The DERAIL

The Official Monthly Publication of the San Jacinto Model Railroad Club, Inc

June 2011 Volume 42, Issue 06

President's Message

Bob Werre

Greetings railroaders, it looks like the summer is upon us and without rain we'll have less mowing to do for the time being. It's also time for conventions for the regions and nationally, not to mention there are many smaller specialty and historical groups that will be putting together meets.

My situation with the special/historical groups, is that they all meet a long distance from here. My own railroad is a combination of four (three being fallen flags) so attending even a few of those events would rival the nation's debt. To continue with that train of thought for a moment… The Milwaukee Road Historical Association, one of the larger associations, has recently mentioned the problem with the aging of their members; whether they are former employees or rail fans. The problem of providing services to a dwindling membership is tough without raising membership and convention fees. Of course this probably means members on the financial edge might be forced out thus compounding the problem. Luckily our club isn't faced with the financial part of that problem. The age situation is another matter.

Nearly all of our success is due to the tireless volunteers that we have. Case in point, I received a note a few days ago from Tom Bailey (surprise…hardly anybody writes me anymore) stating that he would like to continue in his position of "head salesman extraordinaire" for the club's sales table at the next Fall Show. That's great Tom—you're hired!

And speaking of the Fall Show and its success, you have probably heard of the sour note to that event. After our show, the folks at the Stafford Center came across several damaged tables that had to be replaced. They have asked us to do so. Bob Barnett has viewed the damage and had discussions with the people at the center. I seems as though one or more of the vendors have implemented a type of clamp that has caused this type of damage. We are already at work in reviewing how we will deal with this situation in the future. Overall we will replace the damaged tables but also take possession of them. I understand we have offers to sell several so it's not a total loss.

Dealing with this financial loss is something that the club can handle without any drastic actions. My personal feelings are that future ticket sales should not be changed and that the various clubs share of the proceeds shouldn't be affected either. We depend on sheer numbers for attendance and the 'entertainment factor' of the various clubs who help us make this show the success it has been. Whether we raise the vendor table fee is another matter. We have several months to deal with this issue.

A couple of months ago, I brought up the possibility of the club providing "open house' cross-bucks to any of the folks who don't have any. Thus far I have not been made aware of any requests. This means that everyone has one or our message hasn't reached those in need. So at this time, we'll put a hold on building any.

In my lasts month's letter, I had talked about some kind of list of folks who could provide help to others in our hobby. I've had a couple of folks interested, so I will try and formulate a way to make that happen.

Well, it's time to get off the computer and get into the RR room. I've got a CN&W boxcar and a Pennsy G-26 mill gondola to letter, a junker 50' GN boxcar to work on and a N&W caboose to finish up for a customer in California. I'll have these all finished before we meet in June at Bayland—come join us, as I understand we're going to get wired!

Railfanning with Google Earth

Steve Sandifer

Before I make any trip I railfan it with Google Earth. It is an extremely useful tool that can help see what is there now as well as right-of-way abandoned many years ago.

On May 9 I had a trip planned from my son's house in Harker Heights to Ft. Worth. Since I am very familiar with the Ft. Worth sub of the Santa Fe (BNSF now), I decided to follow the tracks instead of taking the faster I-35. But first, Google Earth.

It is easy to find many former railroad structures using the normal view and often confirming finds with the street level view. For my Forth Worth trip I began in Moody. I knew the Moody depot was in Temple at the Heritage Museum, but that was where I picked up the tracks.

The depot at McGregor is still in place at the former location of a diamond with the Cotton Belt (31°26'36.34"N, 97° 24'16.99"W). The diamond is long gone as is the Cotton Belt line, but the right of way is clearly visible. On my visit the sign on the door said "Temporarily Closed," but Amtrak stops here

twice a day to pick up folks who wait in the open or in their cars. A new concrete pad has been poured to hold two automobiles, and an Amtrak sign gives the schedule: 11:10 north and 4:30 south.

My next find was at Valley Mills. Depots are not always left on the main – the railroads often wanted them off the property. City Parks and Chambers of Commerce are the next places to look, and Valley Mills is such a place. The depot and a caboose can be seen on Google Earth at 31°39'25.46"N, 97°28'16.81"W. Google does not show what an awful color the depot has been painted, but at least it still exists.

