



### DON BALL EARNS MMR #501

It could be said that Don became a model railroader at the tender age of two. Under the tree on Christmas Day in 1950 was a new Lionel train set. Though Don enjoyed the train immensely (and still has it!), there is little doubt that his father encouraged the interest. Over the years, the Lionel collection grew until Don discovered scale model railroading in his early teens.

Schooling and the usual teenage pursuits pushed railroading into the background until af-

ter college, where he earned a Mechanical Engineering degree at UCLA. Don joined the NMRA shortly after graduation and attended a regional meet in 1970. There he had the opportunity to operate on a small switching layout. Not having room for anything else, Don built his own version of that layout complete with handlaid track and turnouts. Another, slightly larger, switching layout followed, but had to be dismantled because of a move. Several years passed during which only rolling stock was built due to the need to develop his career and family.

It was during this time that Don became interested in 19th century railroading. He says that when he first started reading *Model Railroader*, most of the staff were interested in early railroads and articles on the subject were frequent. Don was attracted to the period and began to build rolling stock of the era. His first car was a Central Valley

boxcar, which was rapidly followed by others, both kit and scratchbuilt.

In the early 1990s, Don finally had enough time and space to build an 11x12-foot railroad, the Moraga Springs Northern. It was a fictitious railroad running in the California foothills. An article about the railroad and its planning was published in the 1995 issue of *Model Railroad Planning*.

Over the next few years, Don's interest in railroad history and its research grew with many of the cars and structures on his layout showing the results of that research. A casual interest in California shortline Stockton & Copperopolis led to even more research into original railroad documents and a desire to model the line.

A move to Kansas City in 2005 led to a home for the proposed S&C as well as an opportunity to associate with many of the hobby's finest modelers. With KC's large model railroading community, there are plenty of chances to operate on prototypically designed railroads. Many of these modelers are now participants at Don's monthly operating sessions.

Writing about the hobby has become one of Don's major interests. He has produced articles on both historical and modeling subjects for *Model Railroader*,

*Model Railroad Planning*, *Railroad Model Craftsman*, *The Narrow Gauge and Short Line Gazette*, and others.

With his fascination with railroad history, Don was drawn to investigate the story of the first two-foot gauge railroad in the U.S., the Billerica & Bedford. Although researching a Massachusetts railroad from the Midwest was problematic, Don managed to put together a 200-page hardbound book, *George Mansfield and the Billerica and Bedford Railroad*, which was published in 2012.

In 2011, after years of reading about the Achievement Program, Don decided to try his hand at earning some of the awards. Even though the models he built suited himself, he was a bit unsure about how they would be seen by others. Fortunately, other people liked them as well, and Don earned Achievement Awards in Cars, Scenery, Structures, Model Railroad Engineer—Civil, Model Railroad Engineer—Electrical, Chief Dispatcher, and Model Railroad Author.

Don enjoys most phases of the hobby and his other interests in antique cars and photography have given him skills that have helped him in model railroading. He has been very pleased in achieving Master Model Railroader. He says that "it is one

thing to build a railroad that suits your goals but it is so much better when others appreciate what you have done."

Don lives in Blue Springs, Missouri, along with his strongly-supportive-of-the-hobby wife, Becky.

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