ground personnel would be the proceed hand signal, or at night, the highball sign (rapidly spun lantern) or the proceed sign (lantern moved up and down vertically). When I was looking over a train, I always used the rapidly spun lantern sign if the train seemed to be moving at maximum speed. If it was a federal inspection point, I would give the up-and-down lantern proceed signal, as the train would be going only 20 mph. I had another brakeman tell me one time that he only gave the rapidly-spun lantern sign if he knew that the train being looked over had green (clear) signals ahead.
6. When entering a siding and a train's caboose had cleared the circuit in a siding, the rear brakeman would say, "In the clear, 359." If not in the clear of the circuit, he would inform the engineer and conductor if the caboose was at least clear of the switch, or not clear. A single car in a circuit could not be relied upon to properly actuate block signals, since it was conceivable all wheels could be sitting on ballast, or there could be axle problems on a single car that would not properly short-circuit the signal system. I don't recall what the proper procedure was for dark territory.

Watching the train when going around curves: Caboose had either a cupola or bay windows for the purpose of enabling the crew to watch the train when it went around curves. The rear-end crew, including the conductor if he was available, would watch for smoke or shifted loads when going around curves. Sticking brakes could often be smelled from the caboose.

Checking the track for dragging equipment: Periodically, perhaps every 45 miles or so, the rear brakeman would walk out on the caboose's rear platform and observe the track for fresh damage from dragging equipment, and if found, radio the engineer and tell the conductor. In my five years on the railroad, I never found track damage either old or new using this method.

Walking train inspections: Federal laws required walking a train inspection approximately every 100 miles. The rear brakeman would walk the rear-end of the train, and the head brakeman would walk the headend of the train. The walking would only be done on one side of the train while it was stopped (the side with the siding), with the other side of the train being inspected while the train was rolled by the brakemen at no faster than 20 mph.

Looking over other trains: When passing another train, the rear brakeman goes out on the rear platform and observes the other train for defects. He will inform the engineer and conductor if any defects are observed, who will then contact the other train to let them know. After looking over the other train, and no defects were found on either train, the rear brakeman then exchanges highball signs with the other train's headend crew on the ground, and the rear-end brakeman on the other train. Note: the rear brakeman never gets on the ground to look over the other train, because he might get left when his train gets a clear signal out of the siding. He would only get on the ground if he knows his train will be backing out of the siding.

Hooping up train orders: At points where train orders are obtained, this is usually done by a hoop (actually, a triangular arrangement of the train-order string in a rack set by the side of the track. The top hoop will be for the headend, and the bottom hoop for the rear-end.



A trainman walking a train inspection, generated by ChatGPT

Handling pickups and setouts from the rear-end of the train: Pickups and setouts were normally handled on the headend, but rarely, they were done on the rear-end. If handled from the rear-end, the conductor would always be riding the caboose instead of the locomotives.

Watching reverse moves: On reverse moves, the rear brakeman would be on the caboose's rear platform to watch the shove and protect grade crossings. The conductor would probably be there as well, unless he was riding the headend. I would always keep the train down to about 20 mph, or to a crawl if there was a vehicle coming up to or stopped at the grade crossing. The caboose had an air whistle connected to the train airbrake line on each platform, for the purpose of blowing for grade crossings or warning pedestrians. Years ago, on the Houston section of *The Texas Eagle*, while entering Dallas, I watched the conductor, standing in the open door at the rear of the train, do a backup move at about 40 mph on a stretch of track about two miles long without any grade crossings. That was a bit unnerving, and I don't think I would have backed up that fast. The move was required because the wye near the east end of Dallas Union Station had been removed many decades before.

Now, I will cover some of the more interesting experiences (and sometimes humorous ones) that I had while working as a rear brakeman on mainline through and local trains during my days on the Kingsville Division. I'll do these roughly in north-to-south order, if I can remember where they occurred:

1. **Low-income housing development north of Houston Union Station:** One of our conductors had been riding up in the cupola of a caboose when the train was going by the housing development, and a juvenile threw a brick or large rock at him, which caused him to fall out of the cupola onto the floor of the caboose, severely injuring himself. After hearing about that, I was always on alert when going by there. On one trip north, I saw a kid ahead on the side of the track loaded up with rocks. I jumped down from the cupola, grabbed a fusee, and went out on the rear platform. The eight-year-old kid was probably disappointed not to see somebody sitting up in the cupola, but when he saw me, his eyes lit up, and he turned and started running away. I threw the fusee and hit him on the back of his lower leg. That may be my favorite dispensing of comeuppance.
2. **Collapsed train order rack behind Houston Union Station:** I was rear brakeman on a southbound train from Houston headed across town. The conductor was riding the headend, and I would be hooping up orders behind Houston Union Station. On two occasions during other trips, the train order rack had partially collapsed, and I had had to hoop up the rear-end orders with my right foot. This time, however, the rack had collapsed completely, and I had to dash back inside the caboose and radio the engineer to stop. By the time he got the train slowed down enough for me to disembark safely from the caboose, it had gone over half a mile around two curves, and when I walked back after retrieving the orders, it was about a mile to the train. I got back to the caboose as fast as I could without running (which was against safety rules). But it was against the law to block grade crossings for more than five minutes in Houston, and I had no desire to go to jail.



