

The NMRA at 75 Years **A Look Back, A Look Ahead** by Dave Thornton – Central District Director

The NMRA has reached its 75th anniversary year. It's traditional upon reaching such a milestone to take a look back and see where the group has been and we will do that. But, we will also take a look ahead and try to project where we may go over the next 25 years to our centennial year in 2035. Even though preserving the past with our miniature time machines, called model railroads, is a big part of what model railroaders are about, our hobby has been a hotbed of change for the entire 75 year history of the NMRA.

The Formative Years

At the time of the founding of the NMRA in 1935, railroads were essentially steam powered affairs and the railroad modeling of the time largely reflected that fact. Even so, there was a core group that modeled the electric traction that was present at that time. Model railroaders modeled what they saw in their own way. The only standards for construction of trackwork and rolling stock, if you could call them that, were those used by the handful of toy train manufacturers in business at that time. Some used 6 volts DC, some 12 volts DC, some 16 volts AC, some even used 115 volts AC to power their trains. Some used inside third rail, some outside third rail, and some two rail. Traction modelers also had similar variations in what they were doing, such as overhead wire placement and size, operating voltages, and trolley pole or pantograph construction. Any efforts at standardization were largely limited to within local clubs that were springing up in many locales. Scale modelers were on their own as far as standards for anything was concerned.

As interest in the hobby of model railroading grew, promoted by model making magazines and groups of the day, the issue of the lack of interchangeability, became more and more of an impediment to the growth of the hobby. A number of model railroad clubs were being founded in the late 1920s and early 1930s and modelers gathered together to pool their efforts and build club layouts. What you built to run on your railroad might or might not have run with rolling stock built by others or on a railroad built by another or a club. During the early 1930s, one club in Columbus, Ohio and another in Pittsburgh traveled back and forth every month via train to visit each other's layouts. They discovered that the rolling stock from one club would not operate reliably on the other club's layout. The issue was that each club had their own standards and they were not the same. In 1934, these two clubs met in Columbus and then with other clubs in New York, Detroit, and Milwaukee. The object was to try and find common ground. They began to develop a vision of a national organization that would promote standards equipment from different area could interchange. This came to a head in 1935 when a call went out from the Model Railroad Club of Milwaukee (still in existence today) to have a National Convention on Labor Day weekend. The formation of a national organization was discussed at that convention by the 71 attendees. In a vote taken at an open meeting, the National Model Railroad Association was formed and a slate of officers was chosen.

The first order of business of the newly-formed NMRA was to develop standards for scale model railroads. The need for this was amply demonstrated when visitors brought equipment to run on the Milwaukee Union Terminal O Scale Club layout. Third rail shoes were constantly slipping off of the third rail, jamming, and causing derailments and other problems. Visitors said that the third rail was placed wrong and the hosts said that the visitor's third rail pickups were wrong. The convention nearly broke up before it got started! A standards committee, headed by Harry Bondurant, was formed and charged with developing standards and making a report at the next convention scheduled in 1936 in Chicago.

At the 1936 NMRA convention, again held on Labor Day, over 200 model railroaders and some manufacturers attended. The first O Scale standards, developed over the preceding year, were presented and tentative HO scale standards were developed and adopted by a committee formed at the convention. OO gauge standards were referred back to the manufacturers as only 2 OO scale modelers were present at the convention. A new slate of officers was chosen and a constitution and by laws were adopted. The NMRA had become a going concern. There were a number of tours held during the convention, starting a tradition that has continued to this day. The bulk of the membership was from existing model railroad clubs from various locales around the United States.

The 1937 convention was held in Detroit and the NMRA logo and membership pin were developed. By 1937, a number of Canadian model railroaders had joined which brought into question the name of National Model Railroad Association as the NMRA was now becoming an international organization. It was decided to keep the name as it was, but to recognize that Canada was included within the fold of the NMRA. Again, over 200 were in attendance with attendees coming from as far away as Massachusetts and Oklahoma.

The 1938 convention was held in Buffalo, New York with over 250 attendees. Prior to this convention, all business of the NMRA was held at the annual convention. The constitution and by laws were amended to allow future elections of officers and voting on standards to be handled by direct, mail in ballots. In addition, it was decided to have a paid business manager, whose job it would be to see that members would get something concrete in return for their dues. The convention included a fan trip on the NYC and a visit to the TH&B shops in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. In addition, there was a commercial exhibit of model railroad products.

