

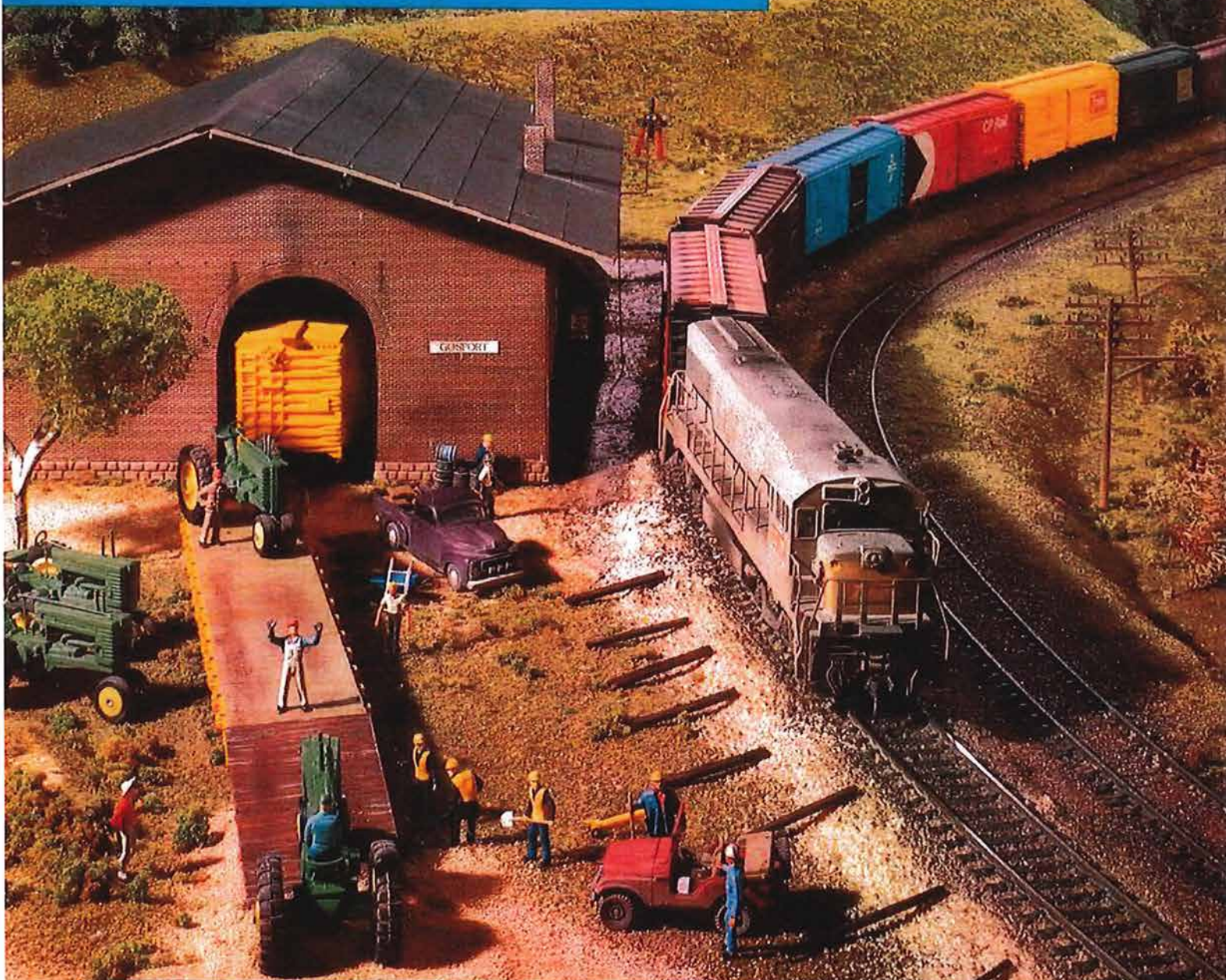
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**The Railroad Model Club of Atlanta
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The Railroad Model Club of Atlanta

This 41-year-old club operates the 31-year-old O scale Great Southern Lines

BY THE MR STAFF

PHOTOS BY C. DONN FLETCHER / INFORMATION SUPPLIED BY RILEY O'CONNOR

PROBABLY not a half-dozen model railroad clubs in the United States can claim anything like the longevity of the Railroad Model Club of Atlanta. The club was formed February 22, 1937, when a group of model railroad enthusiasts held an evening meeting at the suburban Atlanta home of Ingram Dickinson. There were 17 charter members.

