

CARL KUEHN'S MOUNT PENN DIVISION OF THE PENNSYLVANIA RAILROAD

By Dave Rickaby
Photos by the author

INTRO

The Pennsylvania Railroad, the "Standard Railroad of the World". These very words evoke memories of places like Horseshoe Curve, Altoona, & Juniata, and trains like the Broadway Limited, with its elegant Tuscan Red varnish. Steam locomotives like the K-4 Pacific, with its "boxy" Belpaire boiler, and as diverse as the T-1 Duplex plied these rails hauling everything from passengers to general merchandise and, of course, the black diamonds, the anthracite coal that heated the homes of America.

Rails on the eastern end of the line were electrified and made the GG-1 synonymous with the Pennsylvania Railroad. Diesels came from just about every major locomotive builder and saw everything from Baldwin's Centipede's and Sharknoses to EMD's ubiquitous and utilitarian Geeps and F units.

Its rails and subsidiaries extended from Long Island to the east and Chicago and St. Louis to the west creating a system that at one time boasted almost 30,000 miles of track.

The Pennsy is worshipped and adored by railfans from all over the world and it only made sense that a boy growing up in Pittsburgh, PA.

and now living in Harrisburg, PA. would have a model railroad that would echo memories of his childhood. Carl Kuehn (pronounced "keen") is that 56 year old "boy".

The size and scope of the Pennsy was so immense that to model a certain area wouldn't have done justice for him. With help from his friends at Raildreams, Inc. of Lake Linden, MI., they developed the fictional Mount Penn Division. Modeling a fictional division of the railroad allows Carl to embrace the flavor, color, and the feel of the Pennsy without having to feel too restricted by the actual prototype.

FICTIONAL HISTORY

During the construction of the Pennsy across its namesake state, cities, towns, and villages sprung up along its mainline. It was then that the small town of Mount Penn was incorporated. Several business-men from Pittsburgh realized the mineral potential of this area and sought to develop a town along the railroad to serve their interests.

Just to the west of Mount Penn, Roth & Foor Mining and Minerals Co. built their Cathy Cove Mine and started mining anthracite coal.

Farming had also developed in the area and the local farmers welcomed the chance to ship their products by rail. Over the years the town expanded as new business arrived. Passenger service increased and the townsfolk demanded that an ornate station be built, similar to the one in Harrisburg, and in 1882 they got their wish.

By the 1920's, the need for electricity grew and it was decided to build the Taylor hydroelectric dam to the east of the city on the Thicket River to serve the local community and surrounding valley.



The ever increasing size of the trains required helper service over the 2% ruling grade to the west of town near the Cathy Cove Mine. A small engine facility and depot were built here to accommodate the helper locomotives and the site was named Helper. Traffic swelled during the Second World War, increasing into the present steam to diesel transition period of the 1950's.

OPERATION

The operation on Carl's Mount Penn Division is set-up to be run by one or more operators. Typically, there would be a local crew switching the yard and local industries at Mount Penn while several passenger and freight trains would be coursing the circuitous route. There is no staging so all of the freight trains are made-up and broken down at the Mount Penn Yard.

With DCC, it's also entirely possible to run helper units on the trains on the steep climb out of Helper. But for now, Carl enjoys the peace and solitude of his basement and his one man show. He has at his disposal several PRR Sharknoses, F units, Geeps, C-Liners, K-4 Pacifics, and a Mountain and Allegheny type steam locomotive to pull a multitude of passenger and freight equipment anytime he wants to.

THE LAYOUT

The layout is built as a 20'X10' freestanding island design with a drop-down bridge that allows access to the inside aisle. The mainline is a double-tracked continuous run and features Pennsylvania Railroad style signals.



Mount Penn features an engine facility, an industrial switching district, an urban city, and a large passenger station (kitbashed from two Heljan Tombstone County courthouses) with a trainshed. At Helper is the small engine facility for the helper locomotives, the depot, and the Cathy Cove Mine. A large stone arch viaduct crosses the Thicket River just downstream from the Taylor Dam.

The layout is built in modular sections using 1X4's for the frame and 2" Styrofoam insulation for the scenery base. Polyterrain scenic paste is used as a general cover and then painted with earthtone latex paint and covered with scenery material from Woodland Scenics and Scenic Express.

The electrical controls are DCC and are provided by System One. Not only does the system control the trains, but by the touch of a button can control the Circuitron Tortoise Switch machines for each turnout as well. Some of the locomotives use decoders from Soundtraxx that give the layout the extra effect of actual steam and diesel sound. The System One handheld throttle controls these functions as well.

THE FUTURE

The future will bring an expansion to the layout along one wall of the basement. The double-track mainline will go out and loop back on itself. There is another townsite planned that will allow for either point-to-point operation or a continuous run. Also, a sawmill complex and log harvesting area are being planned.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Carl always liked trains. He remembers that as a young boy growing up in the late 1940's and early 1950's he had been given a



Lionel trainset and spent hours running trains on a board that him and his father had set up. After moving to Harrisburg, there were the trips to the Midwest to visit relatives and, of course, Carl and his family traveled by train. He loved the diversity of seeing both diesels and steam locomotives on the passenger and freight trains and the post WWII-early 1950's era is especially dear to him.

All of these elements combined to form an impression in Carl's imagination that now has come to life in miniature in his basement from the echo's of his childhood. He'll also tell you that the best part of the hobby for him is just running the trains through a little town named Mount Penn; a town that he would have liked to have lived in.....

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