The 1939 convention was held in New York City to take advantage of the 1939 New York World Fair and the large model railroad display in operation there. The question of HO scale automatic couplers was brought up and the need to produce a standard set of electrical symbols for model railroad wiring diagrams. It was decided to produce an NMRA yearbook for the following year. The first mention of model railroad operations was made at this convention with the first informal operating conference being held in an all night session in one of the hotel rooms. During the course of the convention, members received word of the opening of hostilities in Europe. World War II had begun.

Six months prior to the 1940 convention, the NMRA suddenly found itself without a business manager. No memberships had been processed, no Bulletins had been sent out, and a lot of mail had accumulated unopened, unprocessed, and unanswered. A. C. Kalmbach, the founder and publisher of Model Railroader magazine, stepped in to take over the position. Under his direction, regular publication of the Bulletin began, the membership list was put on Addressograph plates, a businesslike set of financial books was started, and a membership drive was held.

In 1940, the convention returned to Milwaukee, and was remembered as the "Battle of the Couplers" due to a long drawn out business meeting where the subject was discussed at great length. The 1940 convention was also the first in which special consideration was given for the women in attendance. A mix-up occurred when the 1941 convention was awarded to Peoria, Illinois, not realizing that Washington DC was expecting to be awarded the convention because of a gentleman's agreement made at the 1939 convention. As a result, the bylaws were amended to establish a rotation of the convention between geographical areas. Following the convention, the Eastern Region was formed and an Eastern Region meet was scheduled for March 7-9, 1941. The Eastern Region meet was disrupted by the largest blizzard since 1908, but the B&O did run a promised fan trip in spite of the weather.

NMRA membership reached 1350 by the 1941 convention, held in Peoria. The financial reports showed that the current \$0.50 dues was no longer sufficient to run the organization, so an increase to \$1.00 was proposed. There was some opposition, but the dues increase was passed, which allowed the organization to become self-sustaining. Clinics were given by several noted model railroaders on various aspects of the hobby. The first model contest was also held at the Peoria convention. In November 1941, the Pacific Coast Region held a weekend meeting.

The War Years

The 1942 convention was held in Rochester, New York. NMRA president, Paul Zickgraff had been drafted into the army during the preceding year. Vice president, Hugh Jack, who was scheduled to report for military service the week after the convention, presided at the affair. The local Rochester O and HO scale model railroad clubs, even with their ranks depleted by military service, did a fine job hosting the convention attendees. The present regional setup of the NMRA was formalized at the 1942 convention with proposed changes to the bylaws which were then approved by mail ballot later in the following year.

By 1943, there was a growing contingent of NMRA members on the west coast. Being separated by half a continent from the bulk of the NMRA members in the Midwest and east, there was little opportunity for the west coast members to attend or be part of the NMRA activities of the time. A movement started to form a separate west coast based association. Although the movement to start another association did not succeed, the west coast group did have their own meet for the first time. The 1943 convention was held in Cincinnati. Wartime travel and security photo restrictions necessitated the convention being stripped to the bare essentials. However, the 1943 convention also marked a major turning point in the NMRA with the proposed changes to the bylaws that empowered the regions to hold their own conventions and to initiate measures they wished to have presented at the 1944 national convention. Proposed standards for 3/16" scale, then known as CD scale were introduced, and then renamed S scale. Twelve volts, DC was also recommended as the electrical standard for HO, OO, and O scales, but then deferred back to the Standards Committee for more research.

The 1944 convention was held in Pittsburgh and attended by a record 250 plus members, even with the wartime travel restrictions. Standards reports were more complete than ever with recommendations (for standards) for bolster heights on trucks and king pin holes, therefore making interchangeable trucks possible. Manufacturing tolerances were also proposed so that manufacturer's efforts could be judged as to whether or not they were abiding by standards. Use of 12 volts DC was again recommended as were the proposed standards for S Scale. A proposed increase in the HO scale wheel flange depth was introduced and met with a lot of opposition that did not get resolved until months after the convention. A campaign to change in the by laws was proposed that would allow any group of members to introduce it's own slate of officers to run for election against those selected by the nominating committee was started at the 1944 convention.

Incoming president, Ed Ravenscroft, held an Executive Committee meeting in Cleveland in early 1945 to address several problems that were plaguing the NMRA due the wartime conditions. Membership had declined by almost 500. The Bulletin was behind schedule and no 1944 yearbook had been published. On the plus side, the treasury was solvent. A membership drive was organized and started, that resulted in the membership rolls increasing to over 500 members by the end of the year. Plans to get the Bulletin back on track were developed and initiated.