Since that first meeting the club has met every week without an interruption, a world war and natural calamities notwithstanding. Only rarely has the club gone so far as to meet only briefly and reschedule the regular Monday evening meeting for Tuesday. In 1973 several members fought their way through a devastating ice storm to preserve the tradition.

Once formed, the club got down to the most important order of business — building a layout in the space obtained at the Sobeco Tannery in Norcross, Ga. Work on this layout did not proceed well, however. One major inconvenience was the 15-mile ride from Atlanta to Norcross.

In 1938 the club was able to move into Atlanta when it obtained a 21 x 103-foot space in the fifth floor loft of Southern Belting Co.'s factory.

A new layout was begun, and in the years between 1938 and 1946 it was nearly completed, with over 1900 feet of track and 93 turnouts. The trains were running and the scenery was more than half complete when the club learned that its space had fallen victim to Southern Belting's expansion plan.

One of the members saved the day when he bought a former potato chip warehouse and leased the 24 x 73-foot second floor to the club on a long-term basis. The layout was dismantled and moved piece by piece to this new location, which has been home to the club and its Great Southern Lines ever since.

Once the move was complete, each of the members was invited to present his ideas for a new track plan. From these suggestions the present layout design was developed.

Surveying equipment was used to bisect the layout space and construction was begun. It was almost too late when the members discovered that the room was not square — installing the last few sections of curve became a major engineering achievement.

The Golden Spike, fashioned by a dentist who was a friend of one of the members, was driven in October 1952, and MR's Editor Emeritus, Linn Westcott, then Editorial Director, was there and photographed the occasion. The spike is still there, located in the fifth tie north of the Tyler truss bridge.

The present-day layout's statistics are staggering. There are 2400 feet of track in the main line and yards (that's about 21½ scale miles), 106 turnouts, and 125,000 spikes in the 40,000 ties. The club estimates that about 40,000 hours have gone into the layout's construction.

Great Southern Lines is a free-lance intermediate-size railroad running through the great American Southwest, the sort of

country that a traveler would see in New Mexico, Nevada, or Arizona.

The hour is established as early evening on a summer's day, and the room's back wall has been painted to represent the western horizon at this time. Most of the landscape's details can be seen, but some artificial illumination is required in the twilight, thus showing off the club's use of lighting to good advantage. The stations are lighted and there is a handmade chandelier in one station.

Despite the abundance of detail on the layout, figures are not used, the club's philosophy being that they are unrealistic because they are stationary — real people and animals move around.

The point-to-point layout design represents the railroad's route from Ensley, the northern end of the line, down to Danville at the southern end. There is an intermediate division point at Piedmont Junction.

At Ensley, Great Southern Lines interchanges with one of the transcontinental giants. From there the line is double-tracked on the Wallace Division down to Piedmont Junction.

From Piedmont Junction two single-track main lines continue on south by different routes to Danville. These are the Clayton and Tyler divisions, named for the largest stations on their respective routes. In joining each other at Danville they form a loop between Piedmont Junction and Danville. These loops, together with the freight and passenger loops at Ensley, can be used for continuous running when that is desired.

