



# The Lantern

December 2005

Volume 10, Number 12



## Bristol's Spooktacular Train

By Randy Lombardo

*This event was held in Bristol on October 27, 28 and 29, 2005. Pictures taken at the 2004 BBMRA picnic hosted by VMRR.*

Gloom turned to glee on October 29 when my ride aboard the Veterans Memorial Railroad (VMRR) became a reality. Fellow BBMRA member Mitchell Green called to offer me a ride to Bristol. He picked me up around 6 p.m. and a short hour later we were escorted to the VMRR parking lot by members of the Liberty County Wilderness Boys (See Page 4).

Although the first train was scheduled to depart at 7:30, a line of passengers was already forming in the staging area. Mitch and I paid our two dollars while mentioning to the cashier we were BBMRA members. Babs and Tom,

operators of the Veterans Memorial RR, immediately greeted us warmly.

Soon Babs collected our tickets while standing under a giant inflated cat emitting meowing and yowling sounds from a box taped to its thigh. Youngsters and adults crossed the tracks under the RR crossing gate to board at "River Junction Station" where a butcher was threatening to carve people up with his all-too-real-looking meat cleaver.

We met our engineer for the evening, John Anthamatten, who told us his real face was a white mask with a twisted red tongue. Mitch and I decided to wait for the next train, which was due in seven minutes.

We boarded the newest car with

**Spooktacular** Continued on page 2

## Coupler Heights are Critical to Trouble Free Operation

By David Brazell and Dan King

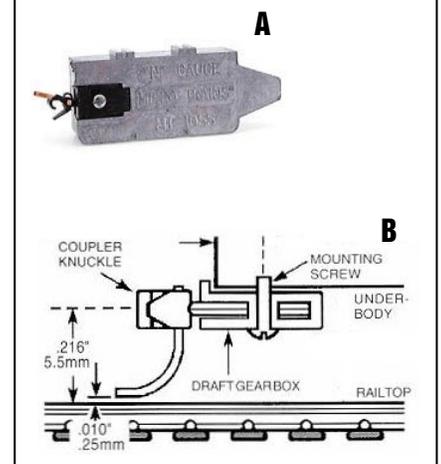
*This is part of our series on couplers. Part 1 appeared in the September 2005 issue.*

Last time we dealt with couplers in general. This month we'll describe how to ensure couplers are at the proper height.

### N Scale Couplers

No matter which scale you are running, checking for proper coupler height is similar. You must measure the height, preferably with a gauge (Figure 1A), and adjust them to the proper measurements as seen in (Figure 1B).

**Figure 1**



For Micro-Trains couplers, use a #1055 coupler height gauge to ensure proper alignment. Inspect the knuckle for any flash or casting defects. It is

**Couplers** Continued on page 5



## North Florida Fair Wrap-up

By John Sullenberger

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the following members who gave of their time during the set-up, operational and tear-down phases of this year's North Florida Fair run:

Jim Amidon  
 Larry Benson  
 Bill Boyle  
 David Brazell  
 Ken Brock  
 Larry Callahan  
 Jim Duncan, Sr.  
 Garth Easton  
 Eric & Ina Ecklund  
 Beth Edwards  
 Mitchell Green  
 Milt Grosz  
 Joe Haley  
 Lyn Heath  
 Barrett Johnson  
 Dan King  
 R. M. Lombardo  
 Roy Mantooth  
 Sal Martocci  
 Sam Miller  
 Harold Odom  
 Bob Pope  
 Carlos Presley  
 Tom Rice  
 Paul Schneider  
 Ed Schroeder  
 Sandy Scott  
 Philip Shafer & Toni Stewart  
 Jeremy Shaw  
 Mike Simpson

Please excuse me (and contact me) if I have left anyone's name off this list. If you have any questions or suggestions please contact me at 410-8425 (8 am to 4 p.m.), 562-5137 (5 p.m. to 10 p.m.), 544-1870 (cell) or sullyjws@aol.