The 1945 convention was slated to be held in Detroit, but as convention time neared, it became apparent that wartime travel and convention restrictions would make it impossible to hold the convention, so it was postponed until 1946. In addition, the planned first postwar convention to be held on the west coast was also postponed. In late 1945, the first Standards Handbook was published and was so well received that the first two printings were completely depleted.

However, the Pacific Coast region was able to host a regional meet earlier in the year despite wartime restrictions and president Ravenscroft was able to attend, marking a new first for the NMRA.

The Postwar Years

By midyear 1946, the NMRA membership rolls had swelled to over 7000 members. The Bulletin, had gone from being behind schedule, to quarterly, to monthly, starting in February of 1946. Dues were raised from \$1.00 to \$1.50 to reflect the reality of meeting cost increases due to the wartime and postwar inflation. The 1946 convention was held in Detroit and hosted by the Detroit Model Railroad Club. Three months prior to the convention, the club was evicted from its wartime home on the third floor of a downtown building. In a Herculean effort, club members cut the layout into large pieces, shoved them out a third floor window into a sling suspended from a block and tackle anchored to the roof of the eight story building, lowered the layout pieces onto a flatbed truck, moved them across town to the New York Central Freight House, reassembled the layout, and had it running in time for the convention. It was one of four layouts on tour at the convention.

The 1947 convention was held in Oakland California in mid August, thus breaking away from the traditional Labor Day venue. Some of the Midwest and east coast members traveled to the convention on chartered passenger cars, starting a tradition that lasted for many years. This was the first time the NMRA convention had been held west of the Mississippi River and marked the fact that the NMRA was truly a national organization in more than name only.

The 1948 convention was held in Atlanta, Georgia.

The 1949 convention was held in Denver, Colorado. A paid NMRA office manager was hired for the first time.

The Fifties

The 1950 convention returned to Milwaukee. For the first time the convention was four days long, but returned to the Labor Day weekend time slot. In an unfortunate, tragic head on collision on an interurban fan trip associated with the convention, 10 members were killed. Coupler concerns were a top item of discussion.

The 1951 convention returned to New York City. Standards for a wide variety of prototype rail sizes were developed.

The 1952 convention was held in Portland, Oregon and was held in late August. Another charter passenger movement from the east to the convention was run. An ongoing debate on the lack of coupler standards developed that went on for many years. One camp was pushing for an automatic coupler and another pushed for one that looked realistic.

The 1953 convention was held in Toronto, Canada. The convention went back to a three day format. A committee began work on an HO Scale coupler. Great controversy developed when plastic was proposed as a material for couplers. The positions of Eastern, Central, and Western Vice President were created. Dues were raised from \$2.00 to \$3.00. Membership reached 10,600.

The 1954 Convention was held in Chicago. The positions of Eastern, Central, and Western Vice President were established, replacing the Vice President position. There was a great revival of activity to generate Data Sheets. The great coupler debate reached new heights as the coupler committee developed proposals for an automatic coupler.

The 1955 convention was held in Baltimore. The coupler committee designed the infamous proposed X2f coupler and several manufacturers began to manufacture it, even though it was not yet an approved NMRA standard.

The 1956 convention was held in St. Paul. The NMRA Conformance Warrant Seal was introduced and put into use. The coupler question was still a hot issue and use of the X2f coupler was even proposed for O scale. The use of NMRA Recommended Practice was proposed. The Southern Cross Region was established, comprising of Australia and New Zealand.

The 1957 convention was held in Houston. NMRA Recommended Practices were approved for use and the coupler debate continued.

The 1958 convention returned to Pittsburgh. The position formerly known as the Vice President was reestablished as the Executive Vice President. The coupler debate continued with the Universal Coupler Pocket design and further debate on the advisability of having a standard coupler.

The 1959 convention was held in San Diego and returned to a four day long format. A simplified presentation of NMRA Standards was introduced making all standards proportional by scale and with cleaned up tolerances. These were readily accepted by the manufacturers.

The Sixties

The 1960 convention returned to Chicago and celebrated the 25th anniversary of the NMRA. A proposal by the HIAA to increase HO flange size to 0.045 inches was investigated by the NMRA and it was determined that 0.025 inch flanges operated very well, so the proposal was denied. membership reached 11,799.