Harder to find was the Clifton Depot. It was the red roof that was the primary clue (31°47'5.61"N, 31°47'5.61"N). It is a very safe place to visit – the Clifton police station. You can pay your traffic tickets at the old ticket window.

The ones I consider a real discovery were the depots at Kopperl and Blum because the rails have long since bypassed these burgs. Back when Lake Whitney was built in 1960, the Santa Fe right-of-way was in the flood area for the lake, so 13 miles of track needed to be relocated. On Google Earth you can find the realignment starting south of Kopperl at 32°03'19.02"N, 17° 31'27.92"W and extending to north of Blum at 32°11'20.24"N, 97°22'39.03"W.

Continued on page 3

Station Stops

June 9-12, 2011 - LSR Convention, Lubbock

June 25 - Houston Railroad Museum - Hand Laying Track and Turnout Construction conducted by Chuck Lee, 10:00 A.M. - 11:30 A.M.

July 3-9 - NMRA National Convention, Sacramento, CA

July 23 - Houston Railroad Museum - The Airbrush Clinic conducted by Bill Reid, 10:00 A.M. - 11:30 A.M.

Railfanning with Google Earth

Steve Sandifer

Following the old right-of-way into Kopperl on Google I saw what had to be a Santa Fe depot (32° 4'12.43"N, 97° 30'6.86"W). It was a sad sight to see. When the Santa Fe relocated in 1960, I assume the depot was left untouched until today except for the boarding up of the windows. All of the paint below the shadow of the eaves is totally gone, with a slide fading in toward the shelter of the roof line. If you want to see an original depot in original condition, this is the one to see.

The Blum depot however has seen a lot of action. It is the Red Neck Bar & Grill. There is reserved parking for motorcycles, and the sign over the door says "Bikes-Babes-Beer." (32° 8'36.24"N, 97°23'57.85"W). With all of the changes, little of the depot aura is visible.

I would not have found Kopperl and Blum had it not been for Google Earth. This is one example of how to railfan from your computer. And if you want to know just what Englewood or Settegast look like, Google Earth invites you to a free aerial view.

GE To Open Locomotive Plant In Texas

Manufacturing.Net - May 13, 2011

FORT WORTH, Texas (AP) -- General Electric Co. said Thursday its transportation unit plans to open a locomotive-making plant in Fort Worth that will create more than 500 manufacturing jobs.

The company also said it will hire 250 more workers for a plan in Erie, Pa.

GE said it will invest up to $96 million in the new 900,000-square-foot Texas plant, which is expected to begin production next year. It expects to begin the hiring process for salaried and production jobs later this year.

The conglomerate, which is based in based in Fairfield, Conn., said it needs more manufacturing capacity to meet strong U.S. and global growth in the transportation business.

The state of Texas will pay up to $4.2 million in incentives.

Henri Morris

THE SPACE SHUTTLE

The Derail, the mouthpiece of our railway club, seems a foolish place to include an article about the Space Shuttle. Amazingly though, it appears that the Shuttle's design was influenced by railways and so with the final flight of the Shuttle, together with the recent insult that Houston received by not being presented with a retiring Shuttle, it seemed to me that that this would be an opportune time to discuss a reported connection between these two amazing modes of transportation.

The US standard railroad gauge is 4 feet 8½ inches, which begs the question - why is that exceedingly odd number used as the distance between the two rails? The May 1905 edition of Popular Mechanics has an article in which it states that George Stevenson inspected portions of a Roman Wall through which chariots had driven, and discovered that deep ruts had been worn in the stone. The distance between the ruts was roughly 4foot 8½ inches, and he believed that the Romans adopted this gauge only after much experience, and so adopted it for his railroads.

Another and in my estimation, preferable answer, is that that was the gauge used in England, and since English immigrants initially designed and built the railroads in the US, they used their prior knowledge, craft and tools after their arrival here to design and build railroads. (Note however, that in his book "American Passages; A History of the United States", Edward Ayers mentions that the US had three different gauges at the time of the Civil War.)

So why did the English use that peculiar scale? Well supposedly, when building the first rail lines in England, the builders used the same jigs and tools that they had used to build horse-drawn tramways (trams) for many years before then, and the jigs all had a 4 foot 8½ inch gauge. Why? Well, prior to trams, the families of the artisans had been building horse-drawn wagons for literally centuries and again, these wagons all had that 'odd' spacing. Why?