## SAM MILLER'S CHRISTMAS OPEN HOUSE:

Sam's Christmas Open House is scheduled for Friday, December 9th from 6:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. Food and drink will be provided. Call Sam if you would like to bring something so he can coordinate the menu. Sam's house is at 3008 Stillwood Ct., which is off of Woodgate Way. Woodgate Way runs between Thomasville Road and Centerville Road. This Open House is in lieu of the December BBMRA meeting. The BBMRA's next meeting will be on Tuesday, January 17th, 2006 in the Myers Park Community Room.



## Spooktacular

Continued from page 1

benches that could seat two adults or three children. As we pulled out, we passed by a miniature water tower disguised as a drinking fountain. In the future it will serve the steam locomotive. We saw huge posters of Dracula and Frankenstein and a small graveyard with a tombstone reading: "Here lies the wicked witch." White and green spotlights illuminated the various scenes.

When we approached the first tunnel entrance (equipment storage shed), a thick white fog inside blanketed us. Purple lights, eerie sound effects and spider webs brushed our faces, but more was in store. As we exited the tunnel, a bright burning fire heated the cauldron of a witch who cackled, hoping to snare some passenger for her wicked brew.

At a second portable tunnel, a skeleton masked man jumped aboard the last car yelling "boo!" Spiders on either side of the track crawled toward us as we reached the entrance. A strange scraping sound

greeted us inside and when we came out we encountered the "Texas Chainsaw Murderer" who was threatening us with a real chainsaw! A swamp monster reached out with tentacles enhanced by a green strobe light which produced the effect of slow motion similar to that depicted in old horror films.

High above the trees were three skeletons basking in a greenish glow, and then a giant pumpkin head scarecrow scowled at us as we passed by. The red glow at the railroad crossing and a blinking radio broadcast tower in the background hinted at more mysterious objects lurking in the night.

Later, Babs asked us if we would like to relieve the brakeman and conductor for a stint. Mitch served as conductor and I was the brakeman. I was to blow a whistle if there was a derailment—luckily—there wasn't. We rode the last train around 11 p.m. then said our good-byes and headed home.

# Executive Reports & News Briefs

## Larry Benson, **Secretary**

The November 15, 2005 BBMRA membership meeting was called to order by President Barrett Johnson at 7:30 p.m. in the Myers Park Community room with 31 members present.

Treasurer's Report: Evan Hughes reported a bank balance on November 15, 2005 of \$1,896.77. His report was accepted.

Barrett asked Larry Benson to report on the status of *The Lantern*. He said the full minutes of the October 18 meeting were available at the meeting for members to read. They were not published in *The Lantern* in précis form because the November issue was in an abbreviated format designed to explain why the publication was curtailed and to get 2006 Dues Notices into members' hands. Larry also updated members about Shawn Vann's plight during Hurricane Wilma when he lost power and cable service. He mentioned the considerable service Shawn has given to the BBMRA, especially during the past two years.

A motion was made to prepare a letter of appreciation to send to Shawn for his contributions to the BBMRA including but not limited to serving as Treasurer, *Lantern* Editor and Web Master. The mo-

tion passed unanimously.

John Anthamatten said the Veterans Memorial RR in Bristol had a very successful Halloween train run. They will be in the town of Bristol Christmas parade and also present their "Winter Wonderland Express" from December 15 to 17.

HO Scale – Modules were returned to storage from the North Florida Fair run and the warehouse is full. Something needs to be done to reduce the number of modules and other items stored there.

Large Scale – Still pursuing purchase of a new locomotive.

The matter of committing the BBMRA to extended runs like the Fair without adequate members signed up ahead of time to staff the layout(s) was brought up and discussed at length. Barrett said the board would take the expressed concerns under consideration.

The business portion of the meeting was adjourned at 8:17 p.m. to watch a railroad video.

## Sal Martocci, **Vice President**

Three or four *Lanterns* ago I started on an elevated G Scale layout in the back yard. It was my first attempt to build a layout regardless of what scale. Seems like the weather was hot when we started digging

the post holes. The "we" was Bob Pope and myself. Hauling all the lumber and other material seemed like the easy part.

Making sure the roadbed was level in spite of the slope of the land proved to be a challenge but we prevailed. An air nailer was a great friend to this project as it was easy to use and accurate. I can remember having to wait several weeks for it to stop raining so the wood could dry out before painting. No such problem here lately. The last step was to put down the track and that was relatively easy.

