



# The Central Missouri & Southern Story

Maggie, CM&S's old ten-wheeler, emerges from Tunnel #1 along Millers Creek and begins her downgrade drift back to Willow Grove.

## A Newbie's Progress

**By Mike Chambers**

Photos by the author

**B**efore reading the account which follows, it must be clearly understood that the author did not come into this world having an innate love of trains. Nor was his childhood filled with the endless joys of owning a Lionel train set. As a result, he did not enter

the hobby through any of the usual means. But he did progress through the usual childhood stages of model building: boats, planes, tanks, and cars — especially cars, hot rods, '32 Ford 5-Window Coupes, oh my, yes — and so he brought with him a lifelong love of model building. It just never occurred to him that with model railroading some amount of research might be required. After all, research was the responsibility of the

kit manufacturers, right? Now all of this must be distinctly understood, or what could be excused as ignorance on his part simply becomes stupidity.

## The Beginnings

Back when I was first getting started in the hobby, a veteran modeler offered some advice. "Pick yourself a prototype," he said, "and model it as faithfully as you can."

Being the “newbie” that I was, I asked why.

“Well,” replied the veteran, “two reasons actually. You new guys see these John Allen pictures in the magazines, and you all start thinking you can do what he’s doing. And it just ain’t so. There’s only one John Allen, and even he’s not doing everything entirely kosher.”

I wanted to ask what he meant by that, but he pressed on. “A lot of you new guys start out wanting to freelance everything, do it your way. To my mind, that’s the quickest way to winding up with a pile of nothing. You’ll start making mistakes all along the way, and after a year or so you’ll be so frustrated that you’ll quit. Then you’re gone from the hobby. Nope, the best way is to pick yourself a prototype and model it. It’s hard to go wrong when you start right.”

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To me, this was good stuff. Not only was this guy a veteran modeler, he was also one of the Saturday morning regulars at the local train shop. Why this fellow could rattle off the names and nomenclatures of a half dozen diesels quicker than I could remember my wife’s first name.

So I took his advice. I picked a prototype. I chose the Santa Fe. I had no particular reason for doing so, other than the fact that I was aware of a large Santa Fe yard in Kansas City’s Argentine district. And I remembered being fascinated years before by ads in *Boy’s Life* for a Santa Fe diesel engine. In short, hurdle number one to my having a “dream layout” had been cleared.

In short order I purchased an Atlas track planning book, picked a plan that required 6’ X 12’ benchwork, got all of the required snap track, turnouts, switch machines, control panel goodies, and - for good measure - a carton of cork roadbed strips. I also bought a highly recommended book on scenery. And of course, I started buying anything and everything that had ATSF lettering on it — including a plastic coffee mug with a Santa Fe herald emblazoned on it. I had a prototype and I was really modeling it!

### **The doubts begin**

But as the weeks and then months went by, and the layout actually began to take shape, I started to feel uneasy. For one thing, I wasn’t sure where my Santa Fe was located. Scenically, it appeared as though some giant had maliciously torn out part of the desert southwest and had plopped it down smack in the middle of the Midwest. I felt lost. I had never seen the desert Midwest or anyplace like it before.

Then there was the issue

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One of the author’s earlier attempts to model the Santa Fe. This scene was photographed on his second layout attempt, c. 1981. Where the heck is it supposed to be, though?



Central Missouri & Southern Shay #1 crosses the long trestle on Millers Creek with a string of empty gons. The gons will be dropped off at Fischer's Quarry to be loaded with crushed limestone.

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of towns and industries to be served by my Santa Fe. While I loved looking at their representations in the track plan, on the layout they were as unfamiliar to me as the hodge-podge landscape they sat in.

Furthermore, I was beginning to realize that my Santa Fe had no reason to exist; it didn't interchange with any other line, it served just three oddball industries on two short sidings, and it basically went nowhere except round and round a 12-foot-long figure 8.

Finally I listened to the disquieting little voice within that kept saying, "This isn't right; it's not what you want." So I sought out my old friend,



the veteran modeler.

His advice turned out to be a variation on his original theme: pick a new a new railroad if I wasn't happy with my original choice and pick a new track plan — one with plenty of operating opportunities, if necessary. But above all, and regardless of what I chose, model the prototype.

## Abandonment

As the ensuing years went by, I attempted to follow the veteran's advice. By 1999, though, I was finished with it: I made the decision to abandon more than 20 years worth of halfhearted and generally ill-conceived attempts to replicate — at various times and in no particular order — portions of the Santa Fe, Katy, Frisco, and Missouri Pacific railroads. During those years, I also dabbled with the idea of modeling the Wabash, the D&RGW, the RGS, and the Rock Island. (This is not to say, though, that those years were a total waste of my time. During that time, I learned

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It's not the first time Silas McGinty and his mule have held up traffic in the middle of Millers Creek. If someone would just tie up them durned dogs, things could be helped along right smartly.



Another of the author's early attempts. Titled "Break Time," this particular scene won Second Place in the Model Photos Category at the NMRA's 1984 National Convention in Kansas City, Missouri.



Nichols Wood Products and Weiry & Sons Well Drilling are both important sources of revenue for the Central Missouri & Southern.



The air is always pungent around Sasson Vinegar's "tank farm," but like their slogan says, it's the "taste worth repeating."



a good deal about scratch and kit building, scenery construction, and many other related activities. I also won three awards at an NMRA National Convention, several more at local meets, and had some photos published in the national hobby press.)