A Missouri Pacific 1300-series transfer-like caboose, courtesy of Tom Cobb

3. **BVDs on the Houston Belt, and Terminal Railway:** I was seated on the fireman's side of a caboose while we were stopped northbound on the Houston Belt & Terminal somewhere south of Union Station, waiting to make our way across town. My conductor was seated on the engineer's side. Without warning, a man boarded the front of our caboose and entered. The only thing he was wearing was underwear. My conductor, after a brief stunned pause, asked the guy, "How may I help you?" The man just stood there several more seconds. I don't think he even looked at us, and then he continued through the caboose, exiting the rear door and stepping off the caboose.
4. **Joy-riding to Brownie:** I was rear brakeman on a southbound freight from Houston. We had had a very unusual run so far, in that we had picked up our train in north Houston, and then made it all the way across town without even one red signal. Our good luck continued on the ATSF, and their dispatcher also cleared us across his railroad without a single red signal. (That was highly unusual, as the ATSF seemed to delight in delaying Missouri Pacific freights. On my first trip ever south out of Houston, we got on our train at

Mykawa, and the ATSF had us sit there for four hours before deigning to let us move.) Of course, when we hit the Mop, things ground quickly to a halt. Perhaps the Mop dispatcher was not expecting us so soon. In any event, we came upon a red signal at the south end of Brownie, a station named after the Kingsville Division's nickname. We hadn't been there long before a teenager about 18 years old, along with his girlfriend, walked up to our caboose and asked the conductor where the train was at. The conductor told him, and the kid had never even heard of Brownie. The conductor explained it to him, and directed him to a convenience store up near the south end of the siding. The teenager had taken his girlfriend along, because he wanted to show her what it was like to hop a freight train. They had ridden on the end platform of a tank car. He had hopped freights before, and they had always stopped somewhere while going across Houston, but this train had not stopped until Brownie. I'll bet he had a hard time explaining to whoever he called exactly how to get there to pick them up.

5. **Cutting the crossing at Liverpool:** On a southbound through freight, our train was so long, that we would have fouled the grade crossing at the north end of Liverpool, where we had to meet a northbound through freight. So, the conductor, who was riding the headend, had the head brakeman drop off to cut the crossing, while I stayed on the caboose. I was passing hand signs from the head brakeman to the engineer by radio as he cut the crossing. We held the mainline, while the other train went through the siding at 20 mph. After the other train had passed, and we had given him a roll-by inspection and gotten a clear signal northbound, the head brakeman coupled up the train at the grade crossing, and signaled me he was done. I then radioed the engineer, so he could go forward. He started moving the train ahead, but forgot that the head-brakeman was going to get on the caboose. By the time I realized he was going too fast for the head brakeman to board the caboose, it took me quite a while to get the engineer to slow down. Watching out the bay window on the fireman's side, I saw the caboose fly by the head brakeman at a pretty good clip. Somehow, though, he managed to swing himself up on the caboose without jerking his arms out of their shoulder sockets. I radioed the engineer that everybody was on before the train had slowed down all the way. This is the only time I can remember where both brakemen were riding on the caboose while the conductor rode the head-end.
6. **Hotbox and Dragging Equipment Detector at Milepost 330:** On a northbound run, I was on the caboose, and the detector went off. I radioed the engineer to stop the train, and told the conductor, who was riding the head end, what the number displayed on the detector's read-out panel was. It was fairly close to the headend, so he had the head brakeman walk back to check it out. Nothing was found and we continued on our way. On two other occasions when a train I was on set off the detector, again, nothing was found. The first one that was set off, I was on the headend, and the conductor thought the number meant the number of cars from the headend, not the number of axles from the rear. So, I went back and checked from two cars before to two cars after the car we thought was the problem and found nothing. At the federal inspection of the entire train three miles down the track, we found no defects there either.
7. **Sitting on the mainline just south of Sweeny:** This describes two instances, once where I was on the headend, and once when I was on the rear-end. In the first incident, I was on the caboose on a northbound through freight, where we were stopped on the mainline about 22 miles south of Angleton, at the south end of Sweeny. The conductor, on the caboose, suddenly got on the radio and called Angleton Yard, telling the trainmaster that we were stopped at the milepost and asking what we needed to do with our train when we got into the yard. I was aghast, as we were nowhere near the milepost yet. (The phrase "the milepost" was how we referred to a particular intermediate signal that was located several miles south of the absolute signal positioned at the south end of Angleton Yard.) There was a several-minute pause, and then the trainmaster came back on the radio, and said rather smugly, "If you will look outside your caboose, you will find that you are stopped south of Sweeny." The conductor changed his demeanor quickly. In the second incident, I was on the headend, when we were stopped in the same place, and this same conductor, again on the caboose, said basically the same thing as before. This time, when the engineer heard the errant location given by the conductor, he quickly keyed the radio on the locomotive, walking over the conductor, and corrected the location to south of Sweeny. Holy smoke!