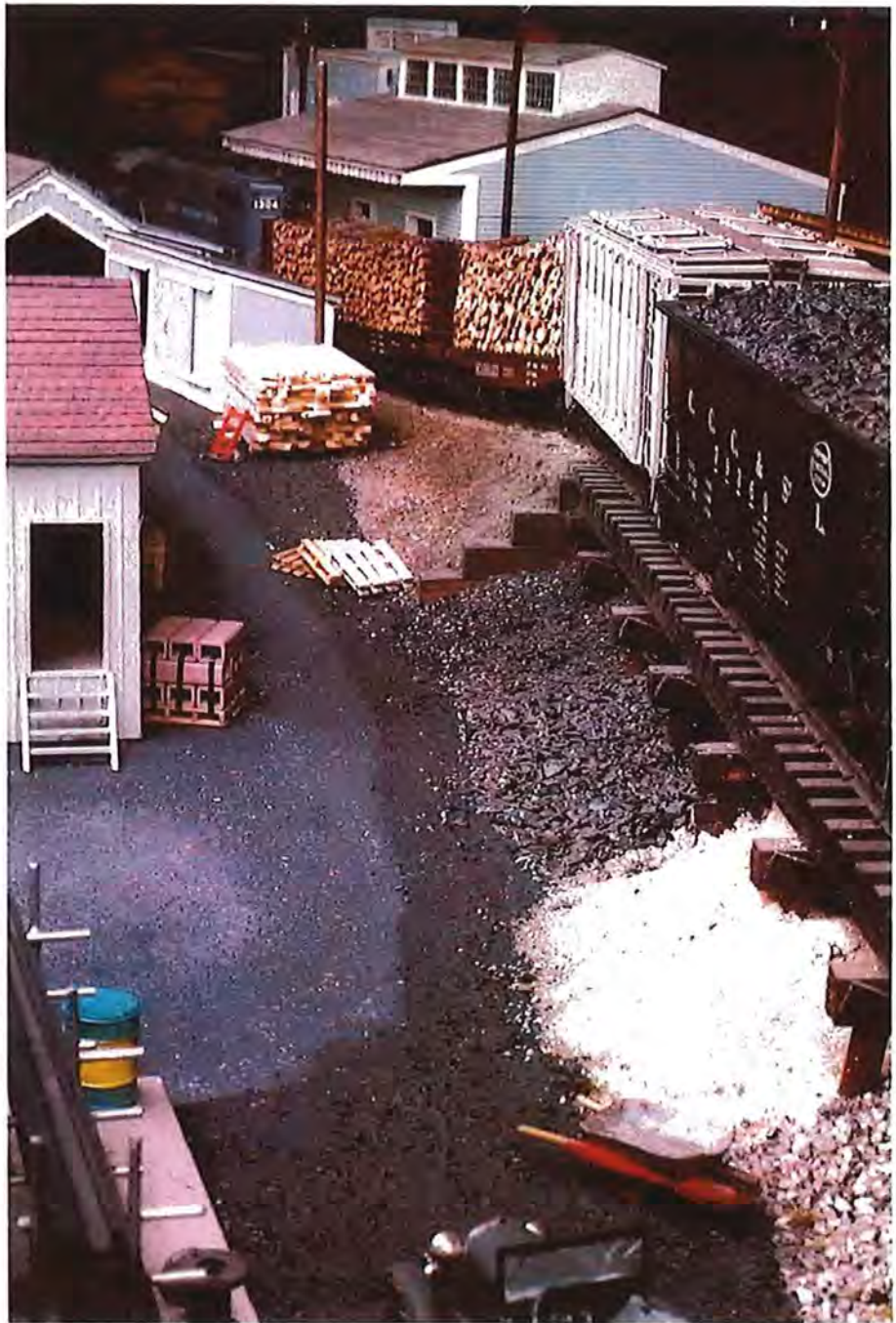
One interesting layout feature is found at Lakeland, on the Clayton Division, where a branch line climbs the mountain to serve Scott Mine No. 1. The steep grades and sharp curves on this branch require service by a geared locomotive, and a hard-working O scale Shay is a spectacular sight.

