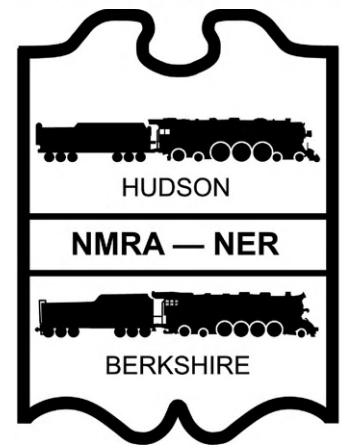


FORM 19

**The Official Newsletter of the
Hudson-Berkshire Division
of the NER NMRA**



Order Number 406

May 2025

**Saturday, May 24th HBD Meeting, 10am-1pm
Mike Phelan's home located at
5956 CURRY RD EXT Schenectady**

This month's division meeting is in Schenectady at Mike Phelan's home. He briefly described his railroad which is located in an auxiliary building on his property. Also, he advises this parking note:

Important! Please park on Ryans Place and NOT on Curry Road Extension.

“My layout runs diagonally northeast from approximately Mechanicville, New York to Bangor, Maine, where it interconnects with the Maine Central, Canadian Pacific, Bangor and Aroostook and the Boston & Maine railroads. I use NCE for DCC – no scenery as of yet, but ninety percent of the track is in place. Only have to put it in a couple industries. Main line is in place. Its everyone's favorite - a plywood central. I am able to run trains around the layout and plan on having one running that day. Some of my engines have sound decoders.” *Editor's note: This is a large multi-deck railroad with an operations perspective. Photo below by Mark Sklar, taken August 2022. Much work has been accomplished since this picture was taken.*





Form19

The *Form19* is published ten times per year for members of the Hudson Berkshire Division.

The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the Division. Products and publications mentioned in *Form19* in no way constitute an endorsement by the Division.

Contributing to the Form19

The *Form19* staff welcomes all contributions. Letters, articles, photos, and other items may be mailed or e-mailed to the editor. Please include a note if you would like materials returned. Suggestions also welcome.

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The Division Point

By Artie Krass

Has it stopped raining yet?

I appreciate all of those who could attend our April meeting and hear Kevin Macomber's presentation on his use of some "old school" modeling techniques. I will post a link on the HBD website site to Kevin's presentation. And we all enjoyed meeting our new youngest member Nathaniel!

Our next meeting is on Saturday May 24th at the home of Mike Phelan to visit his layout. See page 1.

WHY IS IT THAT:

- Even though I have a rolling table/workbench I still find myself using an unfinished part of the layout as a work area?
- Even though I have enough rolling stock and diesels I still ending buying more – do I really need more?
- Even though I have enough storage I still manage to clutter up the layout with odds and ends that I always have to move when working on the layout?
- Even though I have a layout plan in progress I always find something I want to tweak?
- Even though I have started to build a kit or scratch build a structure I always
- Even though I have enough model railroad reading material I always find something new I want to read?
- Even though I have started a blog I always end up watching/reading someone else's without updating mine?
- Even though I have a good stock of paint on supply I always struggle to choose which color I want to use and then end up painting over that color?
- Even though I have enough tools on hand I am a sucker for some new tool or gadget that I hear/read about someone else using in the hobby?
- Even though I have enough structures and/or structure kits or buildings I want to scratch build to use on my layout (in progress) I keep coming up with more that I want to add?

Even though I listed all of the above I still enjoy this hobby so much!

(Continued on page 8)



Todd Burdick tells the story of the Richfield Railroad, his Family's Labor of Love: The 'RRR' - Part 1

In the article "When the Day Comes" published in the May 2025 issue of Model Railroader magazine, the author laments the typical fate of many model railroads: when the elderly modeler passes away, surviving family members dismantle the layout to put the house on the market. I never thought that I would reverse this trend, purchase a "home-with-railroad," and begin learning how to become a model railroader at age 60.

In 2020, when the Covid pandemic first hit, my wife and I moved into the home where she had grown up, in North Adams, MA, a mile or so from the famed Hoosac Tunnel, to take care of her mother. We purchased the house a few years later. I never had the chance to meet my wife's father, Al Richard, who had passed away years before.