Well supposedly, by continuing to use the same 'gauge' on the old English 'roads', wagon-wheels created ruts in the meadows that over the years, became easier and easier to navigate and as a result, the wagon wheels lasted longer and did not break as quickly - the ruts enabled wagons to roll on comparatively accident-free.

Who built those old rutted 'roads' and again, why that spacing?" Well it is reported that when conquering Europe, Imperial Rome had chariots built for their legions and they all had the same wheel spacing, which then everyone else matched for fear of destroying their wagon wheels.

So the final question then becomes, "Why did the Romans space the wheels exactly 4 foot 8½ inches apart"? Well, they really neither knew about nor cared about the exact measurement – it just happened to be the exact distance between the back-ends of two war horses at that time so in fact, the US standard railroad gauge is reportedly derived from the original Imperial Roman war chariot wheel-gauge specifications.

Now to the Shuttle and railway connection.

When we see a Space Shuttle sitting on its launch pad, there are two big booster rockets attached to the sides of the main fuel tank.

These are the solid rocket boosters, or SRB's that are made by Thiokol at their factory in Utah. The engineers who designed the SRB's actually wanted to make them a bit fatter, but the SRBs had to be shipped by train from the factory to the launch site and the railroad line from the factory happens to run through tunnels in the mountains and the width of the tunnel is based upon the 4 foot 8½ inches wide railroad track.

As a result, the diameter of the SRB's were constrained by the width of the tunnel and as a result, a major design feature of what is arguably the world's most advanced transportation system ever, was supposedly determined over two thousand years ago by the width of a two horses' behinds.

Operators Corner

Peter Bryan

THE FIRST TIME

My first experiences were with operations. I had no talent for wiring, bench work, scenery, etc. (And I still don't!) But I can lay track, design track plans, and consider myself at least half way proficient in running freight and passenger trains on an operating railroad.

With my first railroads, (a 5X9 ping pong table and then in an 11X12 bedroom) I learned all I could about operations. This included basic things like uncoupling ramps, picks, switch lists, car cards, playing cards, etc.; in other words all that I could learn on how to be a good operator.

We all start somewhere and this is how I learned. I got more into the hobby and got to meet some great owners of operating railroads at the San Jacinto Model Railroad Club (Gil Freitag, the late Ken Caulking, Don Bozman, Barry Bogs, et al) I started to invite myself to their sessions. That is something you should do as we all are looking for new people to introduce to the hobby and operations are one way to do it. So at the next San Jac meeting introduce your self to these guys and you might get invited to their next I operating session!

When Susan and I moved to our new home in 2001, I knew I was going to have an expanded and better West Virginia Western. I learned so much from these guys and others around the country. I always took a notepad with me to each and every op session and seemed to come home with at least 2- 3 ideas to incorporate in my new WVW.

The most important lesson learned was to have BULLET PROOF track work and turnouts (switches). Nothing ruins an OP session than to have derailments on a regular basis. This also goes for your rolling stock. The other lesson learned was how much fun it was to share a nice 3-4 hours with friends at an operating session. To me this is the best part of the hobby. It does not have to be a giant railroad either. I have operated on model railroads with as few as two operators and had a blast.

Until next time, keep "playing trains".

Guess the Layout!

All pictures are from the same layout.

