

THE SEMAPHORE

April 2020

FOX VALLEY DIVISION • MIDWEST REGION



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Mike's Minute

by FVD Superintendent Mike Hirvela

Dealing With Uncertain Times

Along with the change of the clocks to daylight saving time and the arrival of spring weather, this March brought with it something new: a very contagious virus called the "Coronavirus" or Covid-19. The seriousness of the illness, how contagious it is and how it is transmitted have resulted in local and state health authorities making strong recommendations, and local and state officials, as well as the federal government taking unprecedented actions. These actions have caused the Fox Valley Division and many other divisions in the NMRA nation-wide, train clubs, historical societies, etc., to cancel meetings, open houses, train shows, swap meets, and programs over the next several weeks, and in some cases, months. Besides canceling our March meet earlier in March, at its April 1 meeting via teleconference, our FVD BoD, also unanimously voted to:

- **CANCEL all FVD activities until September 2020.** So, our April 19 meet, June 7 meet, and summer outing **have been cancelled.**
- **Reschedule the FVD Annual Meeting and elections to the September 20, 2020 meet.**

As you all probably know by now, **the Peoria Midwest Region Convention has been cancelled not just postponed.** We hope the Covid-19 situation will greatly improve soon and life can return to normal. For now I and our FVD board, recommend you follow the Center for Disease Control and state and local health officials guidance to stay inside, stay safe, and take care of yourself and your loved ones. We'll get through this. Until we do, enjoy some indoor model railroading!

***Important!**

Our next FVD Meet is:
September 20 at
1:00 pm at the
Gary Morova Rec Center in
Prospect Heights

- FVD's Annual Meeting and elections will be held
- Contest and clinic TBD

All FVD activities
have been cancelled
until September 2020.

Stay safe everyone!

Email Addresses Needed!

At present we are missing email addresses for 36 FVD members. If you are one of those 36 members, please go to page 6 to find out how to easily send your email address to us. Then please send us your email address! In these uncertain times we want to be able to reach you. Thank You!

SCFFSM's Muskrat Ramble RR

Layout of the Month article & photos by Walt Herrick



One of the most unique model railroads in I've come across is the Suncoast Center for Fine Scale Modeling's On3 **Muskrat Ramble**. Why so unique? Three things: its superb modeling, its theme and its builder. The layout depicts a 1925, three foot narrow gauge short line, in the deep south's Louisiana bayou country. The layout was built by Australian master modeler, the late **Geoff Nott**. Nott was a world class modeler who was well known in Australia and in the logging and narrow gauge communities. He sadly passed away in 2013 of cancer. Before he left us, Nott built several outstanding layouts including his large, spectacular HO/HOn3 Leigh Creek Lumber Co. home layout (GMR 2000), the small N scale Lily Flat mining railroad, and his last effort, an On3 New England themed layout called Smuggler's Cove built with Mike Flack. Above on the Ramble, a Climax pulls the daily mixed train into the metal roofed station at the river town of Atchafalaya, Louisiana. *con't on p. 3*

Fun Stuff by Jim Allen

In the 1930s, 1940s, and into the 1950s, magazines like *Popular Mechanics*, *Popular Science*, and *Mechanics Illustrated* would theorize as to what the future would look like. The image to the right portrays what rail transport might look like in the future. Looks like they were off just a tad!



SCFFSM's Muskrat Ramble RR con't

The Suncoast Center for Fine Scale Modeling bought the Muskrat Ramble from Geoff Nott in 2011. It then spent a small fortune to ship the layout from Australia some 9250 miles to the U.S. After at least one appearance at a US train show, the layout was permanently installed at the Suncoast Center joining several other fine scale layouts including the large, well known, F scale, Sundance Central. I photographed the Ramble while in Florida last year during one of the Center's monthly open houses.

The Muskrat Ramble is a free-lanced layout with historic roots. Its name comes from a classic jazz tune composed by Kid Ory in 1926. The town of Atchafalaya gets its name from the long Atchafalaya River in Louisiana. And the paddle wheeler Bixby's name comes from a steamboat captain that taught a young Samuel Clemens about river boating.

As with all the model railroads and dioramas at the SCFFSM, the Ramble features fantastic fine scale modeling, incredible detailing, and numerous mini-scenes. Geoff Nott was an accomplished story teller and he tells some good ones with his mini-scenes on the Ramble.

The Muskrat Ramble was featured in three issues of the *Narrow Gauge & Short Line Gazette* in 2009 and 2010. It is an amazing model railroad.



