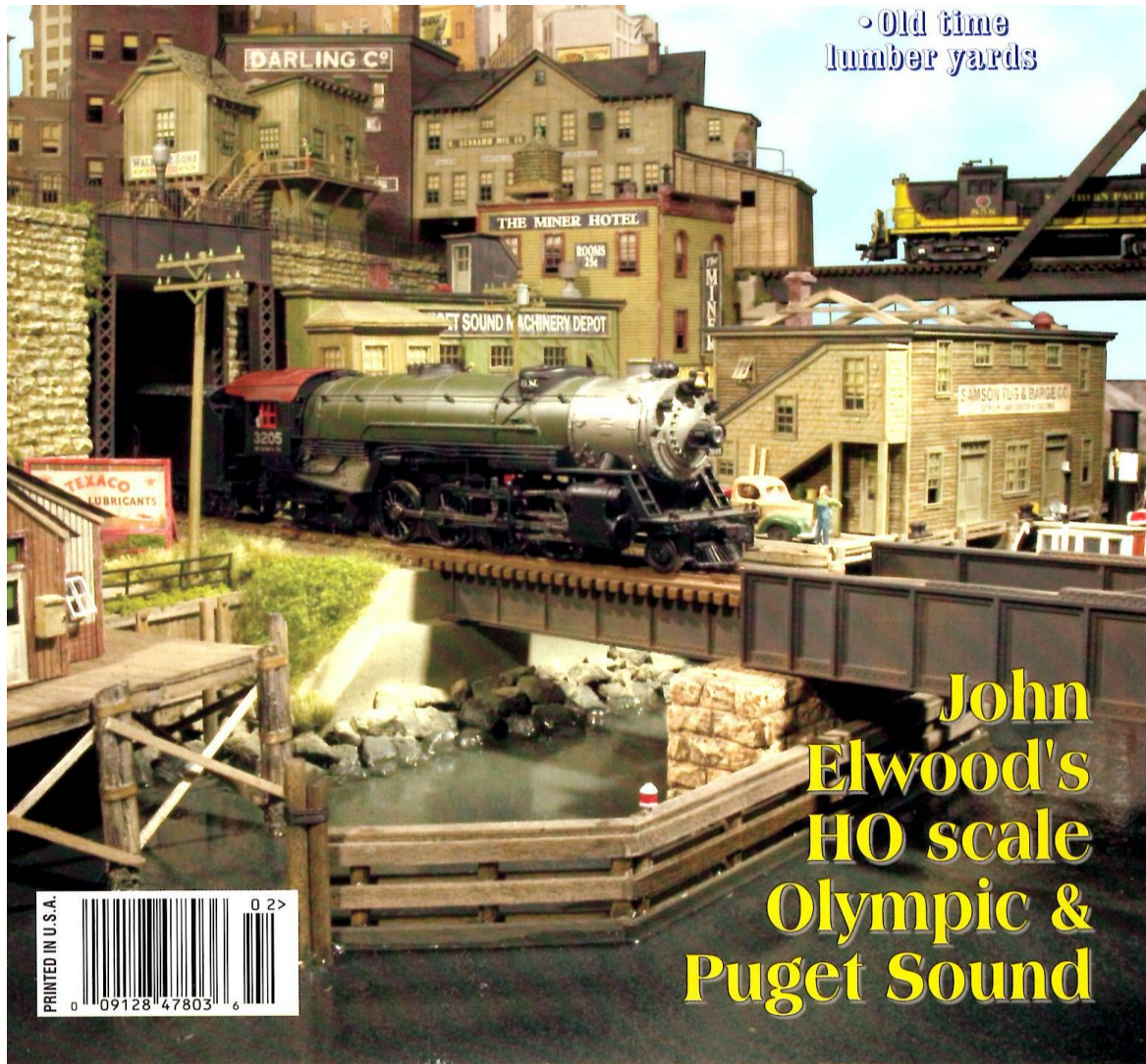


The CMMS Beakhead: A Salute to John Elwood



As I am finishing up some left overs to Transfer II, I 'm starting to go through some of my old Ambroid, Northeastern, LaBelle, Camino, Silver Streak, Walthers, Roundhouse, Athearn, Scotia Scale Models, and Quality Craft Models. The two rails along the main deck of Transfer II call for twelve to fourteen rolling stock cars.

