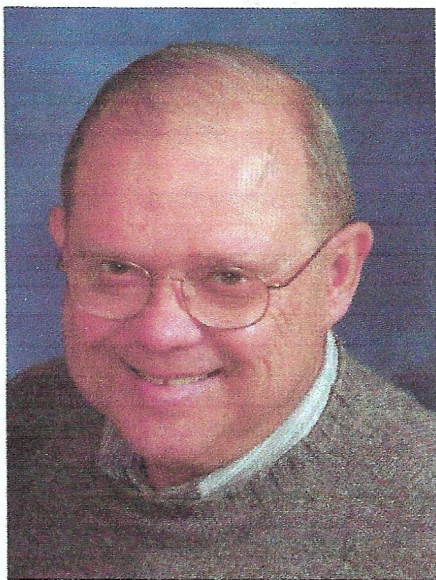


bought a “Stubby” diesel yard switcher from Lindsay Products, Inc., two Varney kits (a Fruit Grower’s Express reefer and an ATSF boxcar), and a stamped brass cabooses kit from a manufacturer I’ve forgotten. The layout was a 3x4-foot sheet of one-half inch plywood on a 1x2-inch frame. We kept it under my bed when we weren’t working on it or running trains. The track was Atlas brass flextrack on fiber ties tacked to the plywood without benefit of roadbed. We had two turnouts with short sidings. I don’t remember a passing track, but then we only had one locomotive. I was seven years old. I remember watching with fascination as Dad assembled the car kits, and I remember many happy hours of running our train around the track, imagining the scenery and towns that we would build one day. We never got around to ballast, scenery, or structures. We moved, the layout was scrapped, and the rolling stock was packed away. I don’t remember it ever being unpacked, and there was no more HO railroading during my childhood years.

Dad put an American Flyer train set under the Christmas tree in 1956, but I wasn’t interested in toy trains at that point. The next time trains entered my life was in 1969, when my wife’s grandmother gave her dad a Tyco Santa Fe train set for Christmas. He had grown up during the Great Depression, and this was his first toy train at the age of 45. That train set and a circle of 18-inch radius sectional track came into my possession in 1976, when my son was two years old. We temporarily set up the track on a scrap piece of Masonite, and it was immediately evident that my son was enjoying running the train. We decided to build a layout, and I spent the next year reading everything I could get my hands on about layout planning, construction, and operation.

A 4x6-foot layout seemed like a good place to start for a first father-son layout. I framed a piece of half-inch plywood with 1x4 inch lumber and built a cantilevered control panel with shelves on either side to accommodate two power packs for dual cab control using the material published in Chapter 20 of *HO Primer* by Linn Wescott. The track plan was designed for operation of two trains independently using Atlas components. I used flextrack and snap switches on cork roadbed. My son, now three years old, would put on his engineer hat and run the train around the outer loop. By now we had several Tyco structures, but no scenery. After we moved into our first home, I added terrain, built a Hydrocal “mountain” with tunnel por-



NELSON P. MOYER EARNS MMR #461

A Circuitous Journey to MMR

My introduction to model trains occurred in 1950 when my father

tals on either end, and added zip texturing. Meanwhile, I had been buying "one of each" of all the Athearn blue box locomotive and freight car kits I could afford without regard for era or road name, though I tended to favor Santa Fe since we lived in Oklahoma City. I also purchased several Atlas diesels and a Bachmann Consolidation with smoke. My son especially liked to run steam. I joined the El Reno Model Railroad Club shortly before the Rock Island folded, and we lost the use of the El Reno freight house, which housed our club layout. In 1982, we moved to Iowa, and the layout and two-thirds of the rolling stock was sold. The last I heard, the layout had been "finished" and was on display in a hobby shop in Oklahoma City.