In 1993, after retiring, Big Al, as he was known to family and friends, began building an HO scale layout in a 10' x 15' room in his finished basement. He joined a local non-NMRA model railroad club in the Northern Berkshire area. With help from the club's members, including legendary model railroader Dick Elwell, Big Al designed and began construction of a semi-freelanced layout, a part real, part fictional version of his lifelong hometown North Adams. Over the next 15 years, prior to his passing away in 2008, he completed all the benchwork, laid the track, constructed and installed numerous structures, and began ballasting and landscaping. He initially wired the layout for DC. As DCC technology became more widespread, he rewired the layout and installed an NCE ProCab system.

The layout includes an around-the-walls loop, suitable for simply running trains round and round if desired. An island extends into the center like a peninsula. Four stations/depots, a small yard for switching and staging, and a half dozen sidings for serving industries, add the possibility for more realistic operations. The train room entrance is a duck-under. There are two other duck-under that lead to a pop-up for accessing hard to reach areas. Big Al had originally built the entrance as a lift-out, but got frustrated when he could never get the tracks to line up straight when lowered down. He soon had enough of that, and permanently bolted it in place. As he aged and developed mobility issues, the duck-under became problematic. So, he used a rolling stool to scoot under, pulling himself along with handles. I am now in my mid-60s and still in good shape, so the duck-under does not yet pose a problem. But I have kept the rolling stool ready, just in case.

Big Al used North Adams as his inspiration, but he never intended his layout to be an exact replica. To honor the legacy of his Richard family surname, and in recognition of many towns and cities in our area having names ending in "field" (Pittsfield, Sheffield, Plainfield, and many others), my wife and I decided to rename the town Richfield, and the railway running around it the fictional Richfield Railroad (RRR). The Hoosac Tunnel was originally planned as part of the short-lived Troy & Greenfield Railroad, further confirming the appropriateness of the "field" name change.

Big Al named some structures after family members. There is a dollhouse shop on Main St., Michelle's Miniatures, for his daughter, my wife, who collects dollhouses. (He also built many 1:12 scale dollhouses that are now Richard family heirlooms, but that is an article for another hobby's newsletter). A few storefronts away is Rose's Rent-A-Maid, for his wife, who to this day is still a compulsive cleaner at age 92. Thanks to her, the basement train room remained dust free for 15 years after his passing. He created Amanda's Horse Farm, and Natasha's Daycare, for granddaughters.

Continued on page 4



Zachary Point, complete with a lighthouse, was built for a grandson who then lived on Cape Cod. In the mythical world of a non-prototypical train layout, I accept, and never will question, the existence of a New England coastal scene in land-locked Berkshire County.

Big Al had purchased two other kits, but ran out of time before he could build them: Morgan's Aquarium for a granddaughter; and a Pirate Ship representing a tourist attraction for the cove at Zachary Point. I felt honored, and a bit nervous, to take these important elements from Big Al's original vision and see them through to completion. Although in my earlier years I had built many scale models of classic cars, sailing ships, balsa wood biplanes, and a dollhouse, this was my first foray into the world of model railroading.

Big Al included a long tunnel in his layout, representational of the Hoosac Tunnel, but not an exact replica. A few years ago, I was pleased to find a second-hand prototypical Hoosac Tunnel portal and installed it, adding an authentic North Adams detail. I was relieved that, compared to the actual tunnel, my work was not as expensive, took less time, and cost fewer lives to complete. I have also continued to expand Big Al's vision, adding other family-related and North Adams-inspired features. An industrial complex I created at one of the sidings represents the former Sprague Electric Co. (now the site of the Mass MoCA art complex). Ellie's Toy and Candy Store, for our granddaughter, now sits in a former empty lot between two other small businesses. I named Steepmeadow Farm after the Burdick family farm that I grew up on, in nearby Williamstown. My wife designed, and I built, a cemetery based on a combination of two real life graveyards – one in North Adams where many Richard and Burdick relatives are buried, and the other in Lacolle, Quebec, where numerous Richard ancestors are interred. In the background is an enlarged photograph my wife took of the North Adams cemetery. I attempted to blend the trees and headstones in the photo with the headstones and scenery I installed in the foreground. More enlarged photos of local mountains, a lake, and trees are glued around the train room on the previously plain sky-blue walls, adding authenticity and depth to the layout.