I haven't unpacked these kits of 1/87 (HO) train cars since the early 1980's. So, I did it last month, and I'm sorting from finished models, half-finished models, and models yet to be built. Having a good, frustrating, re-start on the smaller scale, but I'm getting better as the days progress.

The un-packing also gave re-birth to some RR mags. John's Article was in one of them. I share this with you because it's some class of "WOW!!!!" also shows you how the CMMS got John to the water. He even went so far as to buy a waterside parcel of land of which he brought his RR rails to meet the ocean. Enjoy!

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PICTURE PERFECT: John Elwood's HO empire

This layout links big city modeling with the Pacific Northwest/**Tom Bartley**; photos by **Phil Monat**

Ask a model railroader how he got started in the hobby and chances are good he'll wax nostalgic for a few minutes, his words fuzzy and warm and likely to include Lionel, Christmas, and parents. Ask John Elwood how he got his start and the man behind the world-class, arguably world-famous, Olympic & Puget Sound Railroad

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frankly confesses, "I have no idea."

John knows, of course, to the exact day when he began his nearly four decades of dedicated craftsmanship, but, like his HO layout, the story is not what you ordinarily get. He mentions not Christmas but Thanksgiving, not a gift but a long-forgotten cardboard carton, not Lionel but Hobbytown.

In common with other modelers, his parents are a pivotal part of the story. One long-ago Thanksgiving they arrived to have dinner at the home John had just purchased for his growing family, not far from his Bridgeport, Connecticut, birthplace. His parents brought with them a cardboard box, its contents untouched and largely forgotten for almost two

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The depot at Lake Quinault (above) is always bustling. Here we see a local freight, led by GN 2-8-2 No. 3205, about to make up its train before heading to Puget Mills. A Great Northern SW7 pokes its nose into the scene as it crosses Main Street. Georgetown's main

intersection directs many customers to this Texaco gas station (below). In the early 1950's, washing your car by hand was one of their extended services. This colorful building is scratchbuilt from a photo of the same structure on George Sellios' FSM layout.

student, naval officer, husband, and father. Finally, as a homeowner, he and his RS-3 were reunited in 1972.

By year's end (that's a month later, folks), the toys of his teens formed the nucleus of a rookie's sheet-of-plywood layout in a basement corner. A couple of years later, the tipping point at which a 4' x 8' pike can either revert to pieces preserved in a cardboard box or evolve into something lasting, John built his second layout, the largest an Atlas track-plan book could provide and his approximately 12' x 16' basement alcove could accommodate.

More than simply bigger, the new layout became a first home for the finely detailed structures John created using basic scratchbuilding materials or kits, craftsman and others. Among his early role models in modeling was George Sellios, the Peabody, Massachusetts, proprietor of Fine Scale Miniatures. Widely known today for his magnificent Franklin & South Manchester layout, which dates to 1985, George began designing and selling his line of craftsman kits in 1967.

"He's been my inspiration since before he built his layout," says John, who can point to ten FSM-pedigree buildings on today's layout, including a scratchbuilt structure based on a Sellios design.

Other kits include Builders-in-Scale and Campbell, as well as brick buildings from the usual suspects.

