

# Mohegan Pequot Model Railroad

<http://www.mprr.org>



## The News for: November 2003

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### The Club Show

The Club Show on October 19, 2003 at St. Bernard High School was dismal by almost any business measure. Sure the members got to run trains but attendance was very poor. Only about 100 adults turned up. Many of the dealers did not even make expenses but a few actually did well. The Club just about broke even, depending on how the accounting is done.

In terms of the mechanics of the Show organization, getting tables, setting up, and so on, things did go well. The political liaison with the school and getting solid commitments was another story. The show did get pulled together at the end but people just stayed away in droves.

There was a long discussion about the Club show at the October 26 meeting. Although much remains to be done and said, the following is a summary of the comments at the meeting:

The location at St. Bernards is good, and this time the Club seems to have developed a good rapport with the school (after some hiccups). But there are some ill winds blowing, in that the school might need to move, and the new Principal does not favor secular Sunday activities<sup>1</sup>.

The world has changed since the first Club shows were put on. So much is now purchased on the Internet, that it is not just model RR vendors who have a hard time making ends meet.

One way to attract more people is to involve other model RR clubs in some way. Unless something different is done next time, in addition to what we do now, vendors will not be convinced to sign up for the Show.

### Passenger Modules Status

Work will resume at Henry's as usual, but check with Henry before you go (860 443 5953).

The passenger module in its entirety (except for the control panel) was set up for our Club Show. As before, only the main lines were jury rigged, and it took quite a while to get those working, mainly through paint interrupting electrical continuity. One frustrating aspect is that the whole setup has to be nearly complete before anything else can work!

### September/October Club Meeting Notes

#### Holiday Layout

Avery Point is unlikely to be available. Club members are urged to consider whether we should shoot for some other affordable venue, mid December to late January would be ideal. Many enquiries are received about

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<sup>1</sup> Maybe Saturday would be better anyway?

this. Area needed 3000 sq. ft. minimum, as we want to include all scales.

John W thought there was a vacant area in Plainfield that could be used, but it is about to become a \$ store. Other possibilities in Westerly and New London were mentioned.

### Club Show

Most of the discussion at the September 13 and 28, and October 12 meetings concerned arrangements for the Club show; see also discussion above. Arrangements for Essex November 1, 2, 8, and 9 were also discussed.

### Club Name

The Club name was chosen long before the SE Connecticut Casinos were even a gleam in the eye. Now things are very different. We have a sense that our name is hurting us, as people don't want to be associated with a club connected with gambling.

Perhaps we should choose a less controversial name such as "Model RR Club of SE Connecticut", or the Gutless and Benign?

There would be a big time and \$\$ penalty in changing our name: our badges, polo shirts, and sweat shirts, club cars, incorporation, and so on.

***Please, everyone, let us know what you think about this matter.***

### Club Uniforms

There are plenty of hats, whose badges are sown on or ironed on. We need more polo shirts, but have a few sweat shirts (large sizes) left. Maybe we should hold off on this one if we are contemplating changing the Club name.

### Newsletter

Clark has offered to take over the Newsletter again, and will do so as of January 2004<sup>2</sup>.

### **Field Trips**

Dan is doing a very very long trip story.

### **Member News**

Bert Beukelaer was rushed to hospital the night of the Club show, but has improved as at the time of writing.

### **John Waller's Column**

We buy parts for our model train layouts on the Internet, from vendors at train shows, and many other sources. We can specify that code 100 rail should be used on our HO scale modules, safe in the knowledge that it is readily available from our Storekeeper.

It was not always thus. As I mentioned in a column a year or so ago, model railroading dates back to the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, and has followed the path of prototype railroads ever since.

The October 2003 issue of Scale Rails<sup>3</sup> contains an article by Andrew J. Culver, Jr., *Albert Sprague Coolidge, a Model Railroad Pioneer*. Coolidge taught at the Shady Hill School in Massachusetts and was asked by the headmaster to teach selected students how to build a model railroad.

Andrew writes that Coolidge was infected with "railroad fever" at the age of 3. I can certainly relate to that, as there was never a time when I cannot remember being fascinated by trains. Are we all like that, or do some not get bitten until much later in life?

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<sup>2</sup> By JW; I am pleased Clark is coming back, as he did an excellent job before. This is not to say I did not enjoy doing the Newsletter.