The 1961 convention was held in Cleveland, Ohio. National Model Railroad Week was established. The RP-25 wheel was introduced. Uniform model contest judging rules were put in place and the Achievement Program was chartered.

The 1962 convention was held in Montreal, Canada. The Distinguished Service Award and the Honorary Life member Award were established and presented for the first time. Doug Smith was awarded the first Master Model Railroader certificate under the Achievement Program.

The 1963 convention was held in Indianapolis. The position of Southern Vice President was created and filled. Conformance Warrant activity reached its zenith with awards being announced in almost every issue of the Bulletin.

The 1964 convention was held Philadelphia. The dues were increased from \$3.00 to \$5.00. The convention rotation plan with seven geographical regions was started.

The 1965 convention was held in Vancouver, Canada with nearly 1000 attendees, a record to date. A revised HO Scale gauge was released which had the RP-25 wheel flange and contour in the check gauge dimension incorporated. Membership reached 14,734.

The 1966 convention returned to Cincinnati and was five days long. The first presentation for comment and study of proposed N Scale standards was made. The position of Plains Vice President was created.

The 1967 convention was held in Miami Beach. The position of Plains Vice President was filled. The S-9 electrical standard was put under study for the purpose of updating, a process that took several years. Membership was 13,275.

The 1968 convention was held San Francisco with just under 1000 attendees. A motion was approved at the Board of Trustees meeting ordering a complete study of the current total operation of the NMRA. A study committee was appointed to undertake the task. The study was broken into 6 parts and a sub committee was appointed for each part: Administrative, Executive Organization, Financial (accounting and office), Membership, Regional – National Organization, and Documents (Constitution, By-Laws, and Executive Handbook). Further development of N Scale standards took place. A Scale Converter was developed and made available. Membership reached 14,628.

The 1969 convention was held in Minneapolis. Whit Towers began his 10 year term as Bulletin editor with the September issue. Membership reached 15,515.

The Seventies

The 1970 convention was held in St. Louis and was four days long. The Executive Organization sub committee appointed in 1968 delivered their report and recommendations. The Board of Trustees voted to abandon the organizational study. Some of these recommendations, somewhat revised, related to the size and make up of the Board, were eventually implemented in 2004-2005. Membership reached 16,309.

The 1971 convention was held in London, England, the first and only NMRA convention held overseas. There was quite a bit of discussion during the course of the year in the Bulletin on a proposal to change the NMRA standard for operating voltage from 12 to 24 volts, but in the end, the standard was not changed. Membership climbed to 18,825.

The 1972 convention was held in Seattle and was five days long. The first proposed standards for modules were presented in the Bulletin. Membership reached 20,718.

The 1973 convention returned to Atlanta. At the Board of Trustees meeting in Atlanta, the board voted unanimously to begin a process to find a permanent home for an NMRA headquarters with an office and room for a museum. A committee was appointed to begin the process and an account for a memorial building fund was opened. In addition, the need for part-time, paid secretaries for the President, Secretary, and Bulletin editor was noted as well as a full time, salaried Bulletin editor was noted for the first time. Membership reached 23,579.

The 1974 convention was held in San Diego and was six days long. NTrak modules were shown at the convention for the first time. Membership reached 23,969.

The 1975 convention was held in Dayton, Ohio. Presentations were made to the Board of Trustees on possible permanent locations for the home office were made. Moving the membership records from the manual system to a computer system was discussed by the Board of Trustees. Membership dropped slightly to 24,581.

The 1976 convention returned to Chicago. The NMRA was granted the status by the IRS to allow contributors of gifts to deduct them on their income taxes. Moving the home office from the basement of a home in Canton, Ohio to leased office space in Indianapolis, Indiana was completed. A new office manager was hired to replace long time office manager Bob Bast, who retired. The transfer of the membership records from the manual system to a third party computer system was initiated. Membership reached 26,041.

The 1977 convention returned to Denver. Early in the year, it was discovered that the host group for the 1978 convention had not made arrangements for the convention space and none was available at this time, the Board of Trustees acted to relocate the 1978 convention to an alternate location. The 1978 convention was awarded to a group in the Detroit area with only 18 months to prepare the convention. The Board of Trustees decided to eliminate the NMRA

directory as the cost for the next one would cost \$75,000 to print and distribute. Late in the year, a building fund for raising money for an NMRA headquarters building was announced. Membership reached 28,467.