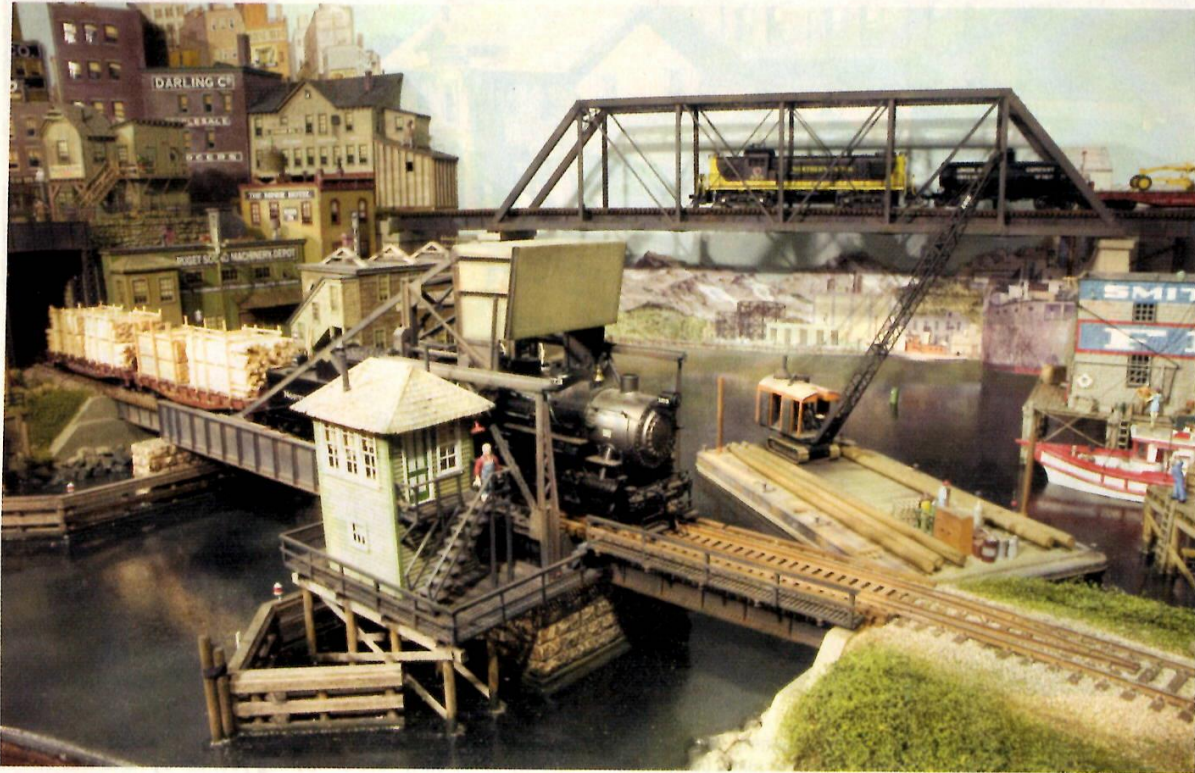
John finds special satisfaction in scratchbuilding wood structures, working from photographs, say, of buildings on Sellios' F&SM or pictures of prototypes. An old panorama of Seattle's

harbor in *Where Rails Meet the Sea*, his favorite book, shows the front (or rear) of a building that caught John's eye. The photo, taken from a distance, barely hints at what the building's sides show or what its nameplate might say. Undeterred, John re-created the visible portion of the two-story building and



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PICTURE PERFECT: John Elwood's HO empire



