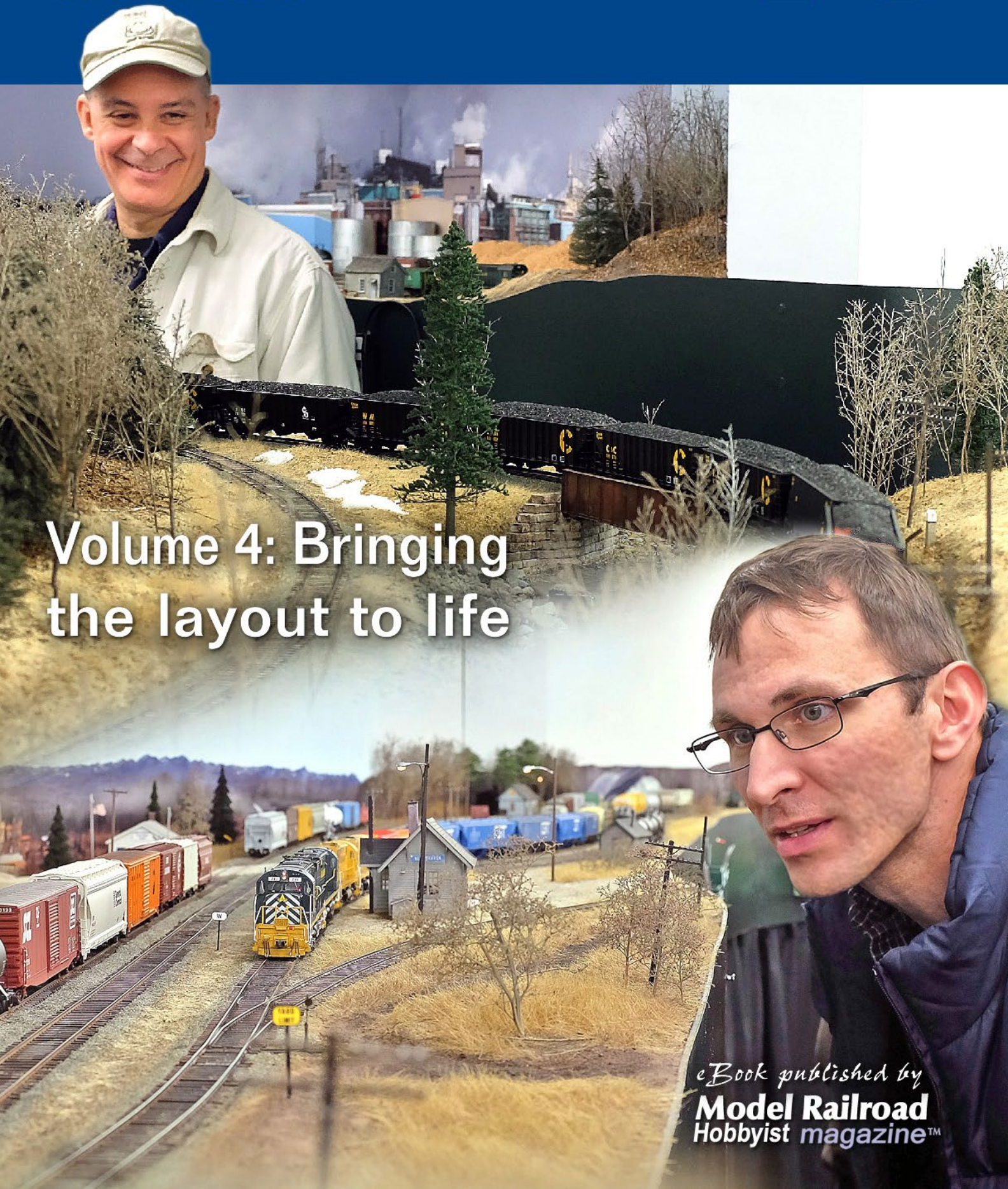


Mike Confalone's **ALLAGASH** STORY



Volume 4: Bringing
the layout to life

eBook published by
**Model Railroad
Hobbyist magazine™**

Mike Confalone's **ALLAGASH** STORY



VOLUME 4: Bringing the layout to life

By Mike Confalone

ISBN-13: 978-0-9916500-6-4

© 2014 by Model Railroad Hobbyist magazine. All rights reserved. Publish date: May 19, 2014

eBook published by
**Model Railroad
Hobbyist magazine™**



contents

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Bringing the railroad to life

Scheduling / crew call

Op session, the day(s) before

Op session day is here!