At Ensley, as befits an important interchange point, there are extensive freight and passenger yards as well as an engine terminal and locomotive backshops. There are also extensive car storage facilities and switching yards at both Piedmont Junction and Danville, as well as passing sidings, yards, and industry spurs in the towns en route. Altogether, there are permanent storage facilities on the layout for 225 freight cars, 55 passenger cars, and 45 locomotives.

Operating sessions are held twice each month, and several trains can be operated simultaneously by timetable and by dispatcher. A telephone system connects the dispatcher with each tower and each mainline operator. The track circuits in each yard are set up electrically and mechanically by towermen. Cabs at each yard control switch engine operation, while a bank of five mainline cabs provides control of through trains.

The club achieves reliable operation by insisting that the rolling stock conform to NMRA standards. The rolling stock must also meet the club's own aesthetic requirements. For example, lights are required on all locomotives, and firemen and engineers are to be installed in steam locomotives that have room for them.

All of the rolling stock must also be equipped with the proper safety appliances. The club's *Official Guide* reveals some sound reasoning behind these rules:



A local switches Tyler Supply. Many layout details are epoxy castings made from scratchbuilt masters.

"... since the layout is assumed to be at least a second-class U. S. railroad enjoying interchange facilities, all equipment operating thereon should classify and come within the standards of the Association of American Railroads." Equipment inspections are performed on the third Monday of each month.

The rolling stock is owned by the individual members, and includes some 150 locomotives, 100 passenger cars, and 400 freight cars. Although ownership of equipment is not an absolute requirement for membership, it is certainly considered desirable. Some of the cars and engines were purchased ready to run, including some custom-built units, while others were made from kits or were scratchbuilt.

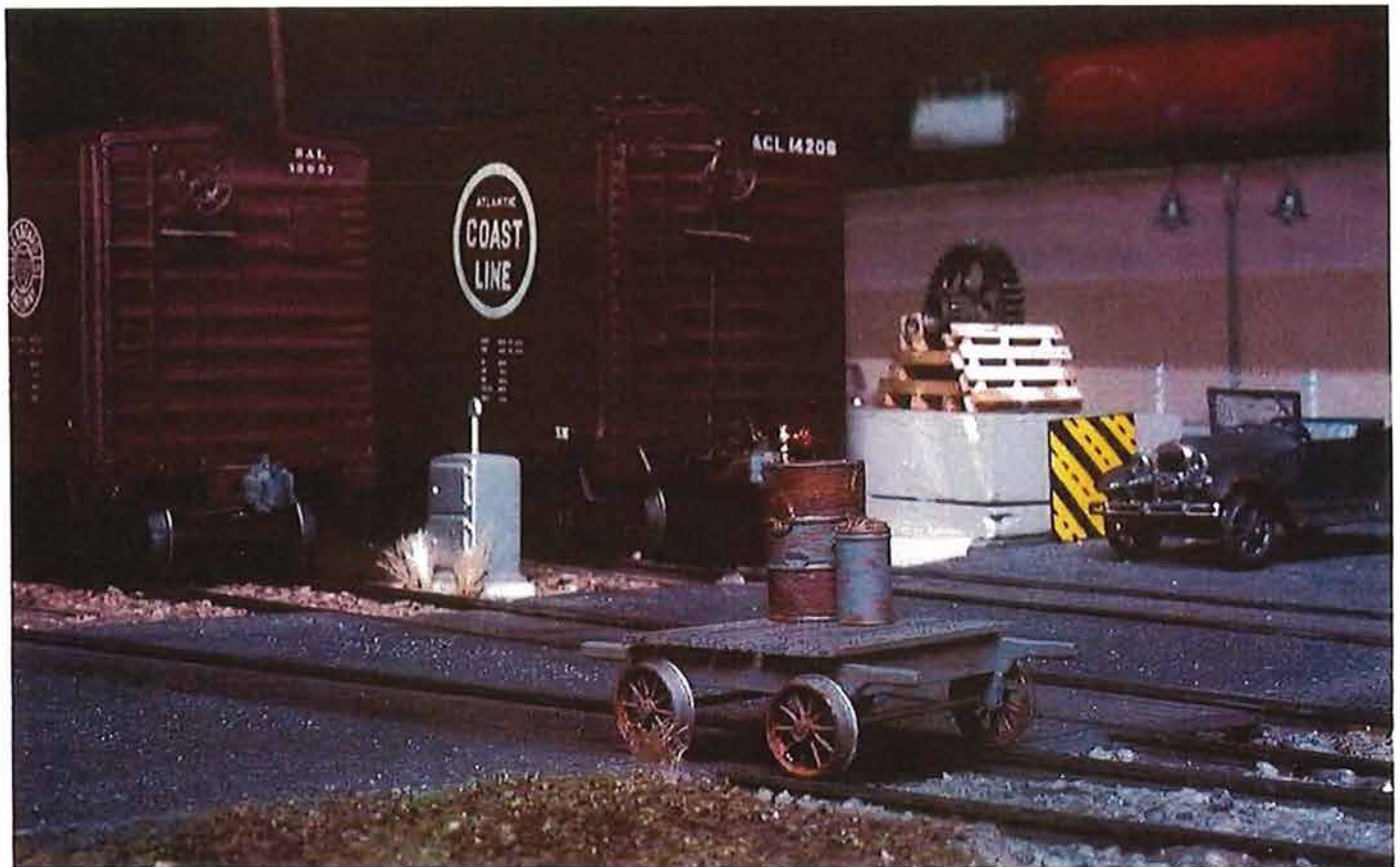
Riley O'Connor, who joined the club in 1972, points out that it is the people in the club who really make it go. The members