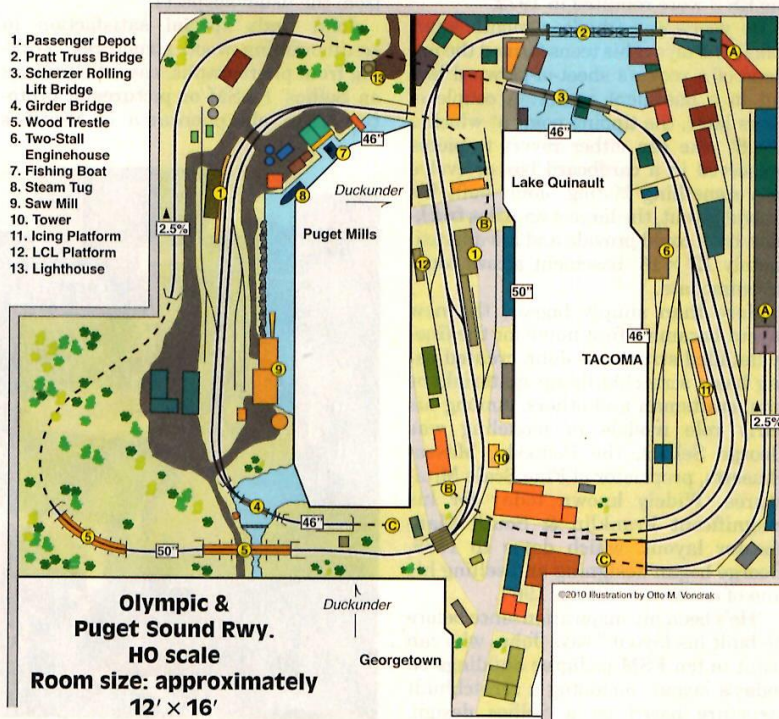
Located between Lake Quinault and Tacoma, the Puyallup River is crossed on two levels (*above*). The Scherzer rolling lift bridge was kitbashed from an old Tyco kit, while the control tower and support

structure were scratchbuilt. Most of the structures in this scene are scratchbuilt to give everything a maritime feel. John Elwood (*page 45*) has mixed big city scenes with Pacific Northwest railroading.

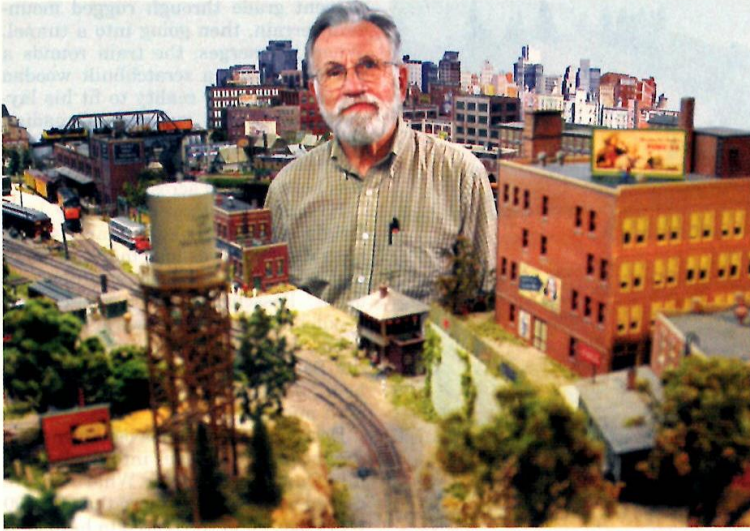
guessed at the sidewall details, then added a slab of foam-core as the unseen rear wall and transplanted the Seattle structure to Tacoma. To decipher the building's lettering, John and his wife, Lorraine, spent more than an hour poring over the photograph with a magnifying glass before arriving at "Harrington and Smith." (While Lorraine has shared an interest in the hobby, their three daughters have not. Nevertheless, granddaughter Rhyann has virtually grown up with the O&PS. See the sidebar.)

Using photos to research what he's modeling is nothing new for John. Ask a model railroader how he chose his layout's locale and chances are good he either lives in the area or his nostalgic next few words will bear witness to a favorite carrier or countryside recalled from childhood, forever fixed in the modeler's mind. Ask John Elwood and he'll tell you he read about it in a magazine.

The O&PS, a compact monument to the Pacific Northwest, sits in Connecticut, a continent away from the layout's Tacoma focus. With no ties of birth, travel, or residency to the area he models ("I spent a day in Seattle a couple of years ago"), John attributes his



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choice of locale to a ten-year-old article he read in 1976 describing the building of Puget Junction, an operating diorama set in Washington State. John

could envision his trains making their way over, through, and, with the help of bridges and trestles, between the Northwest's pine-studded mountains,

but he also wanted the kind of operations detailed in *Where Rails Meet the Sea*, including a big-time sawmill.