Three days in the life of the Allagash

January 18, 2014 op session

March 1, 2014 op session

April 19, 2014 op session

Testimonials:

The Allagash through the eyes of the operators

Brian Bennett

Neil Schofield

Mike Rose

Chad Rancourt

Jim Dufor

Jim Reddington

Dennis Drumheller



245: Running realistic operating sessions takes a nice layout scene like this one of the St. Regis Paper mill and turns it from a nice model into a bustling industry needing raw materials and producing product to ship. That's what takes a model railroad from being just a nice toy to a living, breathing simulation of a full-sized railroad.



246: The Allagash has many appealing scenes like this that become even more captivating as they play host to a modeled business that comes alive with shipping needs during the Allagash's op sessions.

Bringing the railroad to life

In Volume 3, I discussed the nuts and bolts and myriad tasks necessary to operate the Allagash successfully, including developing an operating plan, locomotive and freight car preparation and people management, among other things. The result of all that work and preparation finally comes together on op session day. For me, there is nothing more rewarding than seeing my friends operating the railroad, and having a lot of fun doing it! In short, operating sessions validate all my hard work.

As I mentioned in V3, early op. sessions were nothing more than controlled chaos. I'm happy to report that things have changed for the better. Allagash op. sessions have become, dare I say, "routine?" This doesn't mean boring; this just means that the mini catastrophes that used to happen with annoying regularity pretty much never happen now.

For the most part, the railroad runs like a well-oiled machine. As a matter of fact, Joe Posik and I had a discussion about this after we had just finished the latest op. session



247: Live loads in open-top cars on the Allagash give the trains a much greater sense of purpose and an incentive to avoid mistakes! You really feel like you're railroading when running one of these heavy live-load trains.

(Saturday, April 19, 2014). Things went very smoothly. Too smoothly in fact, to the point that we've decided to make a couple of key changes to the schedule and add in a couple of wrinkles for the next session in order to upset the balance and change the dynamic just a bit. If we do this on a regular basis, this will keep future op. sessions interesting and just a tad different from session to session.

Now let's discuss the lead-up to the big day.

Scheduling / crew call

We operate the Allagash every six weeks or so. I have found that the six-week interval allows my regular operators to make most of the sessions. I would prefer to run every four weeks, but it might be more difficult to fill operator slots, and every eight weeks is simply too long. The worst thing for an operating model railroad is for it to go into hibernation for months at a time. The best thing to do is to operate and operate often, even during times of scenery construction. That's what I try to do with the Allagash. Every six weeks seems to be working out nicely.

Immediately after a session, I typically send out an email to my regular operators advising of the next date. This gives the guys plenty of time to determine if they can make it or not. I don't expect everyone to make every session, but I generally get enough "yes" answers to fill the necessary slots.

Recently, my friend Mike Rose and I have begun coordinating operating session dates between our railroads as



Mike is now also operating his railroad on a regular basis. Mike is a regular operator here and I am a regular at his place. We share most of the same core operators, and this coordination allows most of the guys to make both his sessions and mine.

Op session, the day(s) before

Op session preparation generally takes a couple of days. The biggest task is swapping all of the waybills from the previous session. This alone takes a few hours, but is enjoyable for the most part. Additional tasks include the following: making sure job cards are in the proper place with the corresponding waybills.

Printing, cutting and filing MBS clearance forms into the light green boxes. Making sure system maps are in place at all stations, sharpening pencils, and other myriad tasks. The dispatcher's office is also re-supplied with the appropriate paper work. Radios and scanner are tested and batteries replaced if need be. In addition all 9V batteries for the wireless throttles are tested with a battery tester. Weak batteries are discarded and replaced with fresh ones.

After all of this is complete, I set up and test all locomotive consists and then review the operating plan, making any last minute changes. The final task before hitting the sack is to clean the track. I do this by pushing a weighted hopper car equipped with a couple of Mr. Clean Magic Eraser pads around the layout with a non-DCC-equipped locomotive. I clean all track, including sidings and staging yards. This is a boring task that takes a few hours so I usually put the radio on and just relax.



