

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

LEX A. PARKER, MM3 #300



Lex first showed an interest in trains in South Africa at the age of three. His father, an engineer who ran South African Railways' Beyer Garratts, probably inspired him. Born in South Africa in 1944, Lex also lived in Cairo, returned to South Africa, moved to England and finally immigrated to Canada in 1956.

Lex received his first model train for Christmas in England, an OO gauge Hornby Dublo set. In Canada, an HO Athearn train set started him on his journey into model railroading, as he built his first layout on the floor of his parents' attic. As a Canadian, CNR and CPR were the obvious choices to model. He eventually joined the local model railroad club, H.O.M.E.S., and also the NMRA for a short time as he was pulled between trains and racing cars. However, the lure of trains kept his hand in model railroading. In 1976, Lex met a live steam modeller and began an extension of his railroad hobby, building several live steam engines and a locomotive. However, he found that it was difficult to carry on two intensive hobbies and decided to focus on model railroading.

Soon Lex was given a stack of Model Railroader magazines and was inspired by illustrated scenes of John Allen's model railroad on the back covers. No one else seemed to attempt the weathering that Allen did and Lex was motivated to develop his scratch building and weathering techniques for structures, rolling stock and locomotives. Soon he was painting and weathering locomotives for a local hobby shop to fund his model railroading.

On a visit to Cass, WV in 1978, a friend introduced Lex to narrow gauge and specifically to On3. After much investigation, Lex decided to model the D&RGW as an alternative to what everyone else was doing in his area. He wanted to offer something different for others to enjoy and the D&RGW met his needs for both topography and time period. It was soon after this that he and several narrow gauge modellers started a group known as the Maple Leaf Mafia.

This group is still active in the Niagara Region of Southern Ontario. During the course of the next few years, Lex experimented with various track plans and different eras to model, finally deciding on Chama NM. He found Chama to be a gem locked in time that could be visited and studied. As a result, in 1981 he started a new point-to-point layout in the basement of his new home. Lex attended many National Narrow Gauge Conventions over the next few years and submitted several models that all won awards.

Over the years his layout was photographed and published in the Bulletin, Model Railroader, Railroad Model Craftsman and Narrow Gauge & Shortline Gazette. Unknowingly he had begun preparation for his MMR. The layout was substantially finished in 1996 and then was taken down. Lex began building a new loop layout the following year with the knowledge and skills developed from the previous layout. For Lex, the "journey" was the joy, not the final layout. This new layout also represents Chama, NM. Most structures and cars are scratch built and the track is hand laid. Hand painted background murals and scenery represent the Colorado and New Mexican countryside. As a professional registered interior designer and rendering artist, Lex takes great enjoyment in the visual aspects of the scene he creates.

After rejoining the NMRA two years ago, Lex was soon encouraged by friends, Bill and Mary Miller, to submit his efforts to the NMRA Achievement Program. He recently achieved eight Achievement Programs at once to earn MMR #300 (Cars, Structures, Scenery, Prototype, Civil, Electrical, Volunteer and Author). Presently, Lex is a member and the Web master of both the Niagara Frontier Region (www.drgwrr.com/nfr) and the International Division (www.drgwrr.com/id) of the NMRA. View Lex's layouts as well as his published articles on modelling at www.drgwrr.com.

... Susan Parker

Well, here we are again, some five years after tearing down my last layout! The new and improved D&RGW is well under way.

You might recall my first article, which described my last layout of the D&RGW, a point-to-point shelf design with two short pullout islands (Narrow Gauge and Short Line Gazette - July/Aug 1990, "Chama to Pagosa Springs in On3"). Following this article was one about tearing down the layout after finally completing it (Narrow Gauge and Short Line Gazette - March/April 1996 "Been There...Done That!"). In that article I stated that the building of the layout was the journey for me and that journey was now complete. I had planned on selling my home at that time as we were expecting to become "empty-nesters". We considered downsizing but after a year, one daughter remained, another moved back, as did her brother. Also, we were particularly happy with our home as my wife and I had designed and built it and after looking at other homes on the market, we could not find one that suited us as well. We decided to remain. So I planned to rebuild the layout with a better plan in mind, a better solution for construction (should I move in the future and take the layout with me) and better viewing and operation for groups of people.

PLANNING

Over the years, I had learned a great deal from the last layout, honing my skills and finding new modeling materials. Fortunately, I had saved most of my structures and all the rolling stock and locomotives which gave me a decided advantage in time, considering I was several years older with less agility and poorer eyesight. Take note that if you plan on rebuilding your layout you should really consider these things.



Since my children no longer used the basement of my home, I decided to extend the layout space slightly. After many years with layouts of point-to-point design, I opted for a loop for continuous running. This time there would be no pullout islands as you can see in the plan of the last layout in the earlier Gazette. The mainline would be generally the same length as before.

I began studying various space plan options to maximize the mainline run while examining both viewing and scenery options. First, I sketched various ideas of the benchwork layouts to scale. Then I studied the pros and cons of each and settled on one. I then put this sketch into a CADD drawing. By using layers, I developed the track plan, the benchwork framing and the ceiling /lighting plan with great accuracy. Elevations were set for the 4% grades, typical for the D&RGW.