8. **The Blue Light at Buckeye:** I've already mentioned this event in an earlier article years ago, so I'll just gloss over it here. Buckeye had a reputation for weird things happening. This may be the spot where an engineer told me that one night they saw a UFO paralleling the mainline headed south (west-southwest as the grackle flies) escorted by black helicopters, which was before I had ever even heard of black helicopters. In the blue light incident, I was on the caboose of a northbound through freight, sitting in the siding, waiting to meet a southbound there. It was a quiet night. Suddenly, the engineer came on the radio very excited, and with great urgency. Breathlessly, he told us to look towards the headend. The conductor and I darted onto the rear platform, him leaning out looking towards the headend from the engineer's side, and me looking from the fireman's side. After a minute or so, we hadn't seen anything and weren't even sure what we were supposed to be looking for. We went back inside the caboose, and the conductor radioed the engineer, querying him about what had happened. The engineer related that a blue light had been shining down on the nose of their locomotive for a short time. He couldn't understand why we couldn't see it. Later, in Houston, while the Renzenberger crew van stopped by the headend after picking up the rear-end crew (including me), I noticed the top headlight was unlit. I told the van driver to hold up for a minute, and I got out of the van and climbed up on the locomotive for a closer look. The back of the headlight that was out had dried Jenks Blue paint inside that had run down the parabolic reflector. I got back on the van and told the crew what I had seen, and nobody said a word. It's very doubtful to me that blue paint could have caused the blue light shining down on the locomotive nose. It would have been at least 48 hours since the locomotive could have been in the paint shop at Settegast Yard. As a side note, I should mention that UFOs have often been reported around nuclear power plants, and the South Texas Nuclear Power Plant is only a couple of miles due south of Buckeye.
9. **Going into emergency at Buckeye:** Once again, I was rear brakeman on a northbound through freight sitting in the siding at Buckeye. After we had been completely stopped there at least 15 minutes, the train suddenly went into emergency. The conductor radioed the headend, thinking it might have been a practical joke. The engineer said he hadn't done it. The engineer was not one to engage in such shenanigans, and a few years later he became a road foreman of engines. We decided it had been probably caused by a dynamiter. A "dynamiter" is a railcar that has a faulty airbrake system, which sometimes falsely detects an emergency application of the brakes, and then expels the air from its trainline, causing the entire train to go into emergency. On the other hand, we were at Buckeye.
10. **Jumping caboose at Blessing:** I was on a northbound through freight passing through Blessing. I've already written in detail about the incident, so I'll make this short. We were in an older caboose, that was probably the caboose that Micro-Trains makes in N scale, and which is a model of the all-steel cupola caboose that the Texas and Pacific built back in 1949 and the early 1950s. We had been having a rather eventful trip, as the caboose had leaf springs that seemed to have a malfunctioning dampener, or at least that seems to be what the problem was. At every grade crossing or rough spot in the track, it would start bouncing rather alarmingly. Then we got to Blessing, which had a triple whammy at the north end: the north siding switch, a highway grade crossing, and the interlocking with the Southern Pacific on its Palacios branch, all in quick succession. By the time the caboose was past the interlocking, it was bouncing so much that the couplers bypassed vertically, and the caboose came uncoupled, putting the train in emergency. By the time the caboose got stopped, we could hear the train continuing to come to a screeching halt about 30 seconds later about a quarter of a mile up the track. We got coupled back up, and had no further such problems, though the caboose continued bouncing badly.
11. **Four trains meeting at Blessing:** It was five trains meeting at the same station that had been a contributing factor in the death of Casey Jones on the Illinois Central at Vaughan, Mississippi. We managed considerably better at Blessing, but I've always wondered what the heck the dispatcher was thinking. The dispatcher had a meet arranged at Blessing between two southbound trains and two northbound trains. I was rear brakeman on the first northbound train at Blessing. Having that many trains at one spot on the Kingsville Division was very unusual. In any event, our train stopped on the mainline, being either the first or second train onsite. Another northbound train was cleared down the main behind us but couldn't fit clear of the south siding switch. I worked with the head brakeman from that train, and we pulled off the caboose and a few cars from our train, and shoved them into a spur track, which was now