<sup>3</sup> The new name for the NMRA Bulletin.

Coolidge started with Lionel three-rail tinplate, which hooked him for life, although he moved on from that worthy tinplate beginning in 1919, having accumulated a sizeable collection of tools. He started his teaching career in 1924, building a three-rail model railroad with two inch gauge from scratch<sup>4</sup>. His teaching ran for five years.

The three-rail system used an outside third rail, still in use for prototype practice in many instances, mostly for commuter rail and where electrification is used in tunnels. It has the advantage, in both prototype and model practice, of avoiding complications at turnouts and crossovers, compared with a center third rail. In tunnels, additional clearance would normally be required if overhead electrification is used.

Andrew's article shows pictures from the school archives, including a picture with a class in progress; Coolidge is present together with five students, four boys and a girl(!), all looking very solemn as portraits were posed in those days. Part of his motivation was to teach his students how to build things from scratch. Sadly, we have tended to lose these skills, but often yearn for them<sup>5</sup>.

Worse still, our children are losing the motivation to learn anything at the fundamental level ("from scratch"). Why should we bother learning simple arithmetic? Why should we bother learning history or geography? It is so boring, and, if we need to know something, such as the history of Afghanistan, we can look it up on the internet.

As if teaching model railroading at school was not enough, Coolidge also built a

garden railroad, wait for it, as a two-rail electrification system. It must have been one of the earliest two-rail systems built.

Andrew also mentions that Coolidge developed a two-rail train detection system. Naturally, this piqued my interest. At that time, prototype train detection systems used the conductivity of the wheel set between the two running rails, a method incompatible with two-rail electrification.

Maybe I already know how Coolidge's detection system works, although under a different name. It behooves me to find out, and there is a NMRA reference to it, which I am trying to obtain. It is unlikely I will change from my now well-tried method of magnetic sensors, but I should maintain an open mind.

*John*

### **The President's Corner**

[Ed. Dan let slip that he once wrote a book; so it never rains but it pours! Thanks Mr. Prez.]

As all the faithful readers of our newsletter have noticed, I have been slacking all summer with the writing of a Presidents Corner article. Now that we are back in the busy season of club activities, I feel I also need to get back on the ball and fulfill my creative writing duties. So here we go.

For those of you who attended the meeting on the 26<sup>th</sup>, you probably know the topic for the first half of my article, the 2003 Club Show.

As I left St. Bernards High School on Saturday Oct. 18, although exhausted from the setup effort, I was feeling very good about the show. This was the year we were going to really elevate our show to the level of Cheshire, and Willimantic, the way it was back in the Mitchell College days. I was excited to say the least, we had 75 dealer tables sold, more than 20 tables better than the previous year. We had the school there to do the concessions; we had a good

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<sup>4</sup> The construction aspects are covered in Coolidge A.S. *Building a Model Railroad*, The Macmillan Co. NY, 1929.

<sup>5</sup> The National Geographic video "Love those Trains" shows a live steamer with the number 4852, because it took four years to build, 1948 to 1952.

looking layout in the Gym and 2 more in the Foyer. Needless to say, I was confident we were on our way.

So when my alarm went off at 5 A.M, I was actually ready to jump out of bed and get going. After the hour drive from Manchester, I arrived at St. Bernards at around 10 till 7, to see dealers unloading and getting set for the day of sales. The layouts were up and running already without any problems, and everything was rolling nicely. AND I DIDN'T HAVE TO BREAK INTO THE BUILDING!!! This is gonna be a good day.

Well, all went well except for one thing, and unfortunately, that one thing was a fairly big "thing". Where the hell did all the people go?!? Where were the crowds of train nuts planning to spend their hard earned money at those 75 dealer tables I mentioned earlier?!? As the day went on, I became increasingly disgruntled by the lack of attendance. Here we sat on a golden opportunity to really boost our own cause, to springboard our show into the mainstream, and really instill confidence in the dealers at our show that this was the place to be, and to show the dealers that bagged our show, that they made the wrong call, and it really bothered me that things weren't panning out. So what was the result: we had a great looking, well organized, show at a location that the dealers like, we had awful attendance, some dealers did well, most did not. We did an excellent job on all aspects of the show, except, in the end, the only thing that matters: whether or not the dealers were happy, and for the most part they weren't happy.