are diverse in their backgrounds and also in their skills. The younger members seem to have a slight edge with materials such as styrene and wood, while the older know more about metals and have extensive experience with old lines such as Auel, Scale-Craft, and Pierce.

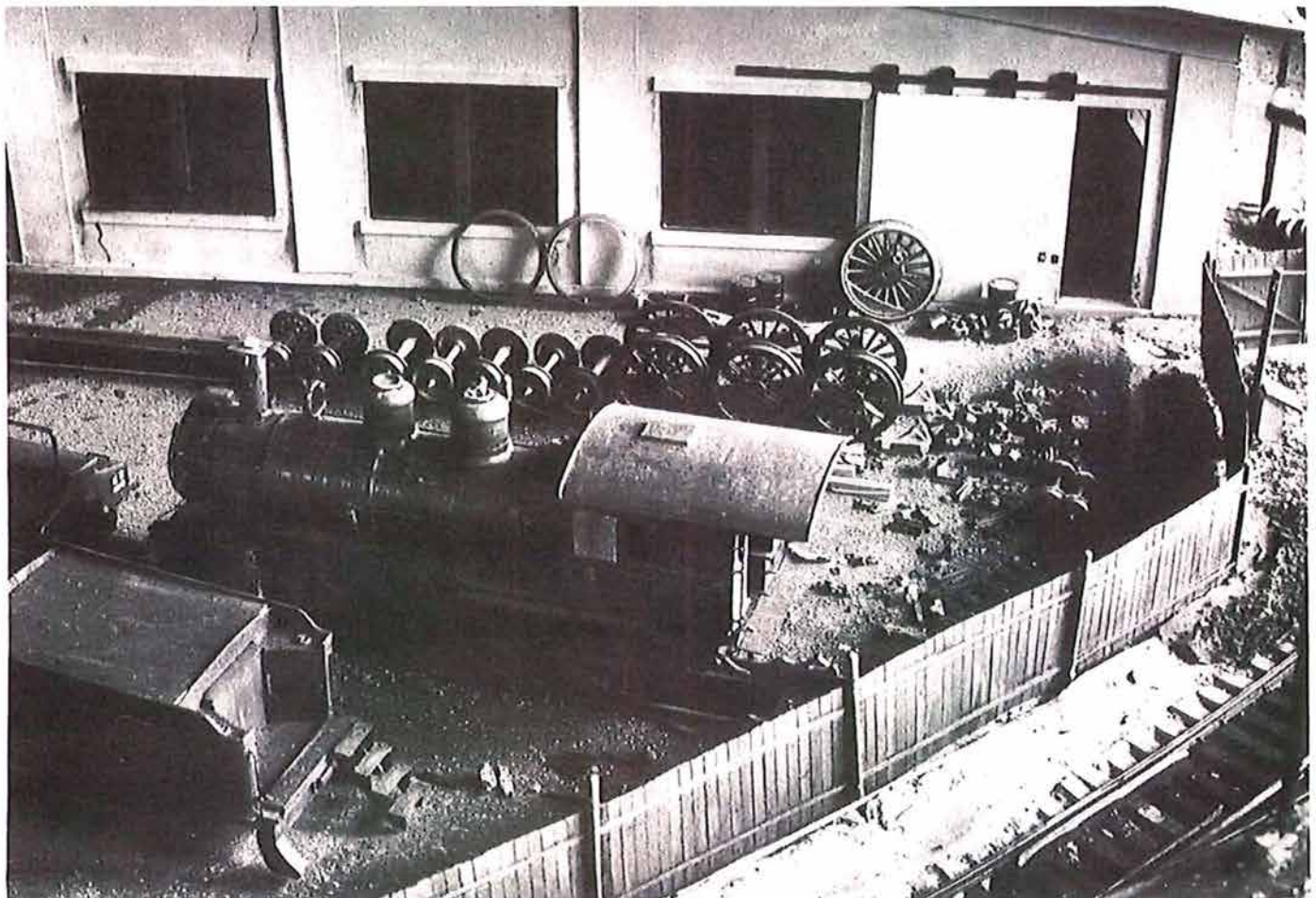
One member has a fair bit of experience with epoxy castings, and at least two have considerable expertise in the track department. Since there is no ready-to-run equipment — even Atlas equipment must be modified to meet wheel and coupler standards — there are an inordinate number of scratchbuilders in the club.