A fictional branch (independent subsidiary) of the Northern Pacific, the O&PS serves the Olympic Peninsula towns of Lake Quinault and Puget Mills out of the parent NP's Tacoma yard. The yardmaster makes up a local freight based on a switch list, and then turns both over to a crew. "When we operate this layout," John says, "I have two crews of two men each" on the freights. For extra interest the dispatcher will send out through passenger trains, requiring a crew to clear the single-track mainline.

When John confronted his most-daunting given, the limited space available for a trackplan, he conceived, and rejected, a number of original designs before turning again to his reliable source material: an old magazine. He came across a compact track plan, drawn by the late Terry Walsh for his West Agony & Inchoate, and decided to adapt it. (After a *Model Railroader* cover story on the O&PS in 2007, Terry's widow sent John a WA&I boxcar for his layout. It sits proudly displayed on a

Growing up with Grampy's trains

My life has been spent in perpetual motion, quite literally, since my mother and I moved from my grandparents' house when I was young. With my parents living in an apartment in New York City and a college life in New Jersey, trains became a main staple in the way I travel. The sound of the wheels on the rails and the wind close on the sides of the train have led me to a sort of rambling view on the world around me, an independent, mobile way of looking at things. Undoubtedly, this vision would not have been there without my grandfather, whose love for model trains shaped me in so many ways.

I can remember being only five years old, scuffing my sneakers on the basement floor, finding Grampy with that big magnifier glass strapped on his head, making his smile silly and uneven with one eye looking bigger than the other. I would ask to see his plastic tray of "little people," as I called them; he would hand me the crowd and set me on a stool by his layout. On any open log or flat cars I could find, I would place the little people unsteadily on the edge of the cars. He would laugh and say something like, "Just make sure nobody jumps ship!" He would hit the "go switch," and suddenly the train would be chugging along the track past the shipyard named for my cousin Liam and my Grammy Lorraine; past the little city where an automobile company with my name on it sat; past the boats and finally through my favorite section of the layout, the mountains. I would run around to the other side of the railroad and he would lift me up to watch for the little point of light shining through the dark tunnel, awaiting its burst into daylight. I'll keep that memory of the train rushing out of that tunnel for the rest of my life.

As I grew older, I found myself amazed at how Grampy would work on a completely scratchbuilt house, solely from photographs. With those big magnifier glasses and those tiny tweezers at graceful work, he would place each shingle one at a time on the small roofs, his hand always so exact with his placement. I remember building a very simple version with him from a kit once; with precision, I attempted to make everything just so, just like Grampy. He

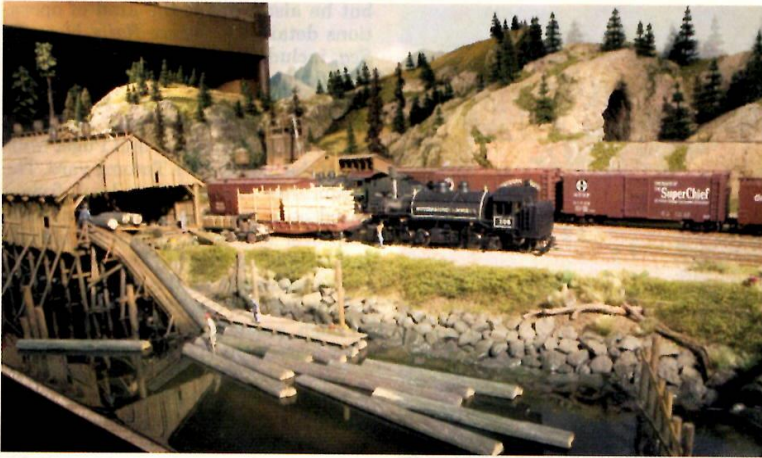
would smile and laugh when I would glue something completely wrong or leave a wall too slanted. Today, I find myself sculpting all my work just as he had, in a way that was not harsh, but with a will for the beauty in exactness.