The minimal landscaping installed by Big Al portrays a typical New England town during fall foliage season. The layout's era, as best as I can determine, was not meant to be one finite point in time. It encompasses a diachronic span of time, early to late 20th century. On the RRR, it is eternally Autumn in any year of your choice from the 1920s – 1980s. Much of the focus is on the steam to diesel transition period; Modeler's License allows for give-and-take of a few decades on each end. The structures, locomotives, and other rolling stock are typical for both freight and passenger service. About half still have horn-hook couplers; an on-going project is replacing them with knuckle couplers. He collected many Boston & Maine locomotives and cars, which is prototypically accurate since B&M ran through North Adams at that time. Big Al also acquired motive power and cars from other railroads and eras, including Pennsylvania Railroad, New York Central, and Union Pacific. I have yet to figure out why his largest collection is made up of Burlington Northern diesel locomotives, freight cars, and cabooses.

Many of the locomotives seem to be equipped for DC only. Through trial and error (mostly by sheer chance), I have found that at least six are DCC compatible. With my minimal knowledge of basic electronics, and even less knowledge of how to operate the NCE ProCab system, I have had varying success getting the locomotives to run properly with dirty wheels, using 30-year-old wiring, and on oxidized track that had been abandoned for 15 years. It often seems that I spend half of my time cleaning track, and the other half running trains - on dirty track.



I have rarely used abrasive cleaners such as Brite Boy. Being new to the hobby, I have heard differing opinions about how they could possibly scar and pit the rails, so I use them sparingly and gently, and only on areas with heavy build-up. I have used isopropyl alcohol and mineral spirits to clean wheels and track, with some success. If a locomotive hits a dead spot and stops, I just nudge it forward a few inches, or a few feet, and sometimes it apparently gets better conductivity and starts up again; and sometimes not. I am still learning how to determine if a particular problem is with the wiring, the track, the locomotive, or my improper use of the ProCab controller. A deep cleaning of the rails in the long tunnel has been particularly challenging, as it requires crawling under the benchwork and contorting your arm at unnatural angles to reach the track.

When under the benchwork, I try to avoid looking up at the wiring. It is well organized, neat, and tidy, apparently designed and installed properly by Big Al, who had an extensive working knowledge of electronics. I hope it keeps functioning properly because I have not yet developed a complete understanding of which differently colored wire connects to what, nor where it comes from, where it goes to, and why. Luckily, all the Tortoise switch machines he installed still work. There are also hand-operated ground throws in easy to reach areas, and only one is broken. I should probably try to fix or replace it someday. Big Al ran some wires to light up about a half dozen structures, and those seem to be working fine. I have found some more unattached lighting wires dangling down from a few structures above. Maybe someday if I am feeling confident, I will try to hook them up.

I enjoy building structures, from Walthers and other commercially available kits, and locating them on the layout. I have done some simple attempts at kit bashing, but have not yet tried scratch building. I have not permanently installed most of my structures, because I like to move them around as I play, and imagine how the town of Richfield has changed over time.

As some of Big Al's modeler friends passed away over the years, and their layouts were dismantled, he acquired some of their used buildings. He installed them on his layout, a memorial to friends and railroads that have disappeared. Similarly, my wife and I enjoy shopping at train shows for second-hand structures. Often worn out, dirty, and damaged, we call them orphan buildings, and we adopt them. I get satisfaction cleaning and repairing them, and giving them a new home on the RRR. I have added landscaping and scenery, including many autumn trees (mostly Woodland Scenics ready made). I have used lichen from the crafts store for shrubs and bushes. Using foam board insulation and plaster cloth, I created a small hill between Main St. and the backdrop, to raise up structures so they are more visible. I have added more figures, from SceneMaster and Preiser, and I also like to move them around, which brings more life to the layout.