Like any other organization that has a lengthy history, the Railroad Model Club of Atlanta has its legends and oft-repeated anecdotes. The foremost of these among the Atlanta clubmembers is the tale of "the curtains."

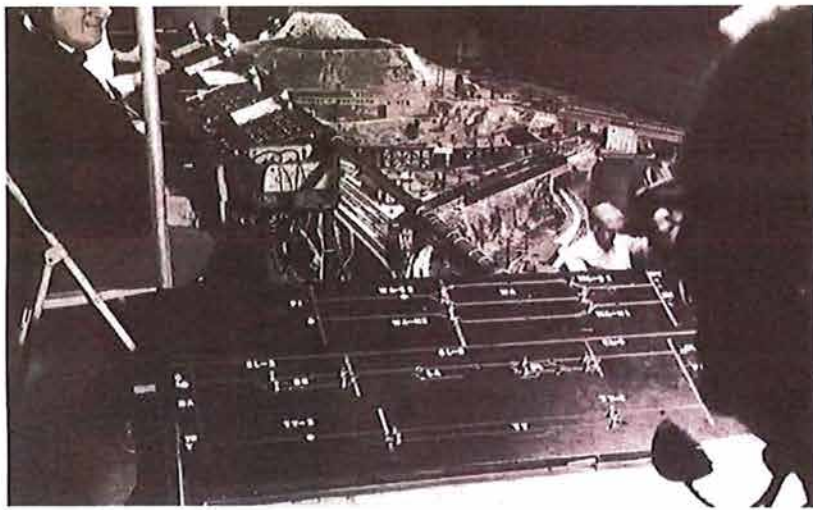