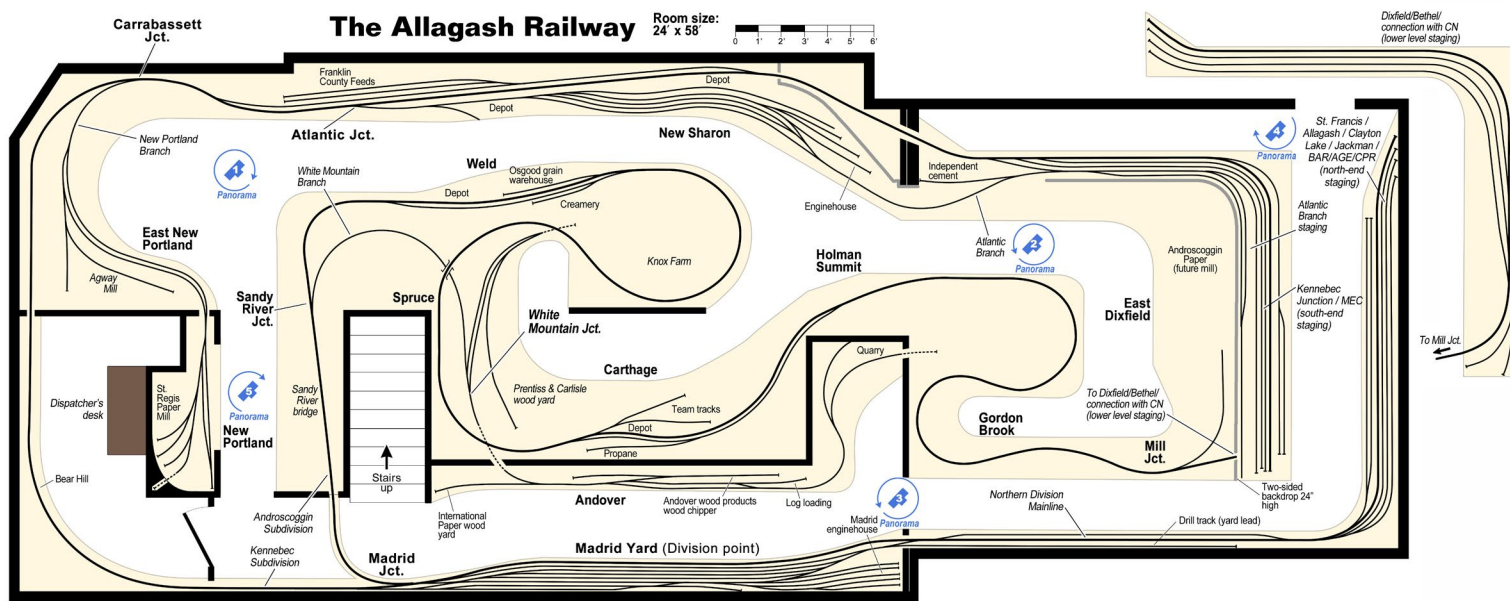
248: As a northeastern wood products line, the Allagash needs trains that clearly show the wood products industry in operation, like this scene of AGR 303 as it enters the small yard at White Mountain Jct with three loaded wood chip cars in tow.

Then, exhausted, I shut the railroad down and head upstairs. Soon, it's lights out.

Op session day is here!

On the day of the op. session, I'm up early and probably didn't sleep much the night before either, because I'm too revved up! I head down to the railroad room around 9am and turn on the lights and the heat if it's winter time. Then I fire up the system and test a couple of consists one last time. It's then time to fill out the crew-call board with





249b: Here's a smaller zoomable trackplan of the Allagash Railway.



250: Detailed industrial switching scenes like this one at New Sharon on the Allagash add a lot of realism and “railroady feel” to the layout’s operating sessions.



251-253 (this and following page): January 18th - Jim Reddington (brown shirt) is the regular yardmaster at New Sharon. Jim is an excellent operator and always keeps things moving at the AGR's second most important spot. Jim and Conductor Jim Dufour are on job N1, the New Sharon Switcher. They have a GP9 for power today, as opposed to the usual Alco road switcher. The guys are getting ready to work the Franklin County Feeds mill. That bright orange car on the Farmington Falls Branch is a BAR potato reefer. It clearly needs weathering!.



252: See caption on image 251.

Three days in the life of the Allagash

The next three chapters chronicle the most recent three Allagash operating sessions, held on January 18, March 1 and April 19, 2014. This is a fresh look at the Allagash as it appears today in the early spring of 2014. From its birth in the summer of 2009, the railroad has come a long, long way in a relatively short time.

I believe in the old adage “a picture is worth a thousand words.” So enough talking, let’s get on with it! Enjoy the show!





253: See caption on image 251.



254: Jim Reddington prepares to uncouple some grain hoppers as train BM2 (Bethel-Madrid) is canned at Weld behind five GP38s. Madrid must not be ready for the train, or there is something opposing it... perhaps the Andover Extra.