The Semaphore April, 2019

A publication of the 2nd Division of the Pacific Northwest Region of the NMRA

Second Section

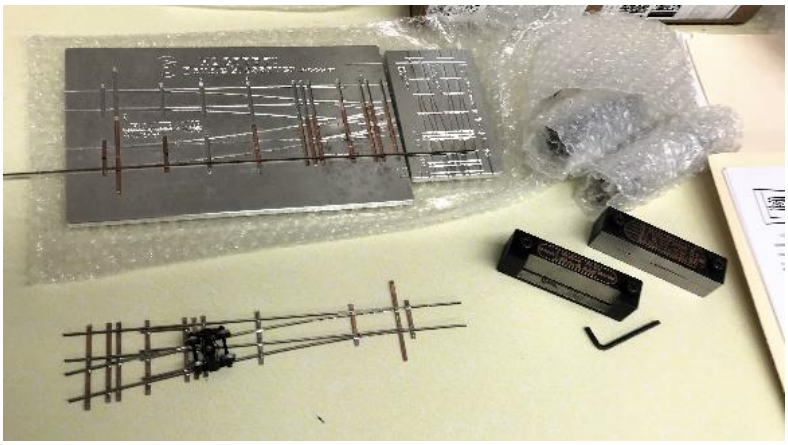
As previously mentioned, there was just too much information that was too important to wait for a final writeup of our April event. So we are doing a double issue this month. Or, in railroad-speak, we are running a second section. This month's meeting was a little business heavy, but with two excellent presentations, it was certainly a valuable meeting. There were 19 folks in attendance: 1 guest, and the rest were members.

- *Richard Kurschner, editor pro-tem*

April Event Report

Report and photos by Richard Kurschner

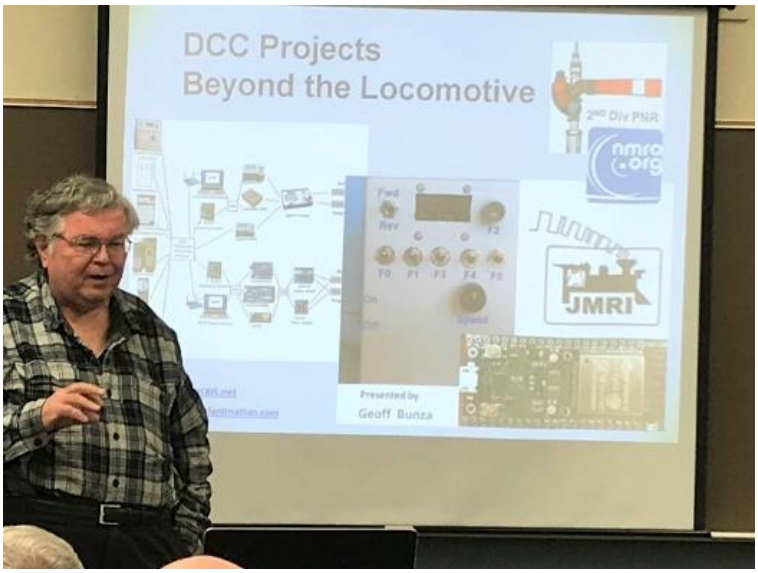
As the first order of business, we approved the presented bylaws with only a minor administrative correction; both the amendment and the bylaws were passed unanimously. They will soon be posted to the Division website. Next, most of the candidates for Vice Superintendent and for Director came forward, introduced themselves, and talked a little about their backgrounds and why they wanted to be on the Board. Unfortunately, candidate John Sparrows could not attend. Finally, Dave Holden gave us a wrap up report on last year's convention. In summary, we had 144 total attendees (wow!) and netted $7073 (double wow!).



The Division's FastTrack jigs plus an assembled turnout.

As a segue from business to clinic, MMR **Ross Ames** showed off the FastTracks jigs that the Division purchased using those convention dollars to help members gain their Civil Engineer AP certificate. The jigs are for a double crossover, so you can use them to make a double crossover, a single crossover, a single turnout, a spring switch, a stub switch, or even a low angle crossing. By doing any three of these, you will easily complete the track laying portion of the AP requirement which is what seems to scare off most people. We have the jigs in both HO

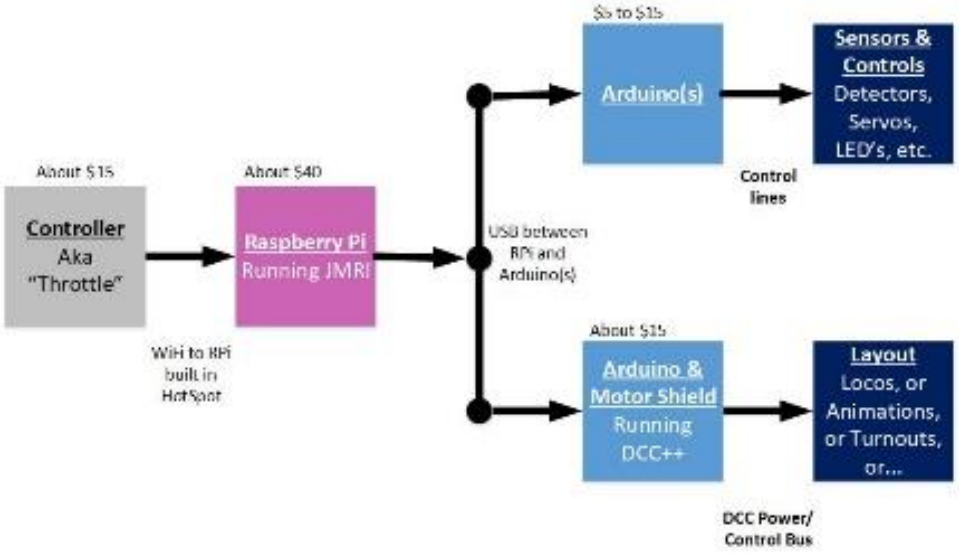
and N scales and the Division also has a small supply of code 83 rail and HO ties for your use until it runs out. After that you will have to supply your own, as will the N scale folks. Ross had hoped to have one of the members actually start constructing a switch right after the meeting, but unfortunately the room was unavailable for the longer period; perhaps at our May meet? Contact Ross at ross.ames@frontier.com for more information or to check the jigs out.