The 1978 convention was held in Dearborn, Michigan and was seven days long. Dues was \$10.00. The 1st discussion was held on the possibility of having the national convention run by professional. An announcement was made that a new Bulletin editor was being sought. Membership reached 28,855.

The 1979 convention was held in Calgary, Alberta, Canada and was six days long. Paul Mitchell became the new Bulletin editor, replacing Whit Towers, who edited the Bulletin for 10 years. Sn3 standards were introduced. Chattanooga was announced as the location of future NMRA headquarters building. Increasing rates of inflation experienced during the late 1970s were impacting the NMRA's financial position. Late in the year, the page count of the Bulletin was reduced to cut costs and reduce the looming NMRA budget deficit for the year. Membership peaked at an all time high of 29,139.

The Eighties

The 1980 convention was held in Orlando, Florida and was eight days long. The NMRA constitution was revised and the dues were raised from \$10 to \$15 by member vote. Future dues increases were now to be addressed directly by the Board of Trustees. A special Board of Trustees committee was established to review the cash flow plan for the future headquarters office, total cost of the proposed building with moving and start up costs included, and policy recommendations for the proposed archives, library, and displays at the headquarters. The Bulletin featured a slick cover for the first time. Membership dropped to 27,994.

The 1981 convention was held in San Mateo, California and was six days long. Ground breaking for the NMRA headquarters building in Chattanooga was held in October. The first Special Interest Groups (SIGs) were officially chartered. The use of microprocessors for model railroad use was first mentioned in an article in the Bulletin. Mike Schafer became the new Bulletin editor. Membership was down again to 27,134.

The 1982 convention was held in Washington, DC. Mike Carlson became editor of the Bulletin. The Basic NMRA standards, S-1 through S-9 were updated. Plastic kits of the proposed NMRA headquarters building in HO and N scale were sold as a fund raising activity for the building fund. Construction of the NMRA headquarters building in Chattanooga started in April. The 500th issue of the Bulletin was published in August. Kalmbach Publishing made a donation to establish the Kalmbach Memorial Library at the NMRA headquarters.

The 1983 convention was held in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. The big news for the year was that the NMRA headquarters building was completed and the office operations were moved in on April 18th.

The 1984 convention was held in Kansas City and registration was \$72. John Smith became Master Model Railroader number 100. Fund raising for the NMRA headquarters building continued with the goal to pay down the borrowed monies required to complete construction. A dues increase from \$15 to \$20 with the option to not receive the Bulletin for \$10 was proposed. Membership was 25,138.

The 1985, the 50th anniversary NMRA convention was celebrated in Milwaukee and was eight days long. Registration was \$50. . Hotel rates were \$48 to \$65. There were a total of 13 layout tours offered showing a total of 54 layouts. The first material donations were made to the Kalmbach Memorial Library and a request was made of the Board of Trustees to fund one library

staff position. A four region joint convention was held in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania in May. The Board of Trustees voted to accept commercial advertising in the Bulletin to help defray the costs of producing and distributing the magazine. Dues was increased from \$15 to \$20. The affiliate member classification was established allowing a member who did not want to receive the Bulletin with dues set at ½ that for a regular member. Draft modular standards were presented in the Bulletin.

The 1986 convention was held in Boston. Registration was \$60. There was poor turnout of the public at the train show at the convention, leading to a discussion of having a national committee run the train show. A proposal was made to the Board of Trustees that a national, for profit corporation be set up to manage and run the train show. A lot of commentary on the subject of membership recruitment and retention was presented in the Bulletin over the course of the year. Progressive cab control was being strongly promoted as the new wave running a model railroad.

The 1987 convention was held in Eugene, Oregon. Registration was \$65. Command control began to get some attention in the pages of the Bulletin. Revisions and updates to the standards and recommended practices for track and wheels were made. Detailed plans for the interior of the Kalmbach Memorial Library were presented. Fundraising for the new headquarters building continued to minimize the size of the mortgage required to pay for the building. The Board of Trustees voted to proceed with obtaining a mortgage on the headquarters building. Membership was up to 21,166.

The 1988 convention was held in Birmingham, Alabama. Convention registration was 72.50. More discussion was seen in the Bulletin on the subjects of computerized progressive cab control and command control. Dues was increased to \$22 for regular members and \$12 for affiliate members. The Kalmbach Memorial Library was dedicated at the NMRA headquarters building. There was considerable discussion at the Board of Trustees meeting concerning the possible establishment of NMRA Canada, incorporated in Canada, and having separate representation on the NMRA Board. Membership was up to 22,099.