The upper right photo shows the busy docks at Atchafalaya. The beautifully modeled "shorty" paddle wheeler "Bixby" is waiting for the fishing boat "Le Mascarade" to leave so it can tie up at the Atchafalaya Boat Shed. In the center shot, the daily mixed train leaves town, passing by a stately southern mansion with its property full of cotton ready to pick. The bottom photo shows about two thirds of the front of the Muskrat Ramble Railroad. Behind the back drop is the un-sceniced "back stage" part of the layout.



SCFFM's Muskrat Ramble RR



Two of Geoff Nott's excellent structures on the MRRR are shown above, the Bayou Fish Co. and the Mississippi Oil Co. Both are fully detailed inside and out.

Basic Layout Information

Layout Name:	Maskrat Ramble Railroad
Layout Builder:	Geoff Nott
Layout Location:	Suncoast Center for Fine Scale Modeling in Odessa, FL (just north of Tampa)
Layout Scale:	On3
Layout Size:	6 x 12 feet
Layout Style:	Diorama type display layout
Layout Concept:	A narrow gauge short line set in a small Louisiana river town and swamp country
Layout Era:	1925
Construction:	Layout built in the early 2000s
Bench Work:	Open grid
Sub Roadbed:	Plywood
Roadbed:	Luan plywood
Track plan:	Long oval with a four foot back drop dividing the layout lengthwise into "on stage" and "back stage" sections
Track:	Hand laid code 70
Scenery:	Masterfully depicted deep south bayou country, and small river town scenery
Structures:	Scratch built, modified craftsman kits
Locomotives:	Small geared steam locos most with sound
Rolling Stock:	Scratch built, kit built
Control:	Digitrax DCC
Operations:	Display operations
Other:	The Muskrat Ramble and 4 other fine scale model railroads plus a dozen large scale dioramas are open for viewing once per month. See the Suncoast Center for Fine Scale Modeling's web site: www.finescalemodeling.org for times.

Modeling Tip: A Super Mini-scene

How's this for a mini-scene? Besides the guy catching the alligator, note the:

- Pelican
- Moss growing on the roof
- Shack's canvas rollup shades
- Moonshine jug
- Confederate flag
- Barrel "planter" with flowers
- "Muskrat Pelts For Sale" sign with a bird on top
- Skunk on the dock
- Long snake on the dock
- Flat boat buried in weeds
- Etc., etc, etc.!



SCFFM's Muskrat Ramble RR



We conclude our coverage of the Muskrat Ramble, with photos taken on the left front third of the layout. A small Heisler loco is making its way through a muggy Louisiana swamp on its way to pick up a tank car at the Mississippi Oil Company in Atchafalaya. The loco, right of way, swamp, vines, weeping willow trees, hanging moss, palm trees, underbrush and old, dilapidated wood shacks were superbly modeled by master Australian modeler Geoff Nott.

March, April, May Clinics, Contests, and Show & Tells

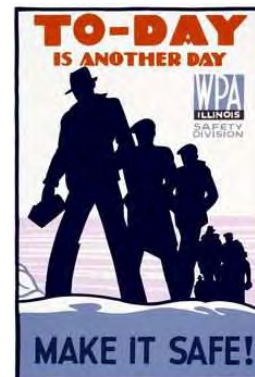
Due to the cancellation of our March, April and May monthly meetings due to Covid-19, we have no clinic, contest or Show & Tell photos and info to share with you this month. However, if you would like to share a Show & Tell with our Semaphore readers in the future, send me a good photo of your item, and I'll publish it. My email address is: waltherrickjr@gmail.com. Thanks! WH

FVD Chief Clerk Needed

Our Chief Clerk, Carl Wagus, has expressed his desire to step down from his Chief Clerk duties for health reasons. Please email Mike Hirvela at mhirvela1@gmail.com if you can fill this position, and/or if you will also run for this office in September's rescheduled officer elections. Thank you!

Member News

As mentioned elsewhere in this *Semaphore*, all FVD activities and meetings have been cancelled until September 2020. To stay current with FVD news, check the FVD website: www.foxvalleydivision.org....Member Services Trainmaster, **Erich Abens**, reports the current FVD membership stands at 180 members. Of those 180, 36 do not have their email address on file with us. Please help us by sending in your email address if we don't have it! (see below)....FYI, our FVD Superintendent, **Mike Hirvela**, is an active contributor to the NMRA's Facebook page. He's frequently found knowledgeably answering member questions from all over the world on model and prototype railroading. He also makes occasional comments.... Due to Covid-19 concerns, the MWR Peoria Rocket Spring Convention has now been CANCELLED not just postponed. Refunds are being sent to those who have registered for the convention....Members are asked to please "Stay Safe" during the current challenges with the Covid-19 or the Coronavirus....The Illinois WPA safety poster at right is from the 1930s. WH



2019 - 2020 Fox Valley Division Meeting Schedule

All meetings are held from **1:30 to about 4:00 pm** (except as noted under "Other" below) at the **Gary Morava Recreation Center, 110 W. Camp McDonald Road, Prospect Heights, IL 60070.** Visitors are always welcome per the NMRA's visitor policy. Note that clinics are subject to change without notice. For the latest clinic and all FVD news and information, visit our web site at www.foxvalleydivision.org.

