



MMR EARNED

KEN CHICK EARNS MMR #476

It was Christmas morning 1948 when a number of orange and blue boxes magically appeared under the tree. I was five years old, and Santa had brought Lionel with him. I was hooked — for life. Dad got me a 4x8 sheet of plywood, and I became a railroader. As the years went on, the railroad grew until it filled two 4x8 sheets. Of course, it was all put away during the summer. I visited my aunt for a week or so every summer, and Grand Trunk mainline into Detroit was at the end of her street. The neighbor kid and I spent hours there watching monstrous steam engines thunder up and down the tracks. They were both frightening and totally awe-inspiring. I built and flew control-line scale model airplanes during the summer. That hobby eventually replaced trains. Then came cars, girls, college, and then the Army. After I was discharged, I visited an old high school buddy who had just returned from Germany. He had brought back lots of N-scale railroad models. I was rehooked.

All the old Lionel had been sold years ago. It was time to start from scratch. I liked the idea that you could build a large railroad in a small space with N scale. My friend and two other guys had just opened a N-scale mail order hobby shop and they gave me a nice discount. I started reading all the model railroad publications I could find, and I subscribed to *Model Railroader*. I still have those “how to” books and have lent them over the years to friends who were

interested in getting into model railroading. Most people chose N scale because of space limitations. I had plenty of space and envisioned an empire with long runs and lots of scenery. Like many others, I was inspired by John Allen’s work on the Gorre & Daphetid.

Our first house was a nice-sized ranch with a good-sized basement. I built a wall across the basement’s far end so the cats couldn’t get in, and I started building the railroad. I took up about a third of the basement, and I built the benchwork in the shape of an “E” with the back of the E against the wall and the ability to walk around the three legs. This was a real learning experience. I experimented with all kinds of ideas that I saw in magazines. I was basically a lone wolf at this stage, so there was a lot of trial and error, but my skills kept improving. The mountains (hills) were hydrocal hard shell with ZIP texturing scenery (remember that?) and bright green grass and plastic buildings that I repainted to eliminate shine. The control system was DC with a few blocks selected with DPDTCO switches. One side ran off a basic powerpack and the other side off of a TAT IV throttle that I built from a kit. The TAT IV was a great improvement; it opened my eyes as to what could really be done to improve operations.

It was about this time that I started to meet more model railroaders, some through hobby shops and others at my accounts (I was a computer sale rep in the days of the big box computers). I joined the NMRA

in 1972. At that time, the NCR’s Division 8 was forming, and I was asked to be one of its original organizers and members. I met more modelers and gleaned ideas and skills from them. (I hope I gave some back as well.) Three of us started a round robin club called the Gandy Dancers. It started as a N-scale club in the early 1970s and grew to some 17 members. Eventually, the club dropped the N-scale requirement, permitting those “strange” HOer’s to join and with them came more skills, ideas, and techniques. Although that club dwindled in size as members moved away or passed on, there are still some of us that meet twice a month after more than 40 years. We are not only operating buddies but have become family friends along the way.

A new house came into the picture. This time, the railroad received three-quarters of the basement. The layout was bigger and much improved; we could now run six trains at one time, and it took more than 20 minutes to run from one end of the railroad to the other. Double-stack rotary switches replaced the DPDTCO switches — there were probably 60 blocks and a much-improved point-to-point track plan better suited to operations. A new club came along as well: the Midnight Pocatello Yardmasters. We meet every Friday evening and rotate from one railroad to another. Somewhere along the line, I drifted from Division 8 to Division 6 and became more active since all the MPYer’s were also active in Division 6. It was also about this time that I started to accumulate “accomplishments” toward my MMR, although at the time I didn’t realize it and hadn’t thought about earning it.

Later, we moved to another new house. My wife, Beverlee, fell in love with the floor plan. It has a spare bedroom, loft reading area, an office on the second floor, and a master bedroom and laundry on the main floor. I fell in love with the completely open, unimproved basement containing only the furnace and hot water heater. The really great part is that Beverlee says the only way we’re leaving this place is in a pine box — feet first!

The 30x50-foot basement was mine. I had all the space I needed for my dream empire. I had a bathroom installed and moved the hot water heater farther away from the wall to allow more benchwork and aisle space. A Rinnai tankless hot water heater replaced the hot water tank to allow even more space in the small furnace/storage/Dispatcher’s office. I had a separate circuit

breaker box installed to control all the basement and railroad power. I then had a drop ceiling and a tile floor installed. The poured concrete walls were studded and insulated. Two sets of power outlets were added — one for the basement and a second for railroad power. I put up drywall and built benchwork. I installed a small kitchenette and built a large workshop. My friends and I would spend a lot of time here and it was going to be in comfort.

DCC was new, and I decided I really like its operational capabilities. DCC also eliminated miles of wire. I selected System One because it, NCE, and RamTraxx were the only ones that supported four-digit numbering, and I wanted to use my engine numbers as the addresses. I had met Don Wangrow, the System One's president, and learned about his future plans. Unfortunately, Dan died some years ago, and RamTraxx gave up, so NCE is left alone. However, everything was compatible and everything still works well.

Code 55 track was new and had smaller, better-spaced ties with eight extremely small spikes per tie. Code 55 track looked much better. I sold my Peco track and turnouts, and I learned to work with switch “kits”

and to scratchbuild others. My Danforth Hadley & Northern was built as a large point-to-point layout designed for operations. Both round robin clubs' operational ideas and design assistance contributed greatly to the DH&N's design and building. The Yardmasters loved to operate, and I learned a whole new area of the hobby. In addition, most of them are excellent modelers. We all learn from each other and continue to challenge each other to improve.

All the MPY members are in the NMRA, and most of us have served as NCR and/or Division 6 officers or volunteers. One of the NMRA's greatest assets is all the organized conventions and open houses. I attended as many as possible. There has never been an occasion where I didn't learn something new that could contribute to my modeling. I also open the DH&N to visitors as often as possible, and because of these visits, I have met many new friends. I suspect that it was this involvement in the NMRA that rekindled my interest in finally completing the requirements and paperwork for the MMR program. As it turned out, I had met 98 percent of the requirements. I only needed to do the paperwork and have some models judged.

The DH&N isn't finished, but it is well on its way. Of course, when it is done, it won't be done; model railroads never are. The layout will continue to evolve as new ideas, models, and friends come forward. I've been a member of the NMRA since 1972 and can honestly say that I have acquired many lifelong friends because of this. I credit a lot of my accomplishments to the NMRA and its programs. I know that I wouldn't have learned nearly as much about railroading, modeling, or made many of the friends I have without having been a member.

By the way, if you are attending the NMRA National Convention in Grand Rapids this year, come visit the DH&N and seven other MPY railroads on the daylong “Canton Flyer” tour, which includes lunch and diner at railroad-themed locations. Four of the eight railroads belong to MMRs with two more layout owners very close to earning this distinction.

Ken has earned the following certificates: Association Volunteer, Master Builder—Scenery, Master Builder—Cars, Model Railroad Author, Model Railroad Engineer—Civil, Model Railroad Engineer—Electrical, and Chief Dispatcher.