Today, Grampy is well known for his amazing model railroad and his ability to construct amazing works of miniature art. Though no one else in the family was much interested in the hobby, he truly made it his own and worked hard at it. For this, he is finally being recognized, and I am so very proud of him for it. His independent ideas have greatly influenced my ability to work towards what I want, even if other people don't necessarily care for the same things as I do. I think being able to do things on my own, in a brave way, came from his knack for being his own person. I have learned how to be passionate towards the hobbies I keep, as well as what I'd like to use as a career, such as writing. Trains will forever be my favorite, and perhaps most personal, way of travel. —RHYANN ELWOOD

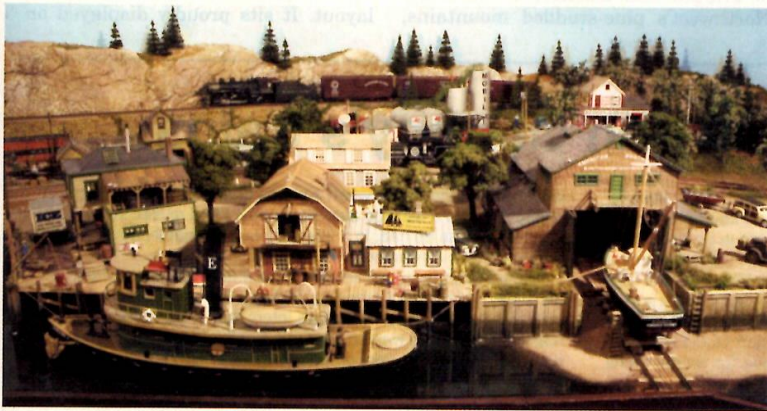


The CMMS Beakhead: A Salute to John Elwood

PICTURE PERFECT: John Elwood's HO empire



While NP 2-6-2, No. 2345 finishes its work in the background, Weyerhaeuser 2-6-6-2T, No. 108 pulls a loaded lumber flat away from the Dowd sawmill (above). The scratchbuilt sawmill was constructed in 1976. An aerial view of the Puget Mills wharf (below) shows a busy waterfront. The American Boathouse builds and repairs all types of small craft. The steamboat wharf will soon welcome the new excursion steamer, *Islander*, currently under construction off site.



siding in Lake Quinault.)

Armed at last with his “permanent” track plan, John built equally permanent benchwork, bolting 1” x 4”s to the basement’s concrete walls, then adding 2” x 2” legs and 1” x 3” sub-roadbed supported by risers. The towns and yard, a model railroad’s traditionally flat areas, rest on a solid foundation of half-inch plywood and Homasote®.

When he was finished, John had a 100-foot mainline of code 100 flexible track and turnouts from Shinohara on cork roadbed. Some sidings and spurs are code 70, while rail on all the trestles and bridges is handlaid.

To scenic this beautiful region he had never seen personally, John studied photos then applied plaster gauze and paper towels soaked with Hydrocal®. Land areas are painted, then covered with sifted dirt and Woodland Scenics

ground foam in appropriate shades of color and degrees of coarseness.

Pines trees dot the layout. Some, the taller ones, were made by carving balsa trunks and adding fern branches, while others are Heki ready-made trees. Water for the ponds and waterfront is Envirotex® resin, dried flat instead of being teased into waves. To create the effect of running water, a coating of Liquitex gloss medium was added to the stream’s surface.

Riding the line

In Tacoma, the yardmaster has finished making up the peddler freight, so let’s follow as it moves out westbound through mountains and pine forests to the switching challenges of Lake Quinault and Puget Mills.

