

Fifty years as a model railroader

Bob Brown earns MMR #215

BY BOB BROWN, MMR

I am 61 years old, have been married for 38 years to my wife, Irene, and retired last year after 35 years of teaching fifth and sixth graders in the Palo Alto Unified School District in Palo Alto, Calif.

I became interested in model railroads when I discovered a copy of the October 1944 *Model Railroader* on a newsstand. In the intervening 50 years I have had a wonderful time with our hobby.

Soon after I discovered model railroading, my parents gave me a used O-gauge American Flyer train set for Christmas. It was not easy to find train sets during the war, and this was the best present they ever gave me — I still have it.

After playing with the train set for several years, I decided to go into HO. It was about 1947 — I worked during the summer, and saved enough money to buy a Varney Dockside, enough track for a loop and a 6-volt battery. I also bought a 4 x 8-foot, war surplus, plywood blackboard. The blackboard had hundreds of hooks in it. Once I had removed the hooks (I still have some of them), I laid the loop of track, assembled the Dockside, and hooked up the battery. I don't think I ever got the locomotive around the loop without it derailing. And, the batteries kept burning out and oozing all over the layout.

My parents took pity on me and gave me a Pittman power pack and a Varney F-unit diesel. Things began looking up and my locomotives began staying on the track.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, I came under the influence of pioneers in our hobby such as Hugh Boutell, Dick Andrews, Jack Alexander, Ted Collins, John Allen and Cliff Grandt; and began modeling in HO_{n3}. I built a small diorama of Nevada City on the Nevada County Narrow Gauge Railroad that won a youth talent contest in 1950.

About 1953 I changed to O gauge and traded in all my HO trains for a Varney ten-wheeler. I worked during the summers, and bought and assembled a Lobaugh 0-6-0, built a layout, and several trains made up of kit and scratchbuilt cars.

In 1955 I married Irene and was almost immediately drafted into the Navy. While in the service I built several O-gauge traction models. When I came out of the service I began teaching and became interested in building O-gauge British prototype models.

Around 1960 I switched to On3 and 1/4 inch AAR finescale (now called Proto-48) standard gauge modeling. In 1964 I started a little magazine called *Finelines*, devoted to the spread of information on finescale modeling. Then I began modeling in On2.

My 20-foot long On2 model of the Wiscasset wharf on the Wiscasset, Waterford & Farmington Railroad was exhibited at the 1968 NMRA Convention in San Francisco, and featured in the August 1969 *Model Railroader*. During these years, pioneer fine scale modelers, and contest winners, Lee Klaus, and Bill Coffey influenced me to enter the world of contest model building. I was fortunate to win many awards. Nothing improves your

modeling more than going up against the best model builders in the hobby in national contests. My all-time best contest was at the 1971 NMRA Convention in London, where I won three first places, and the Brass Lantern Award. Customs did not know what to do with the lantern and confiscated it. It took me months to get that lantern back.

In 1975 *Finelines* merged with the *Slim*

Gauge News to become the *Narrow Gauge and Short Line Gazette*. Irene and I are very proud of our magazine. It's been so successful because of the support of all the advertisers, authors, dealers, columnists, readers and most especially our art director Sharon Olsen, of Just SO Design and typographer John Bird of John Bird Design.

During this time I also built a portable On3 logging layout I called Tuolumne Forks. This layout was featured in the August 1975 *Model Railroader*. In 1980 I began building the present On3 version of Tuolumne Forks. It's a logging and tourist railroad, and allows me to build the funky logging locomotives and equipment I love. I have written many articles about the layout in the *Gazette*, and the layout was featured in Volume 16 of Allen Keller Productions *Great Model Railroads*.

I am also interested in collecting examples of early narrow-gauge models built by those pioneers who inspired me to go into the hobby. I have many models built by Jack Alexander, Vince Ryan, and Hugh Boutell. I find the early history of our hobby fascinating, and feel the models of these pioneers should be preserved — I plan to donate my collection to a museum. (If anyone knows of any pioneer models please let me know care of the *Gazette*.)

I also collect model railroad magazines and books, and I am well on my way to having just about every magazine published in the United States — I also have many model railroad magazines from England and other countries.

My most recent modeling adventure is my off and on attempts to build a garden railroad. I am now doing some serious planning, and I am even cleaning up the back garden. Editing and publishing the *Gazette*, working on Tuolumne Forks, collecting vintage models, seeking old railroad magazines and books, and building that garden railroad should make my second 50 years in the hobby equally as satisfying as my first 50 years. •

