

# My Quest for Master Model Railroader

## My 4th AP Certificate: Model Railroad Author

article and photographs by Jim Wanlass, MMR

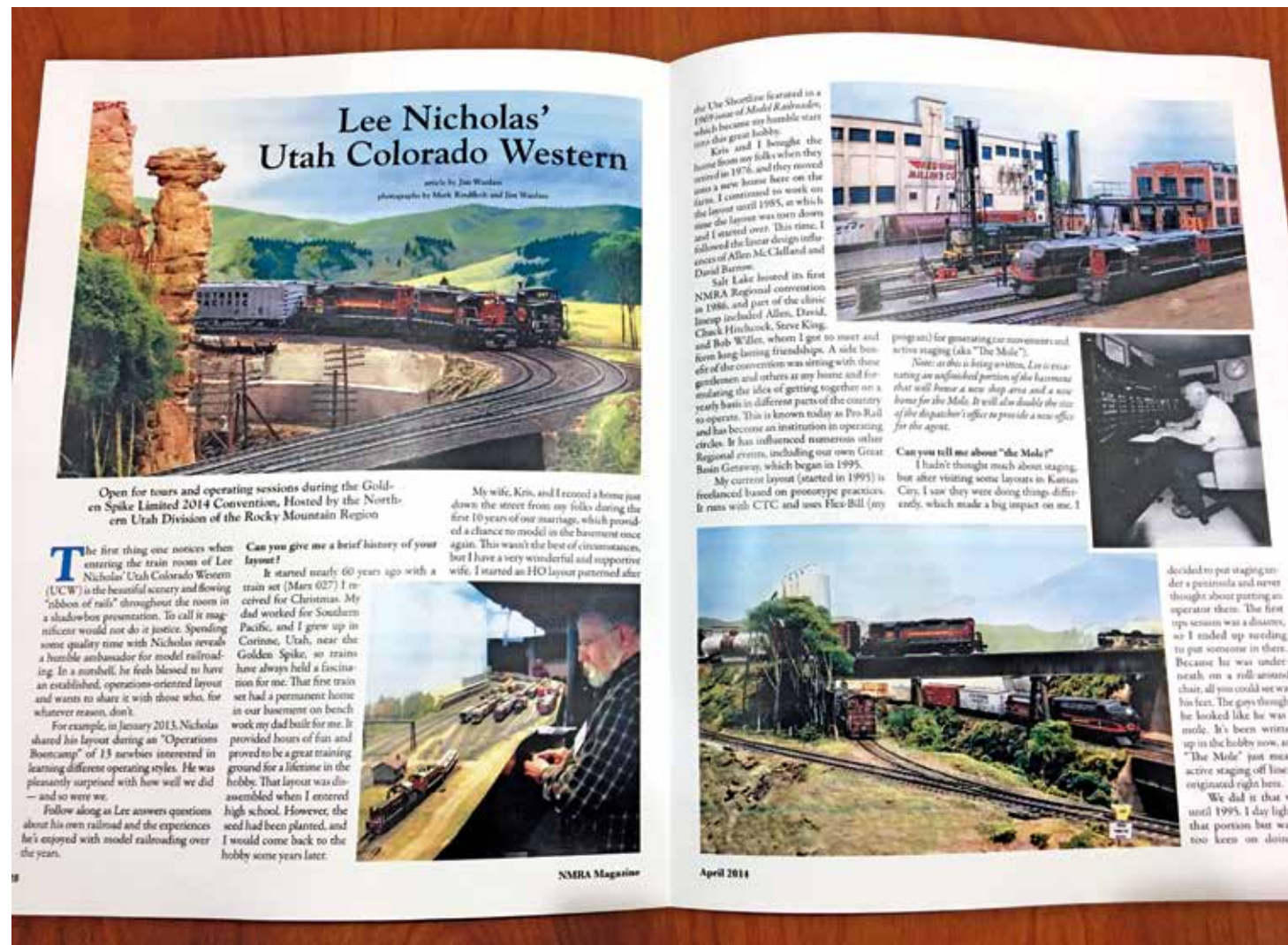
After earning my Cars Certificate, I planned on working in earnest on my Structures Certificate. As I mentioned in my last article, a huge benefit of the Achievement Program is being able to work on certificates concurrently. I already had a few Merit Awards for some of my structures, but now it was time to focus on finishing the rest.

Well, as it turns out, the Author Certificate kind of snuck up on me. For several years, I had been writing a monthly article for our Division's newsletter. I knew I had some points earned, but also knew that no more than half of the required

points could be earned with Division publications. Another thing that I realized early on is that pictures also count for points. After all, as the saying goes, "A picture is worth a thousand words." The requirements stipulate how many points a "page" is worth: a page is about 1,200 words. I guess one picture is actually worth about a thousand words — one page of words is the same number of points as a picture (in printed articles)! Knowing that pictures count, I always tried to add a picture to my articles when it was appropriate. I know I like seeing pictures in articles. When I turned in my papers, I had

another nine months of articles I could have counted but didn't. Remember, only half could come from the Division.