The trouble was, as I attempted to model each prototype "flavor of the day," I would begin to feel tied down, and my interest in both the prototype and layout would drift. Although I had long since quit using published track plans, none of my own seemed to capture the essence of the prototype under consideration. Furthermore, I found myself immensely attracted to structure kits — especially of the "finescale" variety — that had nothing to do with whichever prototype town or industry I was attempting to model. Finally, I did not want to model specific operating procedures. In short, I needed to be free of the old veteran's advice.

### **A New Layout: the Givens and Druthers**

So in June, 1999, I decided to completely freelance a layout. The first thing I did was make out a list of what I wanted in my freelanced railroad as well as what I would have to live with. (John Armstrong refers to this stage of layout planning as "identifying the 'Givens and Druthers.'") As I worked and reworked the list over the next several days, this is what emerged:

✓Scope: No Class 1 railroad. My freelanced railroad would be a local carrier, probably a short line.

✓Locale: The layout would be set in my home state, Missouri. More specifically, Missouri's Ozarks. No more trying to model regions of the country that I had seen only in books or that I had visited only briefly years before. No more desert Midwest!

✓Time/Era: Early 1900's. I realized a long time ago that I preferred the steam era. Diesels do not fascinate me.

✓Cities/Towns: This was an easy one because of the choice of locale and era: small towns only and no large, space-eating rail yards.

✓Industries: Again, this was easy, given the locale and era: logging and railroad tie production had been important industries in the Ozarks until the late 1920's. Coal mining had been a major industry in mid-Missouri for decades, as had lead mining on the eastern side of the state. Just to keep things simple, however, I decided to focus on logging and tie production.

✓Operations: Like most model railroaders, I wanted my railroad to be operationally interesting. As a result, I tried to take the "best" of what I felt the prototypes had to offer. For example, the Missouri Pacific ran long spurs to various tie collection points and sawmills

in the woods and small towns of the Ozarks. Likewise, the Katy (M-K-T) served a string of small towns along the Missouri River as it crossed the state, delivering goods and picking up agricultural products along the way. I saw no reason why my Central Missouri & Southern (as I had now named it) couldn't do both: two or three small towns with appropriate industries to be switched and a long spur line to the Osage Valley Tie

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& Lumber Co.'s millsite deep in the hills. Furthermore, the CM&S could interchange with one of the prototypes, thus giving me a reason to keep most of the rolling stock I had accumulated over the years.

### **The final decision: Ozarks Logging**

For the first time in a long time, I felt genuinely excited by the modeling possibilities. So much so, in fact, that I wrote the following description of my new railroad just to see if my ideas held up:

The CMS is a standard gauge, HO scale road set in the beautiful Missouri Ozarks during the early 1900's. While

it hauls commodities of all sorts to the small towns nestled in the rugged hills and valleys of southern Missouri, its main sources of revenue come from serving nearby logging and milling operations. The Osage Valley Tie & Lumber Company, a wholly owned subsidiary, is also an important source of income for the CMS.

When completed (if the owner lives long enough to see completion!), the CMS and OVT&L together will occupy a 14' X 23' space in the basement. Since yellow pine and white oak logging was a major Ozarks industry - along with railroad tie production - during the early 1900's, several highly detailed scenes are planned along the right of way.

Operationally, no particular scheme has been decided upon beyond the decision to provide for continuous running in the ever-evolving track plan. In order to maintain some semblance of historical accuracy for the region, motive power consists of 2-8-0's, 2-6-0's, and a couple of 2-truck Shays.

Construction began the next day.

It's important to understand that no track plan — other than what I see in my head — exists. I'm truly freelancing... and I'm having a blast! This doesn't mean I change things every other day, though. Over the last three

years, I have stuck to the original vision: approximately two-thirds of the layout will be devoted to the CM&S; the remainder will be devoted to the OVT&L's logging and milling operations.

### Construction methods

All of the layout will be constructed using modified L-girder "modules." Because model photography is an important facet of the hobby for me, I wanted the ability to complete a given area in a reasonable amount of time and photograph it. Modular construction seemed the best choice. To date, a 3' X 8' "module" with the town of Miller's Creek is completed; the benchwork and most of the subroadbed for a 5' X 8' peninsula is also completed.

For the last 14 months, however, I have done virtually nothing more with the layout.

Instead, I have devoted my time to building highly detailed structures and dioramas for the OVT&L. I knew with the level of detail I wanted in the logging area, much time would be required. I now have two finished and two more under way.

I had intended to complete all four models before returning to the basement, but the lure of "heavy construction" is becoming almost irresistible. I may be back to building modules and "getting plastered" in the basement very soon.

In retrospect, while the old veteran's advice might have been right for some other model railroader, it was wrong for me. But he was right about two things: there was only one John Allen. And you can't go wrong when you've started right.

I have finally started right.



For additional information about the CM&S, as well as other photos, please visit

<http://homepage.mac.com/michael21/CMS-RR-Co>.

Other websites of interest:

Railroad-Line Forums

<http://railroad-line.com>

Badger Creek RR. (HO logging layout)

<http://www.badger-creek.co.uk>

Rusty Stumps (Finescale logging supplies for all scales)

[www.rusty-stumps.com](http://www.rusty-stumps.com)

The Gauge Forums

<http://www.the-gauge.com>

Finescale Railroader Magazine and forums

[www.finescalerr.com](http://www.finescalerr.com)

The interior west wall of the Osage Valley Tie & Lumber Company's machine shop. While cluttered with junk and tools, the machine shop is nonetheless a safe work environment. The OVT&L's shop foreman, Charles Osha, won't have it any other way.