April 19 & June 7	Both of these FVD meets have been cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic. <u>All FVD activities are cancelled until September.</u>		
May 14—17	Midwest Region Spring Convention "The Peoria Rocket" in Peoria, IL *This event has been CANCELLED due to Covid-19 pandemic.* Those who have registered for the convention are being refunded.		
July 12—18	NMRA National Convention "Gateway 2020" in St. Louis, MO <u>At present this event is still being held.</u> For further information, go to the convention's web site: www.gateway2020.org .		
September 20	TBD	Passenger cars-limit 3	<u>1:00 pm start.</u> FVD Annual Meeting & elections to be held. Sub sandwich lunch.

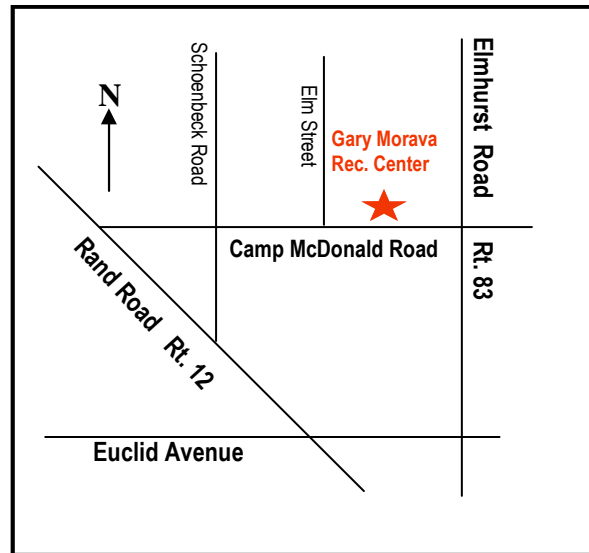
How to send us your email address (it's easy!):

1. Go to <http://www.mwr-nmra.org/mwr2016/mwr.waybill.html>
This is a Midwest Region web page.
2. At the top of the page, click on the link "To update your email address, **CLICK HERE**".
3. Fill out the form and send it in. You are done!

Note. Your email address will be added to the NMRA, Midwest Region and Fox Valley Division web base and used ONLY for association related communications. Thank you!



PROSPECT HEIGHTS, IL



About the Fox Valley Division

If you receive this newsletter you live in the Midwest Region and Fox Valley Division of the National Model Railroad Association or NMRA. The Fox Valley Division (FVD) includes all of Lake and McHenry, and parts of Cook and Kane Counties in northeast Illinois. About 190 members of varied ages and modeling ability levels belong to the FVD. Almost all modeling scales are represented in our division. Membership in the division is free as are the Semaphore newsletters.

FVD monthly meetings are held September through May at the Gary Morava Recreation Center in Prospect Heights from 1:30 to about 4:00 pm. Each meeting features a clinic, model contest, information of interest to the membership, and a time for socializing. Outings, layout tours, and operating sessions are also held periodically in addition to, or instead of, the monthly meetings. To promote the hobby of model railroading, the FVD sponsors and runs the large train show called "High Wheeler" in early March each year at Harper College in Palatine, Illinois.

We encourage you to take advantage of all the FVD has to offer. We are here to answer your questions, help improve your modeling, and help you better enjoy the great hobby of model railroading. Join us at a FVD meeting or outing and bring a friend. We'd love to see you. Also visit us on the web at:

www.foxvalleydivision.org.

Questions? Contact FVD Superintendent, Mike Hirvela, or any FVD Board member listed below. We are here to help!

- The FVD's monthly meeting is at the :
Gary Morava Recreation Center
110 Camp McDonald Road
Prospect Heights, IL. 60070
- Our regular meeting time is:
1:30 to about 4:00 p.m.
- 2019 – 2020 meeting dates, contest and clinic info are on page 6 of this newsletter.

FVD web site: www.foxvalleydivision.org

FVD mailing address: Fox Valley Division
Midwest Region-NMRA
P.O. Box 1535
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Vacant