Since childhood, I have amassed a collection of over 250 die-cast vehicles. *Continued on next page*



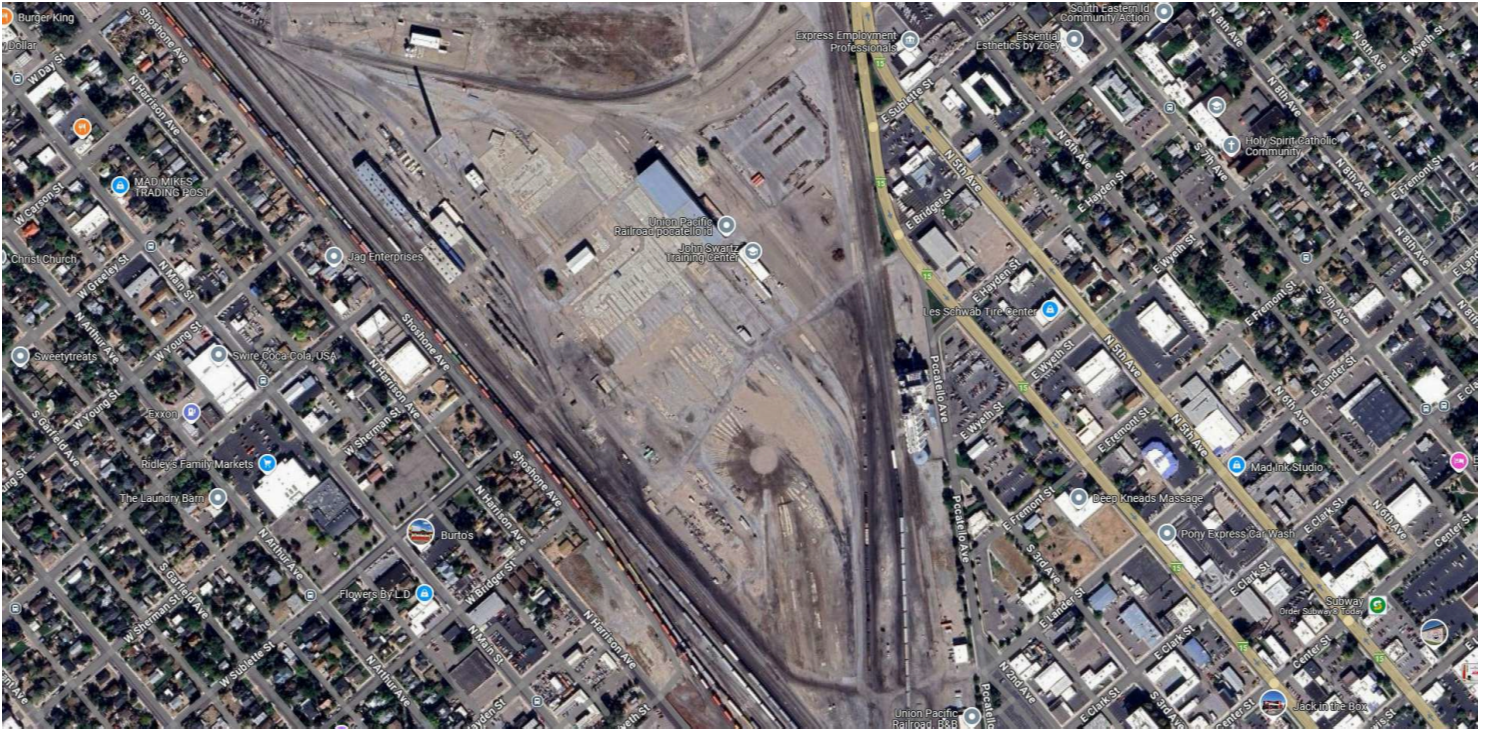
Todd states, “My wife designed, and I built, a cemetery based on a combination of two real life graveyards – one in North Adams where many Richard and Burdick relatives are buried, and the other in Lacolle, Quebec, where numerous Richard ancestors are interred.” *To be continued in the next Form 19 later in June.*