The 1989 convention returned to Houston. Registration cost was \$90. The RPM SIG had models on display in the contest room for the first time. A hurricane hit Houston during the convention, but the convention continued. NMRA Canada was incorporated. The first efforts were initiated to work with the large scale manufacturers to develop standards for the various large scales. Fundraising for the new headquarters building was still being continued.

The Nineties

The 1990 convention returned to Pittsburgh. Registration cost was \$35. The train show was run by the NMRA NTS group for the first time. Module standards were revised, several recommended practices were updated, and proto:scale standards for 7 scales were proposed. The competition for attendance between the narrow gauge, O scale, S scale, and N scale conventions was noted by President Bob DuPont. The Long Range Planning Committee presented their initial report to the Board of Trustees. Dues were increased to \$24 for regular and \$13 for affiliate members.

The 1991 convention returned to Denver and was held jointly with N-trak. Registration was \$75. The outline of the proposed reorganization of the NMRA as developed by the Long Range Planning Committee was presented in the Bulletin. The proposed organization would have the Board of Trustees replaced by a Board of Directors, who would elect the president. All of the vice president positions would be eliminated and a professional Executive Director would be hired. A unified dues structure was also proposed. A working committee to develop a standard for digital command control was chartered. Member comments were requested. Membership reached 25,265.

The 1992 convention was held in Columbus, Ohio. Registration was \$55 and the hotel cost was \$79. The changes proposed during 1991 to the organizational structure were scaled back after member comments were received. The search for an executive director was started. The fund raising programs for the NMRA headquarters building succeeded as the mortgage was burned at the 1992 convention. Membership reached 25,955.

The 1993 convention was held in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. Registration was \$65 and the convention hotel was \$81. Proposed standards for TTn3 and recommended practices RP-9, for electrical, were introduced. Constitutional changes including eliminating regional vice presidents, changing the executive vice president to vice president, and adding a professional executive director were approved by member vote on a special ballot. The Board of Trustees approved a \$400,000 budget to upgrade the Kalmbach Memorial Library with high density storage facilities and archival quality climate control. Money was to be raised by a special fund raising program. The NMRA 2000 program was announced with the aim of increasing membership and increasing influence within the hobby of model railroading. The digital command control working committee released a report recommending that a digital command control standard be adopted. The concept of having a professional convention planner was brought up again. Membership dropped to 25,850.

The 1994 convention returned to Portland, Oregon. Registration was \$70. Terry Bacus replaced Mike Carlson as Bulletin Editor. Draft recommended practices for digital command control were released. An executive director, Peter Jehrio, was hired, and began working out of the home office at Chattanooga. The Board of Trustees approved hiring a marketing firm to do a member survey to determine what the members wanted from the NMRA. Dues increased to \$30 for regular members. Membership dropped to 25,520.

The 1995 convention returned to Atlanta. Registration was \$75 and the convention hotel was \$78. Digital Command Control, DCC, began to gain notice in the model railroad community. A library upgrades were well underway. The initial report from the Large Scale Working Group was released with proposed letter designations for each scale. The DCC recommended practices were approved. The results from the membership survey were received and published in the Bulletin. Membership dropped to 24,696

The 1996 convention was held in Long Beach, California. Registration was \$90. The NMRA Calendar was not published and distributed with the Bulletin as a cost cutting move. A summary of the Board of Trustees meeting instead of the full meeting minutes were published in the Bulletin also as a cost cutting move. The Board of Trustees approved President Bob Charles filling the vacant position of executive director until a replacement could be found. Membership dropped to 24,292.

The 1997 convention was held in Madison, Wisconsin. Registration was \$120 and the convention hotel was \$79. The Howell Day Museum of Model Railroading was chartered using a gift from Howell Day as seed money. A plan for receiving material donations as well as a fund raising program for the museum were developed and announced. Initial plans were to locate the museum in the basement of the headquarters building in Chattanooga. A fund for upgrading the computers and software at the office in Chattanooga was also established. Membership rose to 24,520.

The 1998 convention returned to Kansas City. The NMRA offered a reprint of the classic 1925 railroad book reference book "Freight Terminals and Trains." A new Executive Director was hired, but resigned within four months due to family considerations. Administration Department Manager Connie Rudder was then appointed Executive Director. DCC was making major inroads into the model railroad community, proving to be a major success for the NMRA. Membership dropped to 23,665.