usually only used for temporarily storing maintenance-of-way equipment. By this method, we were able to get the caboose of the train behind us (a really short train) just in the clear of the siding switch, but not the signal circuit, because of the MOW equipment blocking us. The dispatcher then gave the two southbound trains a no opposing trains in the block train order, and those trains soon left. We then got our train back together, and left town. The entire operation probably took about an hour.



A Missouri Pacific ex-Texas & Pacific caboose, courtesy of Tom Cobb

- 12. Sticking brakes somewhere north of about LaWard:** On a northbound trip, I smelled the “aroma” of sticking brakes somewhere between about Laward and Blessing. The caboose radio was inoperative, and I was the only one on the caboose. I reached over to the airbrake lever, and very gradually let the air out of the brake line. The engineer on the headend, would have noticed this gradual loss in air pressure, and would have reduced the throttle setting, though probably not all the way, so as to keep the train stretched. Once the train stopped, I left the airbrake lever open and started walking towards the headend. I don't remember how far it was, but probably no more than about 20 cars. Unbelievably, when I was within two car-lengths of the car with sticking brakes, I could already feel the heat. It was obvious which car was the problem. I spit on the wheel tread, and the liquid bubbled off. The car had a handbrake applied, so I released the handbrake, and made note of the car number for the conductor's delay report. After walking back and boarding the caboose, I closed the airbrake lever, and the brake line pressure gradually built back up. Soon, we were rolling again towards Angleton, and I gave the car information to the conductor at the yard office (depot) there.
- 13. Setout at Lolita:** I was rear brakeman on a southbound train that had to do setouts at the south end of Lolita, and perhaps pickups as well. My conductor was riding the headend to handle the setouts, so I was alone on the caboose. To really make matters bad, the caboose had no operating radio. It was late at night, probably after midnight, when we came to a stop at Lolita. To my mortification, the caboose was stopped exactly on the grade crossing at the north end of Lolita, completely blocking it. The inoperative radio meant I couldn't radio the engineer about the situation. I was hoping the train would pull ahead, but soon I heard the train go into emergency as they uncoupled their setout from the rest of the train. It didn't take long for a pickup truck to pull up to the flashing crossing lights, his headlights illuminating the interior of the caboose. I was just hoping the sheriff wouldn't show up and carry me off to jail. The train blocked the crossing for at least ten minutes, while I stood in one end of the caboose away from the windows. Eventually, I was greatly relieved when we got coupled back up and left for Vanderbilt 5 miles away.

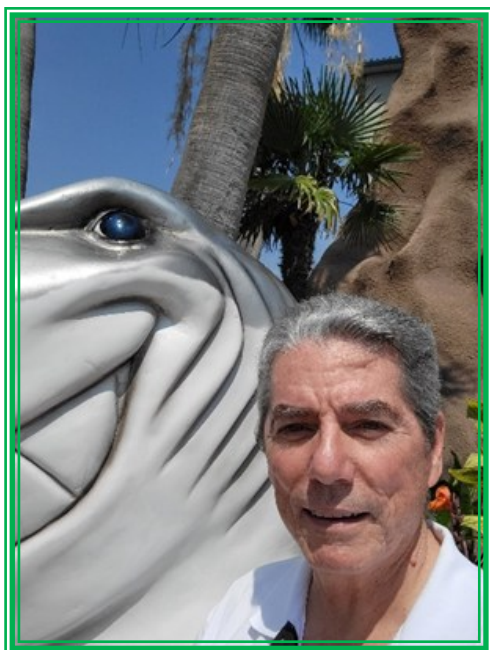


Happy July Birthdays!



Kelly Russell MMR

(July 21) on vacation



Barry Bogs MMR

(July 12)

Barry standing in front the Galloping Goose #5 while on a trip with his wife, Janet, at the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad in CO.



Mark Couvillion

(July 1)



Larry Fitzgerald

(July 30)





Happy July Birthdays!