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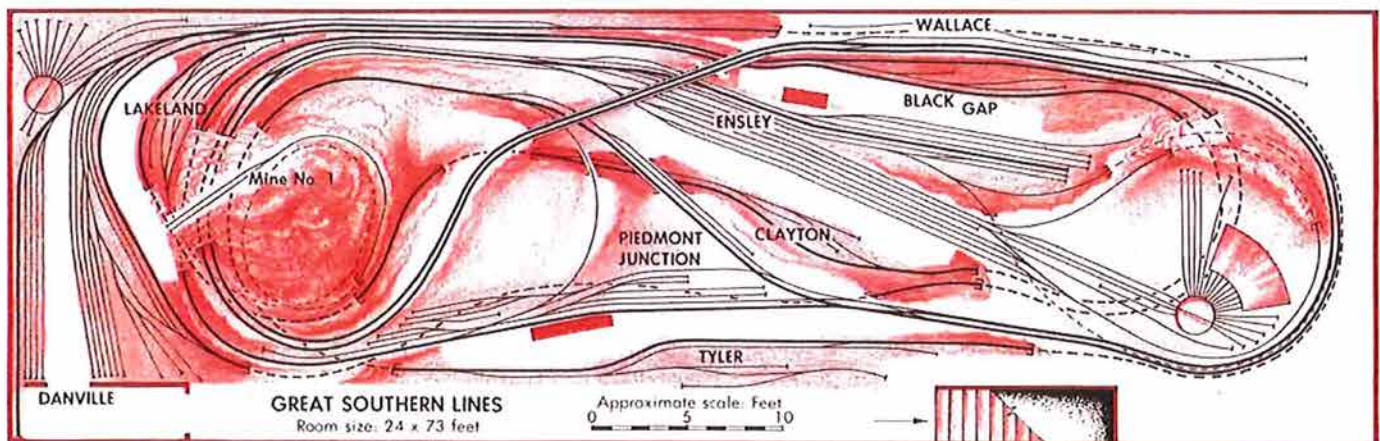
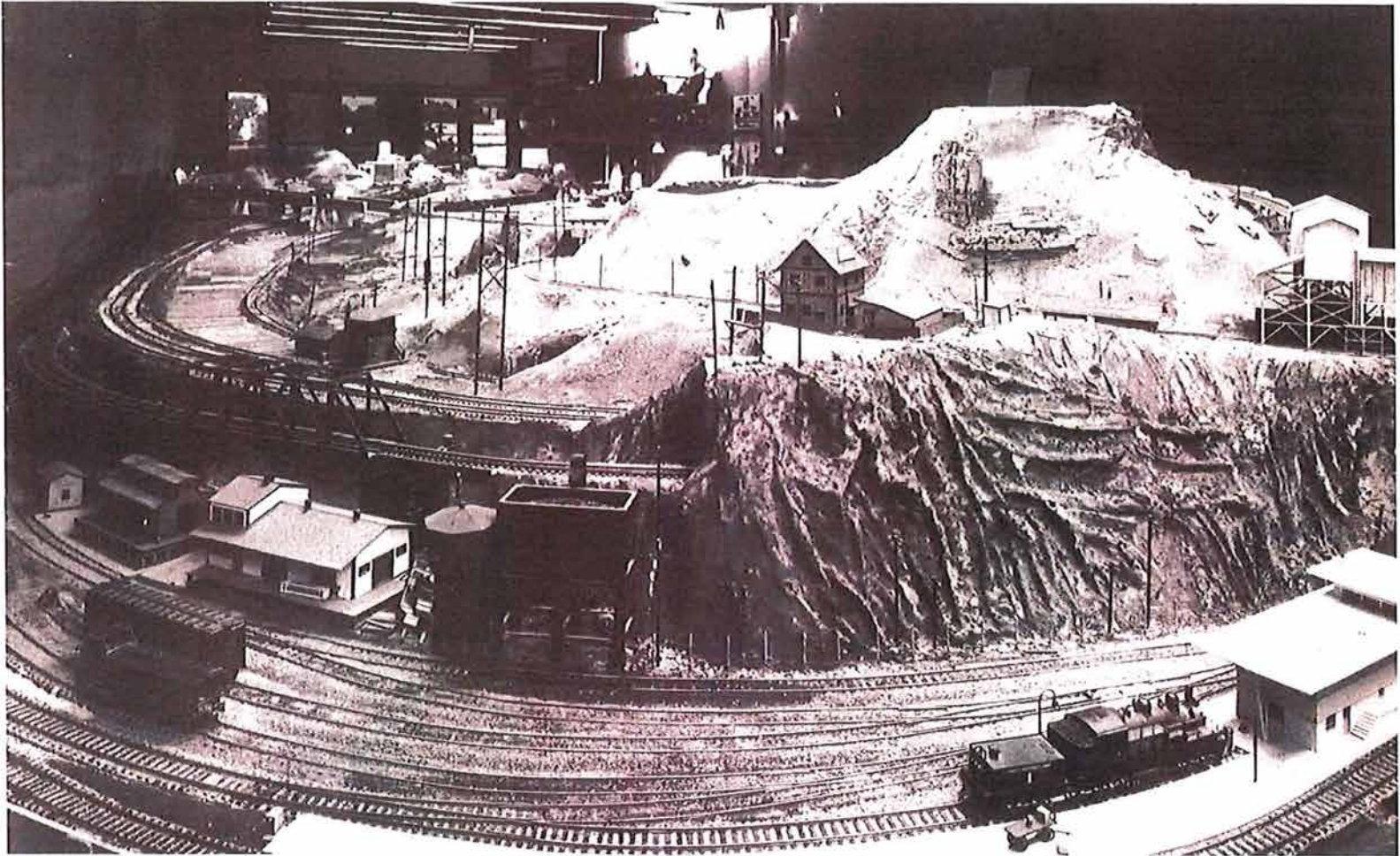
All is now quiet at Tyler, allowing this opportunity to study the fine detail on Great Southern Lines. It is always twilight on this O scale club layout.