Fast-forward 26 years, and we're now in November 2008. I saw a newspaper advertisement about an open house at the Hawkeye Model Railroad Club (HMRC) in Coralville, Iowa. Since I lived in Iowa City, Iowa, just a few miles away from the club, I decided to check it out. I was immediately impressed with the 2,000 square feet of layout space the club was in the process of filling, and since I was approaching retirement, I thought that this was a perfect opportunity to rekindle the flame. I still had the remnants of my former rolling stock collection and several craftsman structure kits constructed in the late 1970s. Granted, my remaining locomotives were all Athearn DC, and my cars were a complete hodgepodge with respect to era and road, but at least I had something to start with. I converted an Athearn ATSF SW7 (the box says it's an SW1500, but it's not) to DCC by adding a Digitrax decoder, bought an NCE PowerCab, and I was in business. I joined the HMRC, and jumped in with both feet. Unfortunately, the club underwent a crisis of leadership about the time I joined, and I was immediately introduced to the politics of model railroad clubs where opposing factions were bickering and the membership had no unified vision about what the layout should represent. Member interests ranged from 1930s steam operation to contemporary railroading dominated by unit trains, and the club leadership was trying to accommodate everybody. After a brief stint as Chair of the Layout Planning Committee, I resigned from the committee due to extreme personality differences among the membership and a complete lack of common vision. After that inauspicious reintroduction to model railroading, I decided to maintain a low profile with respect to the club and begin working toward getting my MMR.

I knew that achieving MMR would be a challenge, particularly since I didn't have a home layout, and the club layout was not a comfortable environment to work in at that point. After perusing the MMR requirements, I identified Author and Dispatcher as the first two certificates to earn. I have written many articles and textbook chapters in the scientific literature over the course of my professional career as a microbiologist, so writing about my passion for model railroading seemed a natural thing to do. My first article appeared in *The Wig Wag*, the Eastern Iowa Division newsletter, in June 2009. Through the HMRC, I met a couple of modelers who host monthly operating sessions on their home layouts, so the Chief Dispatcher certificate seemed within reach. I had hand laid the track and built the turnouts for John Allen's timesaver in 1980, and it included two of the three scratchbuilt track elements for the Civil certificate, so that also seemed to be within reach. My dad had given me his N scale rolling stock from the 1970s before he died in 1987, so I had the capability to complete both the Civil and Electrical certificates by building a very small N scale layout designed to meet the remaining requirements for those two certificates. Scenery and structures weren't required for the N scale layout, just track, ballast, and electrical components. I refurbished and superdetailed some of the structures built from craftsman kits that I had packed away before moving to Iowa and was encouraged when they earned merit awards. I scratchbuilt the remaining structures I needed for the Structure certificate using Chicago, Burlington & Quincy prototypes for inspiration. By the summer of 2010, I had completed the requirements for the Author, Dispatcher, Civil, Electrical, and Structures certificates, and I was well on the way to completing the Cars certificate. I had never built a resin car kit, but after building four resin cars that earned merit certificates, I felt that I was ready to scratch-build the remaining four cars. Again, I used CB&Q prototypes for inspiration, building the Class XB-1 barrel car, Class BH-1 horse car, and two Class BA-19A Havelock economy baggage cars, one in styrene and one in wood. The Eastern Iowa Division hosted the Mid-Continent Regional Convention in 2010, and that started me on the way to my Volunteer certificate. I gave a couple of clinics, judged a few merit award applications, and registered as a merit badge counselor to help the process along. I was elected Paymaster of the Eastern Iowa Division in

January 2011 to provide the last few volunteer units required. The last two certificates awarded were Cars and Volunteer in May 2011. The entire process, start to finish, took less than two years. I may be the only MMR yet that has never built a home layout. The early 4x6 effort and the small N scale layouts don't count since they never had structures or scenery, but I'm planning to correct that omission in the immediate future. As my dream layout materializes, I plan to earn the Scenery, Prototype, and Motive Power certificates. While Association Official is beyond my control, maybe someday I'll get elected to an office that will make that certificate possible for a clean sweep.

I've learned a lot and met some outstanding modelers along the way, and I've enjoyed every minute of the journey. I'm still a member of HMRC, and now that I've completed MMR, I plan to allocate some modeling time to building structures and working on the club layout as well as designing and building my own layout. Don't let the fact that you don't have a home or club layout discourage you from working toward MMR. If you have the interest, it is possible to achieve MMR by reading the fine print and focusing your effort on meeting the minimum requirements for your seven certificates. Your modeling skills will improve along the way, so don't let an early setback deter you from your goal.

Finally, I would like to thank Allen Merta, Superintendent and Achievement Program Chair of the Eastern Iowa Division for being an exemplary mentor. Allen patiently answered all my questions, encouraged me when I had doubts, and facilitated the paperwork. He convinced me that MMR was in my future, and I was gullible enough to believe him.