Laurie Lind
(July 22)

Gene Mangum
(July 25) Gene checking out the framework for his new extension on the Mystic Branch.

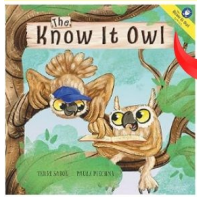


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NOTE: To share your celebrations (birthdays, anniversaries, graduations, retirements etc.) with your San Jac family, please email d.gatohogno@gmail.com before the 9th of the month to be included in the next Derail edition.

Cash Flow - Last month

5/1/2025 through 5/31/2025

Category

OUTFLOWS

Meeting Rental (May and June) 400.00

Software (Website and Acrobat 187.28

TOTAL OUTFLOWS 587.28**OVERALL TOTAL -587.28**

Note: One GHTS Layout Honorarium check (\$250)
was voided and reissued in June

Account Balances - As of 4/30/2025

Account	Balance
Bank Accounts	
Chase Checking	6,409.39
Frost CD	10,363.97
TOTAL Bank Accounts	16,773.36
OVERALL TOTAL	16,773.36

Account Balances - As of 5/31/2025

Account	Balance
Bank Accounts	
Chase Checking	6,072.11
Frost CD	10,363.97
TOTAL Bank Accounts	16,436.08
OVERALL TOTAL	16,436.08

Ken Luebeck presented the clinic “Quiet Canyon Model Railroad”. This is the name of Ken’s family railroad. The presentation was about railroad geometry, specifically about easements and curves.

Chuck Lind called the business meeting to order at 8:15.

47 members were present with 12 online. There were no new guests.

Bob Sabol wanted to recognize everyone who writes articles for the San Jac Newsletter. The newsletter is only as good as the articles that get submitted.

Chris Roehl announced the next SAMRA operating session is July 12. Let Chris know if you are interested in attending. He has 14 signed up so far. There will be pizza for lunch. The layout has a 700-foot single track main line. 3000 square feet. The website is SAMRATX.ORG if you want more information and pictures. The location is technically a museum, so it has artifacts as well.

Phil Stewart:

- The LSR convention is June 26-29 in Baton Rouge. There will be layout tours.
- The National Train Show is July 14-19 in Novi, Michigan. Convention Station #6 (VI) for NOVI.
- Phil is always looking for railroads for people to operate for those who need to get hours for the Chief Dispatcher AP.

Bob Barnett and Phil Stewart lead a discussion about expanding our meetings to include the entire LSR Division 8 group, essentially having a joint meeting. The discussion:

- About 50% of LSR Division 8 is in our club.
- Division meetings have poor turnout. 10 people is a good turnout.
- This is NOT a merger. Our club was incorporated in 1991. That was a significant event and we do not want to go through that again. Before this incorporation, we could have no bank account or legal protection.
- The San Jac Newsletter would be sent to all LSR Division 8 members.
- There are 17 model railroad clubs in the Greater Houston Area.
- LSR Division 8 has no newsletter and a poor website.
- Nothing changes for us. We just get more people at our meetings.

We were not sure if a vote needed to be taken, but we took one anyway. Bob Barnett made the motion. Craig Brantley seconded it. The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 8:37. Our next meeting is at the same location on July 1.

NMRA National Convention— Save the Date!



July 14-19, 2025

The **NCR and SE Michigan** will be your host for the 2025 NMRA National Convention! This will be like no other convention you have ever attended!

Convention Highlights –

- ✓ One low price for everyone! includes layout tours & OPS!
- ✓ 90+ clinics - 65+ layout tours - 30+ OPS sessions
- ✓ 2 day National Train Show - 5 day Yard Sale Room
- ✓ RPM modeling displays - Full NMRA modeling Contest
- ✓ People Choice Voting w/awards - Saturday night banquet

....and MUCH MORE!!



<https://nmra2025.com/>



San Jac RR Club Meetings take place the first Tuesday of each month at 6:30pm

Now In-Person and ONLINE

Southwest Central Church of Christ
4011 W. Bellfort, Houston, TX 77025

Visitors are always welcome!



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Kelly Russell MMR (krussl@yahoo.com)

www.sanjacmodeltrains.org

Webmaster: Brian Jansky

Next Meeting

TUESDAY, JULY 1ST

AT 7:00PM

HYBRID MEETING: ONLINE AND IN-PERSON

‘SANTE FE PASSENGER TRAINS IN THE STREAMLINED ERA’

PRESENTED BY TOM BAILEY



Refreshments:

Chris Tolley



Video Corner

Why are we still using DCC?