This retired steamer, a rebuilt AHM Casey Jones, sometimes sees emergency boiler service at the Ensley roundhouse. This litter is typical roundhouse decor.



← Great Southern operators can see almost the entire layout from their high platform. The dispatcher's panel is in the foreground. Ensley is immediately beneath the dispatcher and Danville is at the far end of the room. The western horizon is painted on the wall to the right. ↓ Danville is the southernmost point on the layout. This busy area is sometimes the subject of unkind remarks because the towering mesa hides the trains there from the operators' platform, seen here at the far end of the room. Scott Mine No. 1, served by the Lakeland branch, is seen to the right.



Many years ago it was decided that curtains would be hung on the windows at the north end of the layout room. One administration after another promised to get the curtains up, but the job was never done, even though the curtain rods had long been installed.

Finally the curtains were sent to a dry cleaner for fireproofing. A thief broke into the plant and stole, among other things, the curtains.

The dry cleaner made good with replacements, but when the curtains were finally put up it was discovered that the rods had gone unused for so long that the cords had rotted.

One of the necessary elements for any successful organization is structure, and Riley O'Connor points out that the layout itself helps to provide it. The members busy themselves with maintenance on the first and third Mondays of the month and operate the railroad on the second and fourth Mondays.

Another key to the club's success is its well-thought-out *Official Guide*. There are enough rules and regulations to ensure good operation and a smoothly run club organization but not so many as to prove stifling.

Like any organization, the club has its occasional controversies — a recent one, for example, resulted in the decision to continue using Monarch couplers rather than switching to Kadees — but when these arise the by-laws provide the machinery to resolve them democratically and with a minimum of acrimony so that the members can get back to what the club is all about — running a railroad.



Linn H. Westcott.

▲Linn Westcott took this photo when the Golden Spike was driven on GS Lines 25 years ago. →The Golden Spike remains in place today. It is located in the area of the handcar shed and bridge approach at the lower left.

The vastness of Great Southern Lines is captured in this view of Piedmont Junction looking toward Enley. The Wallace Division connects these two points. A few cacti grow near the dry wash to the left.