I have loved the charm and simplicity of Chama since first visiting the area some years ago and I decided that I would model the Chama yards again, but this time I would give it some added length to capture the true feel of its design. The yards being long and narrow lend themselves well to a shelf layout. It was this clue that launched the idea of an island straight down the centre of the room, viewable from both sides and wider than the perimeter shelf. This would allow backdrop murals on opposing walls to work on both sides of the island with a natural built-in distance between layout and wall murals. The track on this four foot wide tabletop is reachable from both sides.

CONSTRUCTION

Looking at the new plan you will see the wall closest to the yards incorporates the close background of Chama as viewed from Terrace Avenue, while the wall farthest from the island features mountain ranges and valleys visible behind the town as viewed from the yards. In both cases aisles are wide, ranging from 42" to 72", enabling people to safely pass each other as well as being able to hold several people on both sides. The track along this back wall descends out of view as viewed from the front aisle, leaving only the mountain ranges in sight.



This island is approximately thirty-seven feet long and leads into a shelf surrounding the remainder of the room as the track meanders out from Chama from both directions. I planned to minimize the support structure for simplicity and so the island was supported with pairs of legs eight feet apart while the shelf layout was supported by twenty four inch wall hung gussets five feet four inches apart. I felt it was important not to lay track beyond my reach for maintenance, so two feet was selected as the maximum reach for the perimeter shelf and four feet for the double sided island.

The average height is fifty-two inches in the yards for best viewing. Sixteen inches was later added to the side of the yards for the buildings along Terrace Avenue facing the yards after all the track and scenery was complete.

In order to avoid the problems I had in dismantling the last layout and removing it from the basement, I decided to build the new one as demountable modules. A tray, or frame, was constructed using 1" x 3" clear pine that would rest on the main "L" girders, secured by screws from below. These never went beyond eight feet in length so that they could be easily separated and transported out of the house with minimal damage. All wiring passed through pre-drilled holes and looped at these tray joints. They could be cut here during disassembly. This extra looped wire would make for easier future reconnection. A 'boiler gray' fascia fronts the layout eliminating the need for drapes and braced by gussets hung from the trays. I believe this colour to be the best choice as it is both neutral and dark, does not detract from the colour of the layout, but instead highlights it. Black is a little too intense for the fascia so I opted for the gray, or charcoal.



Perhaps one of the most important steps in preparing for the layout is to prepare the room first. I recommend finishing the floor and all the walls that will have the backgrounds. Install a ceiling to hold lighting while concealing all the house construction, this will also prevent dust from falling from above onto the layout. A white ceiling will reflect all the ambient light making the lighting of the layout more efficient. I painted the background murals prior to scenery. As with the last layout, fluorescent lighting was used for general overall illumination while halogens were used for accents. Again, I have included my popular thunderstorm at one of the layout. The background at this end has the dark storm clouds. Speakers are mounted in the ceiling at this point for the storm and lightening sounds. This is reinforced with the strobe light that bounces off the ceiling from a hidden source.

After the benchwork was complete, I set out to eliminate the square corners of the room. I changed these to curves only above the benchwork. To do this, I used illustration board adhered to the wall at each end. I then taped and feathered drywall compound into the wall. The board is only a sixteenth of an inch thick so it takes very little feathering and will require very little repair work when removed. It is still flexible, but won't be handled anyway.

I primed the board with the wall and painted the backgrounds across it. I then painted the walls a "sky" blue above the benchwork and feathered a light blue into it towards the bottom. Below the benchwork, I painted the walls dark brown as this matched my carpet.

An alternate would be to paint the walls to match the gray of the fascia. The fully exposed wall along one side of the aisle was painted similarly, dark brown along the bottom and blue above. This blue area started about three inches below the yard tabletop and extended to the ceiling. I did this so that when viewing from just above the tabletop from the centre aisle, only the mural would be seen as a backdrop to the yard. This was very realistic considering it was four feet beyond the layout. Trees along the layout edge formed a transition to the backdrop.



I installed four control panels for each of the main operating areas. This allows one operator to remain at the station while the other follows the train with the remote controls.

I carried over the two PFM units with SDS remote controls from the last layout. All the control units are mounted in cabinets hung under the layout out of sight. I preset all the controls. This keeps a simple appearance while keeping fingers off the controls



VIEWING



So, as you can see, the height of the table and the extra aisle widths will provide good viewing. The track design gives both good yard operation and plenty of it to achieve much realism in reflecting the prototype. Terrace Avenue in the town of Chama overlooks the yards and is being completed along one side. This provides an immediate backdrop to the yards from one side with the distant mountains beyond. Beyond the yards, the track meanders in narrow gauge fashion through countryside with stops at Osier with sheep pens, Dallas with a stamp mill and a spur leading up into the mountain to Windy Windrim Gold Mine. There are many operating points both in the yards and along the right-of-way. The Chama River meanders along the front of the layout where the tracks follow it just above the surface. Trestles and bridges abound as well as tunnels and rock faces to contrast with the pastures in the valleys and the flat terrain of the yards.

The "new" journey continues...