Where would I get the rest of the points needed? I could submit articles to our quarterly Regional newsletter. I also thought about publishing an instructional video. I have recorded one but never edited it, which can often take a long time. What else could I do or even had already done? I had written an article for the *NMRA Magazine* before this series of articles (April 2014). It was from an interview I did with Lee Nicholas and the history of his Utah Colorado Western layout. I chose



what was considered a completely finished layout. It improved operations in that area immensely. Another thing he did recently, with the help of friends, was to excavate an additional part of his basement and move his mole staging area. Most of us wondered how in the world he could do that! In the end, it looks beautiful, and there is no longer a need to crawl on hands and knees to get to the mole! In my upcoming article about the Civil Certificate, I will explain how I made a change to an area I thought was finished, but with a little bit of courage, I changed it. I'm so glad I did!

to write this article to help promote the Regional Convention we hosted that year. Lee's layout has been featured in numerous magazines and videos over the years but never the *NMRA Magazine*.

I learned a lot from interviewing Lee. One of the best ideas I took from that interview is never be afraid to start over. On a big scale, I've seen people tear down an

existing layout and begin again. Sometimes I know many of us think, "How could they? It was so wonderful." But for them, it wasn't working, or they needed a change. On a smaller scale, I take that advice to mean if you have invested time in a project but it isn't working quite right, or a slight change could improve it dramatically, go for it! Once Lee added a crossover to

The Author Certificate is part of the "Service to the Hobby" category. When you think about it, it makes sense. When we document things we have done, it can be helpful, whether we share it with others or just keep it for our use. Years ago, one of the few projects I finished before concentrating my efforts on the AP was to document, on my website, a construction build of my narrow gauge Class A Climax locomotive. I documented this build long before "construction builds" were popular on blogs and websites. This build was a craftsman kit that required additional parts beyond the kit to really make it look good. I made the webpage mostly for myself. Imagine my surprise when I started receiving emails from around the world thanking me for documenting the process! Again, this is before the phrase "going viral" was even coined. Nowadays, a few thousand views mean nothing, but back then, it was crazy. I don't update that site anymore — the software I used is outdated, and I use a new site. Last time I checked, before the page counter link broke, there were more than 13,000 views. Again, in today's measurements, that isn't too many, but how many outdated personal websites with zero advertising have you seen with that many views?

My point in bringing that up is that "Electronic Publications" in public areas of the internet can count for points. Just like Division points cannot count for more than half the points needed for the Author Certificate, electronic publications can also count for no more than half the total re-





quired points. When a blog post or article can reach — and potentially help — thousands of people, I am glad they count, and it makes sense that they do. I was humbled to receive messages of thanks from people in Australia, Japan, England, Russia, and elsewhere from around the globe about that construction build. I know I enjoyed building it and am glad I could help others by sharing it!

I am also one of 500-plus members of the “NMRA Achievement Program” group on Facebook. I have found it to be a good resource for asking questions and sharing information. One of the posts about electronic publications is what led me to reread the requirements and realize I just had to finish the paperwork! I have that old website and my new one, with several

postings I counted — and more I didn’t. Remember that the same article posted in multiple places counts only once.

About a month after submitting my paperwork, I gave a clinic. I had planned on using the clinic for points, but now I didn’t need to! As I mentioned in my article on the Cars Certificate, I did some mold making and casting for the frames. In the clinic, I explained and demonstrated the process I went through and then shared sourcing materials, as well as a few additional techniques I found helpful. I allowed time for others to try too. (You can read the handout on my website: [JamestownTrains.com](http://JamestownTrains.com)) One thing to be aware of: the first time you give a clinic it counts for Author, but if you give the same clinic again, points count toward your Association Volunteer Certificate.

Whether writing about your model railroading experiences or being in front of people giving a clinic is out of your comfort zone, or not, it’s a great way to help each other, and you will grow from the experience. You are giving back to the community that has helped you. There are many publications from your Division and Region to National publications that want more articles and input from others. You could write a simple “how-to” article that you think might benefit others. Over time, little by little, you will earn the required points. Who knows, having enough points might even sneak up on you like it did me! However you do it, share your thoughts and talents with us so that we can enjoy the journey together! 🚂

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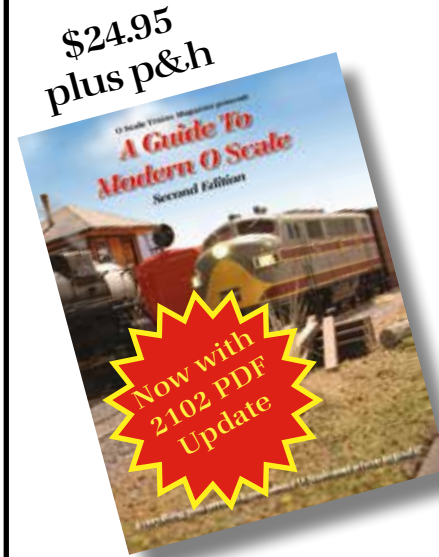
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