The 1999 convention returned to St. Paul. Registration was \$99 and the convention hotels was \$89. Pending final DCC standards were presented to the membership for approval. A number of significant material donations were made to the Howell Day Museum. Membership dropped to 23,022.

A New Century

The 2000 convention was held in San Jose, CA. Registration was \$100. Dues increased from \$32 to \$34. A new department, the Marketing, Advertising, and Promotion (MAP) department was chartered. Additional major material donations were made to the Howell Day Museum. A Long Range Planning Committee was chartered to look at the long term needs of the NMRA and develop recommendations to address these needs. Membership dropped to 23,791.

The 2001 convention returned to St. Louis. Dues was increased from \$34 to \$45 due to a rapid increase in annual operating deficits. Significant cost cutting at the NMRA headquarters and with the Bulletin were implemented to address the expense side of the deficits. Executive Director Connie Rudder resigned and the Board of Trustees decided not to fill the position. Additional pending DCC recommended practices were released for review. An increasing number of major material donations to the Howell Day Museum were received. The Long Range Planning Committee's first report was reviewed with the Board of Trustees. A special committee to review the future of the Kalmbach Memorial Library was chartered. Membership was 23,727.

The 2002 convention was held in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. Registration was \$125 and the hotel cost ranged from \$97 to \$109. Additional proposed DCC standards and updates for track and wheel standards were approved. Lenz received a US patent for the DCC technology and donated it to the NMRA. The Board of Trustees considered a number of Long Range Planning Committee recommendations, which included streamlining the NMRA Constitution, By Laws, and Policies, downsizing the Board of Trustees from 17 to 9 members, and going to a single membership and dues structure. Membership dropped to 20,881.

The 2003 convention returned to Toronto. Registration cost was \$127 US and the convention hotel cost was \$140 US. Due to the late spring-early summer SARS scare, many convention registrations were cancelled and most of the manufacturers cancelled their train show registrations. As a result, already incurring a monetary loss of \$50,000 and facing a potential several hundred thousand dollar loss, the NMRA cancelled the train show. Convention attendance was disappointing; however, the Toronto host convention committee ran an outstanding convention and put together a locally run train show at the last minute. Those that did attend the convention had nothing but complements for the convention and train show. The NMRA Bulletin was renamed Scale Rails. The proposed changes to the constitution and by laws, changes to the structure of the Board of Trustees, changes in membership and single dues, and term limits were first released to the membership for review. Membership declined to 20,401

The 2004 convention returned to Seattle. Registration was \$140 and the convention hotel was \$109. The proposed restructuring of the NMRA constitution, by laws, single membership and dues, size and make up of the Board, and length of terms was placed on a ballot for membership approval. Revisions and updates to track and wheel, coupler, and DCC standards were also approved. The changes were approved by 2 to 1 margin. It was concluded that the NMRA lost \$56,266 on the cancelled National Train Show in Toronto. The International committee proposed the ABC plan for the Australasian and British regions and NMRA members residing in Canada. The Rail Pass introductory membership program was introduced. Membership declined to 19,823

The 2005 convention returned to Cincinnati. The new NMRA regulations, Board of Directors, term limits, single dues, and single membership were fully implemented. The new Board of Directors was seated at the BOD meeting held at the Cincinnati convention. Region by laws were updated to reflect the new NMRA Regulations. The decision was made to no longer

offer life memberships. The ABC plan was implemented for the Australasian and British regions and NMRA members residing in Canada. Region rebates of \$2 per member in the US were initiated. The mortgage on the NMRA headquarters building was paid off. Membership dropped to 18,654.

The 2006 convention returned to Philadelphia. Dues was increased to \$36 with a Scale Rails subscription going to \$12. Stephen Priest became the new Scale Rails editor with the August issue. Membership increased to 19,440.

The 2007 convention returned to Detroit. Registration was \$150 and the convention hotel was \$127. The NMRA spearheaded, with several manufacturers, a patent challenge to a DCC sound patent that was improperly awarded to a single manufacturer. That manufacturer was attempting to force other manufacturers of DCC sound decoders to cease and desist in making and selling them. The Board of Directors announced that negotiations were underway to relocate the Kalmbach Memorial Library and locate the Howell Day Museum of Model Railroading to the California State Railroad Museum in Sacramento, California. Membership increased to 19,805.