So after loading Big Blue and hopping in my car for the long drive back to Manchester, I began my characteristic extreme self criticism, wherein I beat myself up until I figure out the problem, and how to fix it. On a side note, this had made me a very good engineer, but often at the expense of long hours of insomnia. So, after a number of hours of deep thought, as well as various discussions with dealers after the show, and discussions with other clubs, here is what I have concluded.

We can no longer rely solely on the old standbys for advertising. Yes, we need to advertise in the major model magazines, and the local papers as we always have, but in todays world of internet hobby shops, mail order, and especially ebay, we need to do a lot more. So here's a list of things I've come up with over the past week.

1. We need flyers ASAP. Before Christmas if we can get the school to commit.
2. Better, more organized distribution of flyers. We need to be sure they get to every show in the fall and spring to get word out to our fellow train nuts. We also need to be sure all local shops are well stocked with flyers.
3. Club to club promotion of the show. We know a lot of other guys in a lot of other clubs. Use our connections to get other clubs to come to the show. An added bonus would also be that they would in-turn notify us of their shows.
4. \$1 off admission for anyone in any Model Railroad Club. Not that \$1 will make or break ones decision to come to a show, but it sends a message, and it promotes the hobby. It is a nice gesture to other clubs, and most importantly, it shows the dealers who were unhappy this year that we are making every effort to promote and advertise the show, and get better attendance.
5. Confidence from within. Our greatest asset as a club is our own members. The more psyched we are about the show, and the more we talk it up, the more appealing it is to others. I was bothered by the fact that in the last 2 years I have been president for the Club Show, we have had more of the club members at Springfield than our own show. Now I realized the Springfield show is the superbowl of shows and we all have a great time there, but this is OUR show. I have always been a firm believer in the fact that a hobby

is what you make of it, and everyone is involved with the club to whatever extent suits them. Some of us are at every club function, some aren't. I honestly have no problem with that. (Many of you remember when I disappeared for 4 years while going to college.) But, I would like to see more than 50% of the members at our own show. Even if you can only make it around a few times a year, make one of those days the Club Show.

6. The attendees we are looking for are our fellow train nuts. It would have been nice to have another 50 people come in off the streets to see the layouts, but what really matters is how well the dealers do.

The most important thing I would like you guys to take out of this is that I fully realize the show didn't go nearly as well as I had hoped, and I have spent a lot of time and effort searching for feedback, and brainstorming how to correct the problem of attendance. In the coming months, I plan on continuing my efforts to devise a strategy to make this show a winner. As for next year, we should all be aware that we cannot afford another show with this year's attendance. Most dealers did just well enough to give us another shot, some did not. In order to keep this show afloat we need to show to our dealers that we have done everything we need to do to get the crowds there, and make it worth their while to spend their Sunday with us.

All in all, I hope this show serves as a wake-up call for us. We have a lot of things going for us. The dealers like the location, they like way the show is set up, and most of all they like the Mohegan & Pequot Model Railroad Club. With a little more effort focused in the direction of advertising and show promotion, I still think we could have a winner.

In conclusion of part one of this super sized presidents corner article, I would just like to say that I am dwelling on the negatives here,

but that's how we make things better. For me to sit back and look at the good points of the show and say we did our best, would be a disservice to you all. I have played plenty of sports in my life, and the only time I've heard the words, "We did our best", was when I lost. So, next year I plan on writing an article on the overwhelming success of our show. For me, the preparations for next years show started at 3:01 on Sunday the 19<sup>th</sup>.

OK, now on to the rest of my article. I do have about 5 months of articles to make up for here.

Now that we are back in "season", it's good to see obvious progress on the passenger station modules. Every Monday and Wednesday night at Henry's house we inch closer to finishing them. As the scenery starts to unfold, you can really see we have a showstopper in the making. Nice job fellas. Work will continue while we are setup at Essex, in a final push to get as much done as possible before Springfield.

Speaking of Essex, Thomas the Tank engine has arrived. As always help is need staffing the display as well as the raffle table, which looks to be this year's big money maker. Thomas requires a big commitment of personnel on our part, and the more help we can get the better. I personally enjoy this show a lot, as we get to operate without worrying about running a show, or spending too much on dealer tables. A good time is always had by all.