The amount of fun we have had since the last piece of track was laid is hard to describe. I now know first hand how our other members who have their own layouts feel. I encourage you to take that "someday I will" and get started! Don't put it off... don't delay... get off the couch and get going. The enjoyment is too good to miss!

## **2006 Dues Are Now Due**

Dues for 2006 are being collected now. Members must have paid their dues to be eligible to vote in the election of officers during the January 17th Club meeting. Send your check for \$20 (no cash please) to the BBMRA Treasurer at P. O. Box 3392, Tallahassee, FL, 32315-3392.



## Buying Used Equipment: Chance and Challenge!

By Larry Benson

*Photographs featured in this story were taken at the club's 2004 summer show.*

Model railroaders know that when they buy used motive power or rolling stock they take a chance the locomotive won't run well, or at all, and the cars may derail from bent or broken wheel sets. It's the old cliché: "Buyer Beware!"

Then again, sometimes acquiring used items appropriate to their specific layouts is so tantalizing they can't pass up a risky purchase. That's what happened to me one Saturday in September when Shirley and I spent the day wandering through antique and gift shops in Quitman, GA. We had been to the tiny hamlet eight or

ten years ago but didn't have time then to hit the stores.

When we entered the very last shop, I spied three large scale passenger cars sitting on a shelf along the back wall of the store. I did a double-take to be sure what I saw was real and not imaginary. I made a "bee-line" to the back, knocking over several displays in my haste (well, not really but almost). Not only were there large scale passenger cars, but also several shelves of Lionel, HO and N Scale locos, rolling stock and buildings. Some Lionel cars were still in their original boxes.

I looked closely at the N Scale offer-

# Veterans Winter Wonderland Express

By John Anthamatten

December promises to be filled with plenty of activity! The Veterans Memorial Railroad's Christmas plans are as follows:

## December 10th

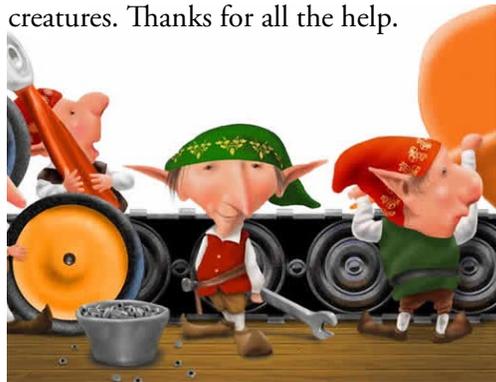
VMRR all day poinsettia sale in Bristol and Blountstown. Bristol sale is on Highway 12/20 (main drag) close to the bank. Blountstown, further west and across the river, will be at the supermarket on Highway 20 (main drag).

There will be a Christmas parade in Bristol on the main drag beginning around 7 p.m. The Crown Steam Locomotive will be shown in the parade and probably pulled by an antique fire truck along with other floats.

## December 15, 16 & 17

The Winter Wonderland Express will run three nights at the Veterans Memorial Park. Lots of Christmas lights and other events along the route. Great for the little kids. Also, pretty good for adults too. Anyone with a Christmas type parade entry could get in the parade easily.

The three nights of the Halloween Spooktacular were very successful. Several BBMRA members and families came over to Bristol to check us out and ride through some pretty scary stuff. Several other members came over and even volunteered time as helpers, conductors and scary creatures. Thanks for all the help.



## Boston Depot Now a Feed Store and Tack Shop

By Larry Benson

A year or so ago, Dan King and I roamed around south Georgia looking for small railroad depots no longer in use that might be acquired and moved to Tallahassee. The idea was to find a depot large enough to accommodate our meetings and a permanent layout or two.

We figured the first step was to find a suitable structure which was for sale or would be given to anybody willing to move it away. Once a depot was located, we expected to pursue grants as well as contributions of time and labor sufficient to haul the depot to Tallahassee in pieces or intact and place it in a yet to be determined location.