The 2008 convention was held in Anaheim, California. Registration was \$150 and the convention hotel was \$135. A post convention survey of convention attendees was done to determine what they liked, didn't like, and what they would like to see in future conventions. President Mike Brestel had a serious health issue and was out of commission for several months as a result. Vice President Allen Pollock ably filled in until Mike was able to resume his duties later in the year. An issue arose when it was discovered that some divisions had officers that were not even NMRA members. It was highlighted that all members of a division or region have to be members of the NMRA. The US Patent Office ruled that the DCC sound patent challenge initiated in 2007 had merit and would result in a review of the patent. There was no response from the patent holder, giving the NMRA a clear victory in this effort. The wheel and track standards were updated and revised. The conformance warrant program was rejuvenated with new warrants being issued for some products tested and some being denied. Due to substantial postal rate increases, the Scale Rails subscription was raised to \$19 for US members and \$53 for no US members. There was a substantial fall off of income during the last half of the year with the rapid decline in the US economy. Significant cost cutting measures were put into place to offset Membership decreased to 19,585.

The 2009 convention was held in Hartford, Connecticut. Registration was \$175 and the convention hotels were \$108 to \$135. The results of the convention survey were tabulated and reviewed. As expected, the significant cost of attending a national convention was the number one issue. Other concerns expressed were a perceived bias towards HO, having the convention over the July 4th period, and the length of the convention. The Board of Directors appointed a committee to look into addressing these concerns in future conventions. A final version of track and wheel standards for large scales was released for review. The Standards group began a program to address the issue of coupler standards for all scales. A new staff position of Communications Director was created to improve communication between the national level and region/division level. A fund was established for the purpose of purchasing products for conformance testing. A memorandum of understanding between the NMRA and California State Railroad Museum was signed for locating a Howell Day Museum gallery exhibit in the existing CRSM Sacramento museum. A fund raising drive to pay for the cost of the display will be organized. A second fund raising program, the Diamond Club will be organized to fund the digitization of the balance of the photographs in the Kalmbach Memorial Library collection. Dues was increased to \$39. Membership dropped to 19,496.

The 2010 75th anniversary convention will return to Milwaukee. Draft large scale coupler standards were released for review. Registration is \$175 and the convention hotel is \$139.

The Future

The world has changed a lot since the NMRA was founded in 1935, when they couldn't get trains built in Detroit, Chicago, or Pittsburgh to run on a layout in Milwaukee. It will probably change a lot more during the next 25 years to the 100th anniversary of the NMRA. What the changes will be is unknown, but we can take a few guesses.

The NMRA will become a lot more of a web based, electronic organization. Communication will transition away from paper and postal mailing. The magazine may eventually cease to be printed on paper. On line membership information will soon be the normal way to do things. The Kalmbach Memorial Library, once it is digitized and joined with the California State Railroad Museum will become a very well used resource for members. Information on subjects of all kinds pertaining to model railroading, real railroading, and the NMRA will be quickly available through the internet. The Howell Day Museum of Model Railroading will be fully developed and become a major tourist draw in itself at the California State Railroad Museum in Sacramento, California.

The membership in the NMRA will grow strongly outside of the US. Mexico and continental Europe will grow to the point where they will have their own regions.

The growth of DCC will bring on additional uses of electronics in model railroading. Live, real time views from the cab, caboose, or passenger car on the model railroad will become commonplace. Sound, which is already making big inroads, will be normal for almost all model railroads. Electronics associated with DCC will become smart enough to do diagnostics on the motive power and layout.

Battery technology may progress to the point where the trains no longer are powered through the rails. Imagine building a layout and not having to wire the tracks, except possibly to get the signals to work, and maybe not even for that.

Prototype modeling will continue to grow in popularity as will prototype based operations. SIGs will grow in popularity, but as they grow in size, they will begin to have some of the same organizational issues that the young NMRA had in the 1930's through the 1950's. At some point, the growing fragmenting of the hobby will result in many groups looking to gain the economy of scale become more closely affiliated with the NMRA in a symbiotic relationship.

There will be a continuing development of both smaller and larger scales. Scales smaller than Z will come on the scene and large scale will have a growth in finer scale modeling.

Virtual model railroading will become a reality and a part of the world of scale model railroading.

One thing will probably not change, and that there will always be a core of fine model builders that will find the NMRA offers an outlet for their skills and abilities.

Finally, the NMRA will continue to be a place where friendships are made and nurtured and good times will be had by model railroaders from around the world.