Geoff Bunza introducing his presentation

Next up was **Geoff Bunza** with his presentation "DCC Projects Beyond the Locomotive". Geoff's premise is that we are thinking too much "inside the box", that DCC is just for controlling locomotive speeds. Instead, he demonstrated that it can also be used as a general purpose remote control protocol. His method made extensive use of JMRI running on a Raspberry Pi computer (credit card sized and very inexpensive). This JMRI instance would get its commands wirelessly from an easy to build, and again very inexpensive, handheld control box that most would simply call a "throttle". The JMRI would then control an Arduino microcontroller with a motor shield (very, very inexpensive) to run as a DCC command station

and booster. All this would total about $70.



Simplified block diagram of Geoff's layout control suggestions

Geoff demonstrated such a setup by using a single button press to cause a locomotive to perform a series of actions. He went on to discuss using more Arduinos as massive banks of sensor inputs or control outputs. As one example, a $15 Arduino Mega would give a 60 to 70 inputs or outputs to the JMRI system for turnout controls, signal indications, panel displays and all the other wonderful things that JMRI can do for you. This is far less costly than commercially available solutions.

The common fear of such a setup is the amount of programming required to achieve it, but Geoff showed that while the JMRI system would need to be configured, that is nothing you wouldn't have to do if you wanted to use it on your laptop or desktop computer. You would also need to configure the handheld controller for the desired actions, but again, it wouldn't be any harder than setting CV's. As for true programming? There isn't any!

All in all, this was an eye-opening presentation on new uses for DCC that I was unaware of. This writeup is not doing Geoff's work its due, and I encourage you to check out his site at http://www.scalemodelanimation.com. I especially suggest you look up his home-built throttle/remote control unit that only requires very simple point to point wiring and no programming.

Warner (left) and Gary giving their G gauge overview

Our second presentation of the day, "G 'Gauge' Update", was given by MMR's **Warner Swarner** and **Gary Lee**. This was a wide-ranging discussion of the current state of the various scales that use 45mm track. One of the biggest advancements has been the use of batteries to provide "Dead Rail" power to the locomotives. Over the years, batteries have gotten both smaller and longer lasting. These days a small one can probably go into a large HO engine, and even the large two motor garden locomotives can last half a day on a single charge. Warner mentioned that those interested in garden railroads included a higher percentage of women and children than do our normal meetings. It seems that doll house scale buildings and the big, chunky locomotives really appeals to these demographics.
Besides showing off the sample rolling stock, engines, and structures they brought along, Gary and Warner encouraged everyone to consider attending both the Rose City Garden Railway Society's annual summer tour of local garden layouts (http://www.rcgrs.com/annual%20tour.html) and later in the year the National Garden Railway convention that will be happening in Portland (https://2019ngrc.wildapricot.org/).

Notes from the Caboose

The next scheduled event for the 2nd Division will be on May 18th at 10:00. We are still finalizing the location. This will be considered our Annual Membership meeting where, besides the usual reports from the committees and directors and any other business that might come up, we will announce the election results! And of course, for those of you who don't just live for committee reports, I'm sure we'll have more clinics for your amusement and edification.

Don't forget we are still looking for someone to be the editor of the Semaphore. If you'd like to make a little progress towards your author and volunteer AP certificates, this is a great way to do it! Contact the board (board@2dpnr.org) if you are interested.

Jeff Shultz, our Superintendent, has set a goal to increase our meeting attendance. As one of our Director candidates said, on line groups are great, but face-to-face is much more valuable. So for the 90% of you who don't attend our regular meetings, what would it take to get you to join us? We understand that some of you simply can not join us. But what about the rest of you? Is there a better time for the meetings? What about Friday evening or Sunday meets? Is there a better location for you? On the coast or in the gorge? What topics would you like to see covered? Is there some topic or some speaker that you drive across the division to hear? What changes do YOU want to see? Or, why don't you want to attend a meeting? Drop us a line at board@2dpnr.org. Please let us know, we really want to make the events valuable to you.

Have you made plans yet for the PNR convention in Cranbrook? May 29 to June 2, more information at https://www.kootenayexpress2019.ca/. How about the National in Salt Lake City? July 7 to July 13, more information at http://www.nmra2019slc.org/.

A simple reminder, please do vote when your invitation arrives. Your vote will help shape your Division.

We hope you have enjoyed this issue of the Semaphore. We'll close with a few more pictures of the excellent large-scale work from Warner and Gary. Their structures and the stock car are scratch built while the locomotive is an Aristocraft product with added lighting effects. Talk with you on the next run!

- *Richard Kurschner, editor pro-tem*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GRIZWALL

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