We found the ideal building in Boston, GA sitting beside seldom used tracks which were once a line of the Georgia Northern Railroad. The roof was partially missing. The interior was a cluttered wreck full of trash and bird's calling cards. While the original doors and some window frames remained, most of the

glass panes were broken out. Even in such a run down condition, it seemed to our untrained eyes to have the potential to satisfy our objectives.

While enjoying a cup of coffee in the only café in town, a young waitress told us the depot had been sold and was to be occupied by an upholsterer. That was that! A few months later when we saw the old Boston Depot again, it was being remodeled and "spruced up" although not yet occupied by a business.

In mid September 2005, Shirley and I spent a Saturday poking around in some small hamlets that dot South Georgia. On the way to Quitman, we detoured into Boston to see what was happening "down at the depot". We discovered the petit depot had been attractively refurbished and is currently occupied by Boston Feed & Tack. The merchant apparently has a sense of railroad history because hanging over the door is a small sign reading "The Boston Depot."

## Who are the Liberty County Wilderness Boys?

The Liberty County Wilderness Boys are homeless teenagers that were never adopted or made homeless through some other circumstance. The Wilderness program teaches them technical and other skills so they can support themselves as they become of age. This great program assists the VMRR, and in return, Veterans supports them from time to time as well. The group will probably help VMRR with Santa's Work Shop during this year's Winter Wonderland.

# Coupler Heights

Continued from page 1

always a good idea to take a small needle file to clean up the knuckle so the coupler doesn't ride up or down when under a load. A little Micro-Trains "Grease 'em Dry" lubricant (powdered graphite) in the pocket is a good idea, even for Rapido style couplers. Most problems with the Micro-Trains coupler is with the trip pin, which should be carefully adjusted so it's not so low it hits or hangs up on the track in turnouts or road crossings. For this measurement, use Micro-Trains #1056 Trip Pin Height Gauge.

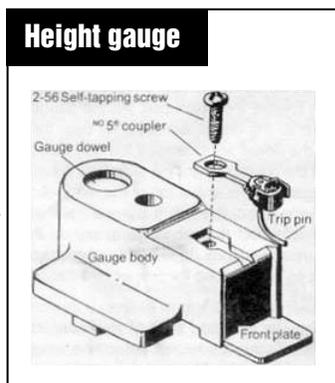
Next, inspect the trip pin with the trucks mounted to the car by pulling slightly with the coupler gauge to put some pressure on the knuckles. This action should show if the coupler tends to ride up or down. If you suspect a problem, then you may have to rebuild the entire coupler.

Unfortunately, no height gauge is available for Rapido style couplers. However, you can make one by hot gluing, or ACC gluing, an Atlas truck down to a section of flex track. Inspect the truck coupler for any flash or casting defects. Use a small file to clean up the flat surfaces on the coupler. With the truck attached to the car body, make sure the coupler rides up or down over the gauge coupler and drops into a good joint.

A slight tug on the coupler will indicate a good connection. If the two couplers tend to ride up and appear to want to separate, then there's a problem which may require disassembly and coupler replacement. As a last step, before attaching the truck to the underframe, it is important to file the bolster face lightly.

## HO Coupler Heights

If you decided to use knuckle couplers, you have to check the height. Why? After all, the trip pin (the curved metal part hanging down simulating the brake hose on



prototypes) is in the middle of the track and shouldn't hit anything, right? Wrong! If the trip pin is too low it can catch the cross ties and also hang up when negotiating a switch. In either case the cars will uncouple or derail or both. There is a gauge designed to set a height standard. If the height of the coupler and the trip pin are correct, the car is ready to run.

As illustrated (Height gauge, below right), you simply put a Kadee coupler in the slot and screw it down. The gauge fits on the track between the rails. The coupler on the gauge and the car should match exactly as shown in the photograph above.

However, if the coupler is too low and the draft box is attached to the car vs. to the truck, there are two things you can do: switch out the coupler with an overset or adjust the trucks, which we'll describe later. "Oversets" are Kadee couplers with the head offset lower on the shank (Figure 2A). "Undersets" are the opposite – the head is higher. McHenry calls them lowered head and raised head.