The local first makes its way over the Puyallup River before climbing a 2.5

percent grade through rugged mountain terrain, then going into a tunnel. When it emerges, the train rounds a curve, crossing a scratchbuilt wooden trestle. Adapting reality to fit his layout needs, John curved a Canadian Pacific Railway prototype, which had described a quite straight line when it was built in 1929 across Alberta.

Rounding another curve, our local freight arrives at Lake Quinault, where the railroad serves four industries and makes less-than-carload pickups and drops. Passengers ride a gas-electric doodlebug from the town’s two-story depot, John’s first structure built from the Sellios FSM line. “Everything on here,” John says with evident pride, “I built myself.”

Descending as it leaves town, the freight plunges deeper into the beautiful Quinault Valley. What nature carved with a glacier more than 20,000 years ago, John re-created in hardshell just over 20 years ago.

Heading for Puget Mills, our local passes John’s scratchbuilt sawmill, which processes trees after they have been rafted down the river and pushed into place by tugboat. Reflecting its maritime character (and its builder’s dedication to details that can be seen and heard), the Puget Mills waterfront also includes the squawking of sea gulls, a shop where private boaters gas up and buy their supplies, a repair facility, a lighthouse that sounds a warning foghorn blast at regular intervals, and a steamboat wharf.

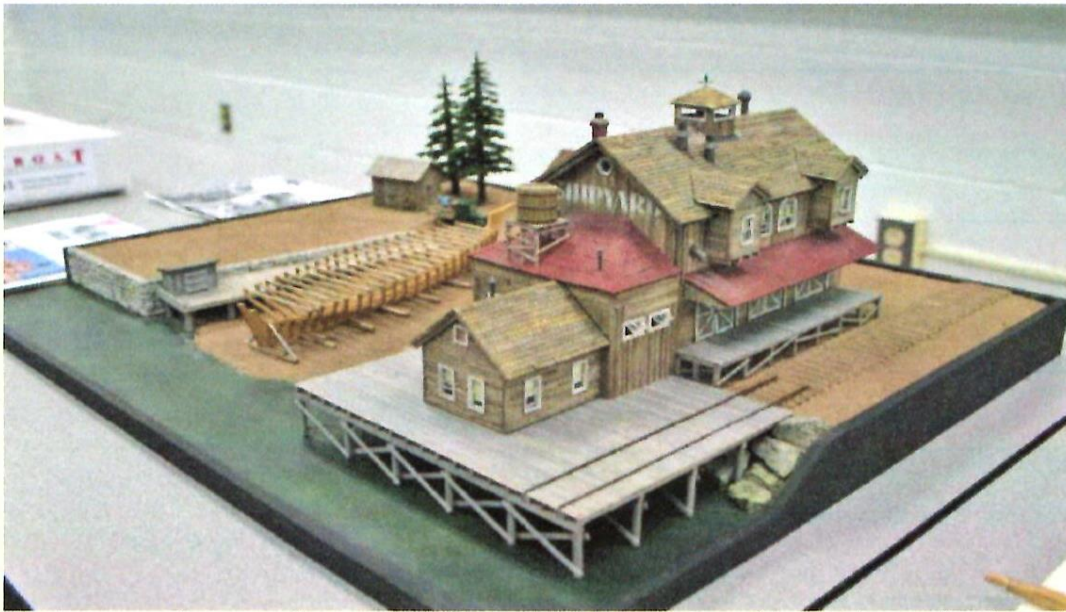
For continuous running, a train leaving Puget Mills can follow hidden tunnel tracks back to its starting point in Tacoma, then begin a second circuit, climbing once more toward Lake Quinault, but for operations, and for this peddler freight, Puget Mills is the end of the line, so the tunnel’s direct-line trackage back to staging cannot be used. Instead, the crew must turn its train, swapping the caboose and motive power positions to return whence it came, running in reverse if necessary.