Answer to last months' Guess the Layout: Eddie Carroll

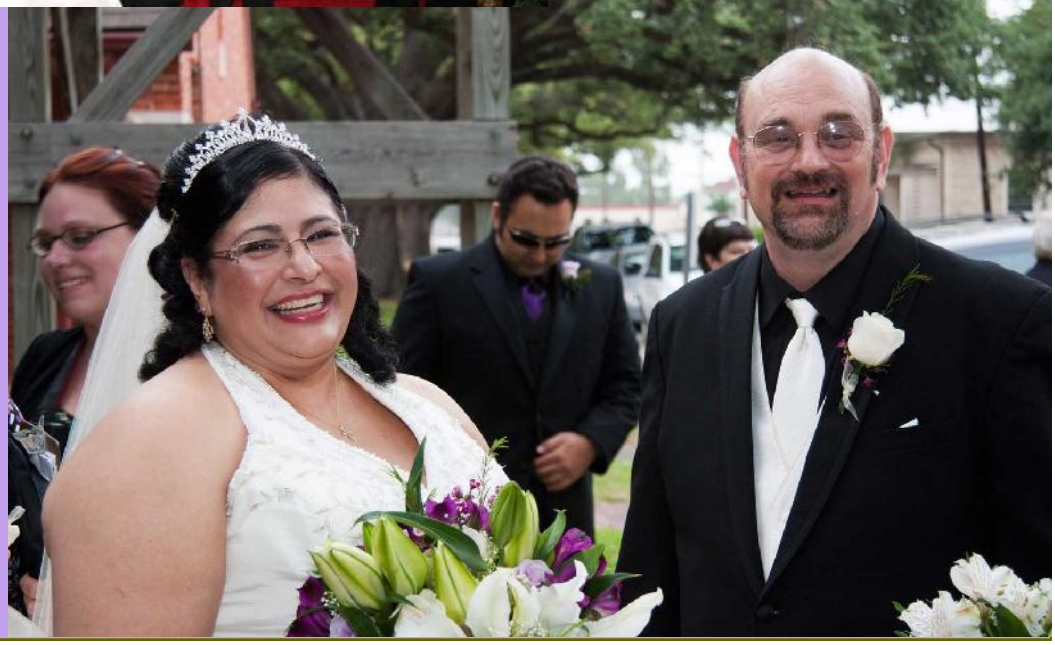
Congratulations Tracy and Cora!

Steve Sandifer

Saturday, April 30, marked a merger day for Tracy and Cora Mitchell, and the church was filled with model railroaders from across Texas. You have never seen so many spit-shined modelers in your life, and they really clean up well. Following a serious spiritual service, the reception included lots of food, dancing, and music. For many it was a reunion with friends normally only seen at LSR conventions.

We thank Tracy and Cora for bringing us all together to enjoy their day.

We celebrate their new family and life together!



The Raritan Valley Line

Bob Sabol

During the last week of April I made one of my frequent plane trips to New Jersey. Normally my brother picks me up at Newark Airport and 40 minutes later I am in Somerville, NJ, my final destination. That weekend he was not able to meet me at Newark, so I took a train to Somerville. Here is how the story goes.

When one lands in Newark you can take the air train from terminal to terminal to parking areas and continue on to be let off at a station that serves both Amtrak and NJ Transit. The route to Somerville necessitates getting on a NJ transit train and heading toward NY City but must get off a couple of minutes later and Newark Penn Station. My timing was right up until this point. Once I got off the airport air train the NJ transit train was just arriving at the station. I hopped right on and Newark Penn Station was a few minutes away.

NJ Transit works like this from Newark Penn Station: There are five feeder lines from Penn station to different parts of New Jersey. You can go on one line generally North, one line south and 3 lines west. Arriving at Penn Station I had to go down the stairs from track level to a commercial level and then up again to Track 5, which was the Raritan Valley Line (train heads west). The Raritan Valley line has most trains terminated in a town called Raritan (an old Native American name). Several trains a day continue unto a town called High Bridge.

The passenger cars are only a couple years old. The cars are the Bombardier Multilevel Vehicle (MLV) constructed by AMT (Montreal). They were good-looking cars with clean interiors. I went to the upper level. This train left Newark Penn Station at 4:10 PM. The trip to Somerville was to take about 62 minutes going about 35 miles with stops at 11 stations (Somerville be number 11).

A few miles down the road the track joined the old Central of Jersey line (more commonly know as the Jersey Central) and continued on the CNJ track the rest of the trip. At one time when the Jersey Central was running there were roundhouses in the towns of Cranford, Dunellen, and Raritan. The only remnants of yesteryear are part of the roundhouse in Cranford which is being used as a maintenance garage for the City of Cranford.

A few minutes into the trip I realized the best plans on a railroad often do not go as planned. Passenger service has priority but we had to slow down due to freight traffic ahead of us. This reminded me of my rail operation sessions at Peter Bryan's. His passenger trains always seemed to be waiting for the rest of us to clear the track of our freight operations.

This being a commuter train, frequent stops were in order. Most stops lasted less than a minute and off we went. About half the stations could accommodate only 3-4 cars so you were told ahead of time which cars would allow you to get off the train.