Lastly, as many of you at the Club show noticed, I have been doing a lot of work over the last year weathering and adding loads to my freight car fleet, as well as weathering my diverse locomotive fleet. I received a lot of questions as to how I weathered different cars, so I have decided to write an article detailing what methods I use and their pros and cons. I haven't finished picking the photos yet, but the finished article should be in next months news letter. To whet your appetite for the weathering article, I have compiled a basic rundown of various modern freight cars, and how they are organized into trains, using my favorite

railroad, Conrail as an example. Even if you don't model present day modern freight trains, the way cars are utilized should be interesting to everyone, and it should serve as a good intro to my future modern freight car weathering articles.

### Vice President's Niche

The Club Show was already in existence when I first joined the Club. Many people worked hard to bring the Show about; as stated earlier, that part of the Show worked well.

I worked as hard as any to get it all into place. My role was not as intensive as, say, that of Dan or Stu. But it was extensive, starting in early June and continuing to the day of the Show. It involved writing to all the candidate vendors, and handling their responses.

Therefore, I was particularly dismayed to see so many glum faces among the vendors at the Show.

What is the objective of the Club Show? Obviously it is aimed in general at promoting the cause of model railroading. And vendors are part of model railroading.

Let me draw an analogy. Small farms in New England (and elsewhere) have tended to disappear. As a consequence whole forests of trees have grown which did not exist 60 or so years ago. The impact on the tourist industry is important, but I doubt if any farmer in 1950 thought that way when deciding to give up a small farm.

The small farm has given way to the mega-farm, which can make ends meet<sup>6</sup>. The Springfield show is clearly successful. Two years ago I went around and asked many vendors if they would be interested in our Club Show. Even then, some of them replied

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<sup>6</sup> I don't want to get embroiled with farm subsidy issues!

they had tried Connecticut, but never covered their expenses.

Springfield is the mega-show; remember there were 18,006 visitors this year. Unless we can beat the mega-trends of these times, maybe we should say the game is not worth the candle.

### The Market Place

#### Club Member Ads

Advertise (free) here to reach more than seventy model railroaders eagerly waiting to buy your wonderful stuff.

Editor's Note: Let me know when your item sells or when you want to stop running the advertisement.

#### The Club Store

##### The Storekeeper's Report

None

#### M&PMRR Officers & Functionaries

<b>The President</b>	Dan DeLany	860	643-9303
<b>Vice President</b>	John Waller		564-3114
<b>Treasurer</b>	Gary Domer		848-0690
<b>Secretary</b>	George Harran		443-0707
Storekeeper	Larry Southwick		535-2996
Bulk Purchases	Bill Evans		267-9482
Meeting Speakers	Bill Evans		267-9482
Layouts/Name Tags	Stu Dom		536-7637
New Passenger Module	Stu Dom		536-7637
Field Trips	Jim DeLany		889-4029
Newsletter	John Waller		564-3114
Club Web Page	Jim Spavins		

### The Technical Section

Contributions are welcome. You can write about anything from prototype to model railroads. Scenery, electrical, bench work, model building and more are all of interest to the club members.

#### Model Railroad Calendar

#### Cheshire and the Willamantic Shows

#### Springfield Show Ron Pothier has details

### **This Month**

Work sessions will generally be held at Henry's. To check on a particular date, call Henry. Sessions start at 7 PM. Don't assume a session is being held; check first. Henry will also let members work on modules at non-session times, if he is home.

Since there are no modules at Larry's, Thursday sessions are in abeyance for the time being.

### **Submitting    Newsletter    Items**

Electronic versions are preferred so retyping is not necessary. E-mail enclosures can now be opened. Microsoft Word and other compatible word processing programs should be used. Send items to be published by E-mailing them to me at home at: [john.waller@snet.net](mailto:john.waller@snet.net), or snail-mail to 94 Glebas Road, Plainfield, CT 06374-1429. If you do send something, it is a good idea to phone (860 564 3114) and say that you sent it. Say M&P newsletter article in the subject line. You can also put the items on a floppy disk in Microsoft Word and give it to me or mail it. The deadline for submissions is one week before the end of the month.

By JW: the test file, with ".jpg" pictures inserted, could be read by most Club Members. I suggest, if Bill Evans is willing, that paper copies of the pages with pictures on them be sent to those who can't open them electronically. Mostly pictures are "decoration", but sometimes they are part of an article.