Simply replace the coupler with the overset and measure again with the height gauge. Hopefully the heights will match.

Three other reminders about oversets and undersets. First, they cost a little more than standard Kadee couplers but not that much (McHenrys tend to be more pricey but we don't know why). Second, they are simpler to replace than the second method which I'll explain later. You simply remove the standard coupler and replace it with the overset/underset. Third, there are some cars (particularly locomotives) that require an overset/underset to achieve the correct height because you can't adjust the trucks.

When using the second method you must remember to raise the coupler on cars with the draft box attached to the car itself. Here, you have to remove the trucks and insert a number two washer between the truck and the car. This raises the car (and also the coupler) hopefully to the correct height. Usually one washer is enough. However, another word of

caution. There is a plastic extension on the car allowing you to screw the truck to the car but still permits the truck to swivel. You may have to remove this extension with an Xacto knife so the washer can be attached. With this extension removed, you can't screw in the truck real tight because it must swivel to run properly. One idea is to tighten the screw down and then back it off enough to allow the truck to swivel.

What do you do if the coupler height is proper but the trip pin is too low? You then need a pair of coupler pliers to bend the trip pin (Figure 2B).

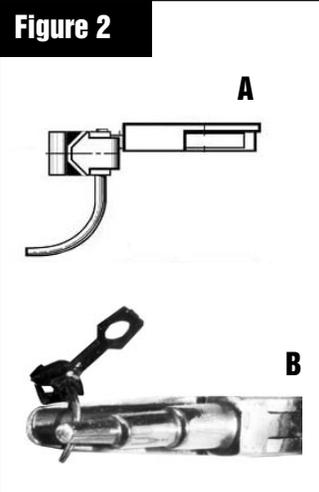
Don't try this with a regular pair of pliers or even needle nose pliers. More times than not, you'll break the coupler instead of bending the trip pin.

When a coupler is too high and is attached to the car, the best way to correct this situation is by installing an underset type described earlier.

One last comment. What do you do if the coupler is attached to the truck, as many Bachmann cars are? First, you need a Talco Truck adapter that allows you to slide a Kadee coupler into the coupler slot. There's a small tab on the end you have to remove first with a hobby knife so the return spring can be slid into the slot with the coupler. If the coupler does not match the gauge, the best thing is to install an overset/underset coupler to adjust it to the proper height.

Finally, let us repeat how much more smoothly your layout will run if coupler heights are correct. You will be amazed at the difference. Best of luck and happy model railroading!

*Larry Benson contributed to the preparation of this article.*





# The Lantern

Post Office Box 3392, Tallahassee, FL 32315

[www.bbmra.org](http://www.bbmra.org)

## Upcoming events

### December

12/17-18

G.A.T.S. Train Show  
Florida State Fairgrounds  
Tampa, FL

### January

1/14-15

Coastal Rail Buffs Show  
Savannah, GA

1/17

BBMRA Meeting  
Election of Officers  
Myers Park Community Room

1/21-22

Flint River Train Show  
Knights of Columbus Hall  
Albany, GA

CALENDAR

## Buying Used

Continued from page 1

ings and found a 2-8-2 Mikado wearing the Frisco RR flag on its Vanderbilt coal tender. It was marked \$20, but a sign on the shelf said: “All Trains Half Price.” I was taking a chance buying a used Atlas-Rivarrosi steam locomotive because I had already replaced the motor in an identical loco I’ve owned for several years. Hey, for 10 bucks, no big deal. Even if it didn’t run it would look neat sitting somewhere on my layout. Then too, I had an ace up my sleeve, just in case.

Once home, I put the new acquisition on my layout and fired it up – or tried to. Nope! It wouldn’t budge. The motor was burned to a crisp. Here’s where the challenge came in because it was time to call on a train buddy who lives in Lawton, OK, and from whom I bought the earlier motor. In response to my e-mail (and at a reasonable cost) he sent me two more re-



placements – one for the newly acquired “Quitman” loco and a spare.

With Roy Mantooth’s help and expertise, we managed to figure out that the electrical pick-up is on the left set of trucks on the steam loco and tender, rather than the usual right hand side. So, the chance which became a challenge worked out after all.