John eschews Digital Command Control for a layout the size of the O&PS, saying, “It runs flawlessly on d.c. using the traditional block-control method.” In addition to MRC power packs, the yard throttle, or a wireless Aristo-Craft cab can run mainline trains. “It’s not that I don’t like DCC,” John insists. “I do. I love it on the big layouts.”

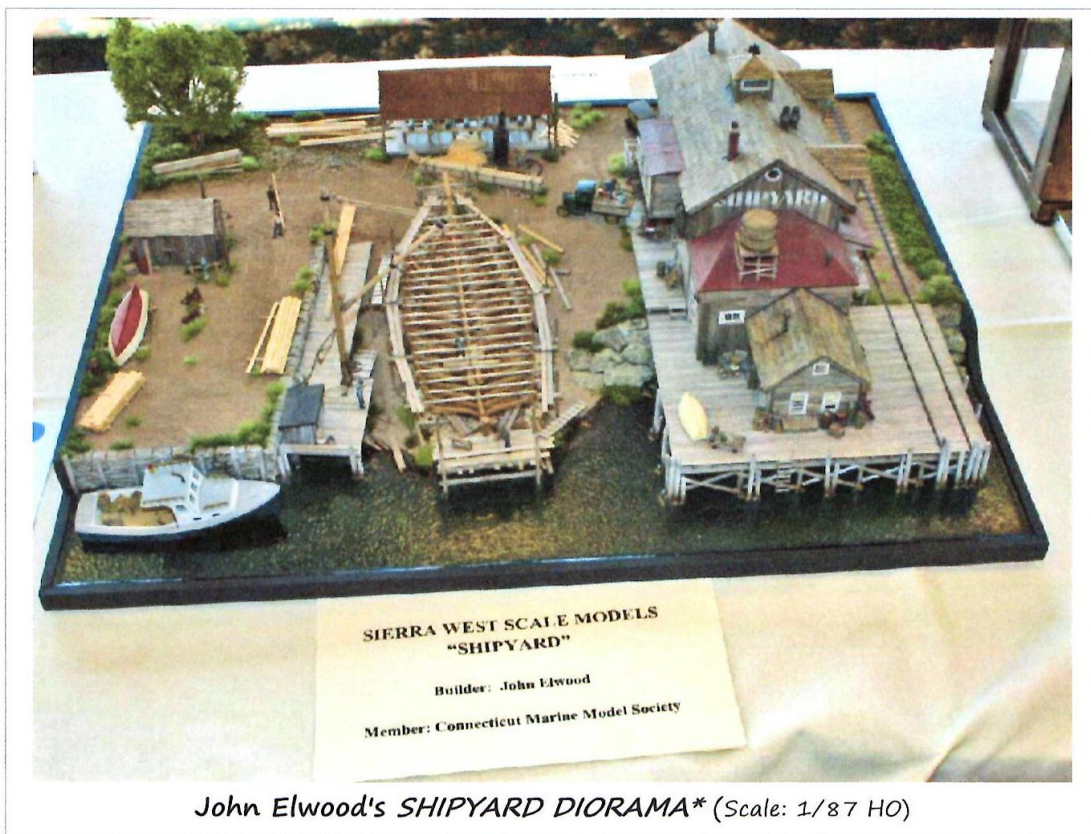
John could have a bigger layout and, indeed, he’s already drawn ambitious plans for a logging branchline built out over his workbench and existing crew quarters, but after “28 years of pecking away” at the O&PS, John says of his envisioned expansion, “I don’t know if I have the energy for it.” Just wait and see. ☞

The CMMS Beakhead: A Salute to John Elwood

John Elwood, An "Essex" like shipyard diorama



John is using photos and research of historical Essex, MA as his guide to what he calls "junking up" a very realistic diorama of a shipyard in its heyday. Neat stuff!



John Elwood's SHIPYARD DIORAMA* (Scale: 1/87 HO)