

Fall 2011 Baldwin Trophy Winner

Richard Walz's Railroad Avenue



I'd like to know how many railroad towns have streets named some variation of "Railroad Avenue" or "Station Street." The percentage must be high.

My diorama recreates Mahican, Maine's own Railroad Avenue as it appeared in 1948. ("Recreate" is, I guess, a self-indulgent word, since Mahican exists only in my head... and to some extent, in my basement.) The diorama includes ten buildings, nine of them made from kits. But it's the tenth building, the Precision Machine Company, that's probably of most interest to modelers. Certainly it's the building I have the most affection for.

For Precision Machine, I envisaged a factory of substantial size, one which would include tunnels for both trains and cars to make sneaky entrances into the scene. Though no such kit exists, I bought Atlas' Middlesex Manufacturing Company with the hope of using it as a kitbashing vehicle. But as I studied the kit, I found that the decorative brickwork at the factory's cornice didn't line up consistently with the columns of windows below it. That would make kitbashing extraordinarily awkward. Apart from that troublesome brickwork, Middlesex' walls began to seem pretty bland to me, anyway.

So instead of using sections of the Middlesex kit as Atlas made them, I cut them into small pieces--building blocks with which I hoped to cobble together different, more interesting walls. Using those cannibalized parts, I built a short length of wall--a section one window wide and four stories high. My revised plan was to make castings of that module and then join them together to create walls of whatever length I'd need.

My new wall section--my "master"--differed from Middlesex' walls in three ways. First, the dentils (if that's the right word for the vertical fingers of decorative brick just below the building's cornice) were centered above the windows. Alongside the windows, I added a protruding brick pier. Finally, I reduced the horizontal space that would separate neighboring columns of windows.

Before I could begin casting I needed to make a mold of my master. I did that by gluing my master to a sheet of glass. Then, using 1/4" high styrene strips, I glued a dike around the master, about 1/2" away from it on all sides. I sprayed the master with Mann's Ease Release 200, an aerosol mold release agent. Next, I filled the diked area to its top with Micro-Mark's thick (though liquid) room temperature vulcanizing rubber, completely covering the master. I temporarily pressed a second piece of glass over the dike to assure that the top surface of the rubber would be flat. When after four hours the rubber had solidified, I popped it from the dike, flipped it over, and to my great pleasure saw that it had formed a precise negative image of the master. With a successful mold now in my hands, I was as close as I am ever likely to get to the big deal in the movie, "Forbidden Planet": *the almost unlimited power to create*. I sprayed the release agent on the mold and filled it with Micro-Mark's CR-600, a water-thin, two-part casting resin. After about forty-five minutes, the resin had whitened and hardened, creating an exact reproduction of the master. All that remained was to repeat the casting process over and over, returning to the mold every three-quarters of an hour to remove the completed casting and reload it with a fresh dose of liquid, resolutely cranking out window columns until I had enough to Slo-Zap them all together as Precision Machines's long, *very* long walls.

I've quickly become an enthusiastic fan of do-it-yourself casting. When a piece needs to be reproduced a lot of times, casting is a real time-saver. Cast parts are as strong as styrene parts and, like styrene, they can be cut, sanded, glued, painted, and effectively weathered. And creating and using home-made molds is absurdly easy. Forget about "learning curves." There aren't any. Just follow the directions on the blasted resin box and--bingo--perfect results right off. For the megalomaniacal or the impatient, it's just what the psychiatrist ordered. I'd like to know how many railroad towns have streets named some variation of "Railroad Avenue" or "Station Street." The percentage must be high.

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