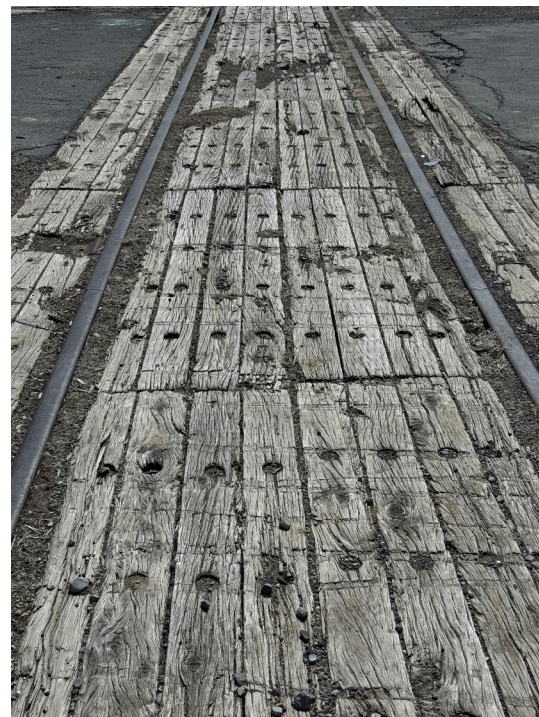
CHARLES NEWTON

‘Sudoku’ for a Retired Railroader. . . .By Charles Newton, Editor

My ‘retirement thing’ sometimes gets interrupted, and I find myself drawn back into the railroad arena, as I was in April for two weeks. My recent foray involved a training update for instructors, and newly scheduled two weeks of on-boarding new hire conductors in North Platte, Nebraska. During my ‘retread’ training, I spent two weeks in an old railroad town, Pocatello, Idaho. On the following pages I’ve posted a satellite view of what is the current layout at Pocatello, which once was a large facility. The picture shows the footprint of the roundhouse and associated yard and I’ve included some scenes of existing buildings. The terminal is now mainly a crew change and block swap location. Some old vestiges of the steam/ diesel transition era years remain, including the powerhouse smoke stack, large car shop, and a granary inside the yard. The railroads here in the Capital/ Saratoga Region, including NYC, B&M and D&H once had similar properties in railroad towns like West Albany, Mechanicville and Watervliet, and we know what happened to them over the years. From my wannabe modeler’s viewpoint, some thoughts occurred to make my dream railroad more like the prototype. I recommend digging up the old photos and books/ maps to help tell the story you wish to convey, even if it’s a very modest operation you are building.

Remember, “Do or do not, there is no try!”





More Pocatello details from its past as a railroad town. UP isn't a company to hide its identity as shown by their prominent signage. Crossing construction detail is also something to consider.

The Division Point, continued from page 2

Any of the above sound familiar? Have your own list?

Till next time – enjoy all of the above!

Artie

PS: Mark your calendars for our annual (discounting the fact that rain canceled the past 2 years “annual”) HBD Family picnic on Saturday, June 7th from 10 AM until 2 PM at the home of the Adirondack Live Steamers (aka ALS). **ALS is a private club so we will send out a short 4 page Form 19 Extra in a couple of weeks giving their location and directions as that information is given out by invitation only.** We are fortunate to have a really good relationship with ALS and a number of HBD members are also members of ALS. Thanks again to Ben Maggi for arranging the picnic for this year.



Upcoming Meetings/Events

Saturday May 24th

At the home of Mike Phelan for a layout visit

Time: 10 AM until 1 PM

Address: 5956 CURRY RD EXT Schenectady

Saturday, June 7th - Division Family Picnic at ALS - more details to follow

NMRA National Convention - Station No.VI - Novi, Michigan July 14th through July 19th

NER Fall Convention - Concord Flyer '25 - Concord, NH - September 11th thru the 14th

Division Badges Are Available

If you do not have a Hudson Berkshire Division name badge or have lost your original one and would like it replaced, contact:

Bert Pflegl at bpflegl@gmail.com, phone 518-235-8496

or

Ben Maggi at BenLMaggi@hotmail.com, phone 585-506-2680

Please provide your name as you want it to appear and the place of residence that you want - just community or city and state.

Please visit:

Hudson Berkshire Division Website:
<http://www.hudson-berkshire.org/>

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FORM 19

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