One of the stops along the route was Bound Brook. This town was known for a focal point of several railroads. The tracks we were on were original CNJ tracks, which were shared by the Reading and B&O. Running parallel to these tracks in Bound Brook was the old Leigh Valley line. Today the CNJ lines are part of NJ Transit. Norfolk Southern and CSX hauling freight now use the old Leigh Valley line. Just down the road from Bound Brook the Lehigh Valley line splits up with routes going to Philadelphia and the other route works its way west to Easton, PA and beyond. Bound Brook to this day is a great place to watch trains go by.

As I was sitting in my seat I was thinking of many stories about Durango and Silverton, White Pass and Yukon, Alaska, and many other scenic railroads. A scenic railroad the Raritan Valley Line is not. A modeler's paradise it is. After this 62 minute trip I am almost 100% sure that anything we build from scratch is prototypical somewhere, but we just may not have found out where. The scenic Raritan Valley Line travels the back yards.

(Continued on page 8)

The Raritan Valley Line *cont'd*

Bob Sabol

(Continued from page 7)

Junk piles, abandoned industrial buildings of all shapes and sizes, siding both used and abandoned, back yards of houses of every type, and parking lots. You name it and I think you would find it on this 35-mile trip. Another interesting item is the variety of stations along the route, but this is probably typical of most railroads left over from yesteryear.

One never knows when taking a train rides what you may learn and observe. This adventure is just one of the many extensions of our hobby of model railroading. From time to time, may we all have opportunities to experience the many facets of our hobby.

All Aboard!

April Minutes

Gil Freitag

Meeting minutes May 2, 2011

President Bob Werre called the meeting to order at 7:00PM and welcomed all.

Vice president Don Formanek introduced the night's presentation:

A vintage video from Craig Brantley, filmed by Wayne Weiss about the 1989 Astrorail convention. The video showed footage of the various layouts that were on tour at the time. It was sad to see how many of these layouts no longer exist. There was footage of the side tour bus trips to San Antonio, the Texas State R.R., and the Galveston R.R. Museum. Some clips from various clinics during the convention were also included.

Don said Jim Hinds will discuss wire sizes for model railroading next month. We still need ideas for future clinics.

Old Business:

none.

New Business:

Bob Barnett reported that damage was done to 8 tables during the GHTS and these will have to be replaced to the sum of about $1400.00. The damage was due to someone putting clamps along the edges of the plastic tables and crushing them beyond repair. Steps will need to be taken to keep this big expense from happening at future shows.

Thanks go out to Steve Sandifer for printing some copies of the club directory for a very minimal fee.

Peter Bryan announced Roy Pickard passed away this week in Comanche, TX. The Comanche and Indian Gap live steam R.R. Will continue to function with no changes and have 2 meets a year, regardless of what other rumors have been heard.

Abraham and Peter have taken on part time jobs at the Herman Park R.R. They say it is a lot of fun and you get a free shirt and hat plus a little pay. The R.R. is still looking for more employees, so sign up for shift if you can.

Bob Werre suggested collecting a club member skills database to allow us to share our talents and perhaps post this in the club directory.

Derail: Bob Sabol

Bob thanked all those who have contributed material. Still could use new material.

LSR:

Convention, Lubbock, TX June 9-12

Early registration deadline extended until May 16th.

NMRA:

The convention is in Sacramento, CA. July 3-9.

Division 8: Jim Lemmond

There will be a clinic on locomotive tune-ups at the Houston R.R. Museum on May 21st at 10AM.

Refreshments were thanks to Angie Caulking and Virgina Freitag. Bettye Bozman volunteered to bring the treats next month.

Treasurer's report, Gilbert Freitag:

Expenses:

$113.55 GHTS printing

$519.92 2nd run of Club Shirts

$12.60 Club Directory printing

Income:

$1071.00 Club Shirt sales

$7422.91 Ending balance with all bills paid.

Meeting adjourned at 8:40PM

-Respectfully submitted, Gilbert Freitag, Secretary / Treasurer

Thank You

to all who've contributed articles! If you haven't yet, give it a shot! It doesn't have to be long or perfect, just share your story, tips, or background in the hobby.

***You* make the Derail great!**

San Jac RR Club Meetings take place
the first Tuesday of each month

Bayland Community Center

6400 Bissonnet St. Houston,Tx

Click here for directions

Visitors are always welcome!

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Tuesday June 7

Jim Hinds presents

Wire Sizes for

Model Railroads

See You There!

Happy Birthday Gil!

Gil Freitag recently celebrated his 75th birthday with the help of his grandchildren.