

Kevin Klettke's

Washington Northern

Big switching in a small space.



Washington Northern 325 leads a short freight into Union yard.

Kevin Klettke knew he didn't have space for long mainline runs on his bedroom-sized pike. So he created a small layout with big-time switching potential and great scenery.



By Charlie Comstock, photos by Joe Brugger

Model Railroad Hobbyist got to visit the Washington Northern in Tacoma, Washington and interview Kevin Klettke. Kevin has been in the hobby for well over 30 years and this is his sixth layout.

MRH: Hello, I'm here with Kevin Klettke in his Washington Northern railroad empire. Kevin, this is quite the layout you've got here. It's a little bit small – it fits in a bedroom, but it's very high quality. How long have you been modeling anyway?

Kevin: Well, for about 38 years now. I started when I was 12 years old and I'm approaching the big 50 so that's 38 years.

MRH: Oh, so this isn't your first layout?

Kevin: No, no. I've had layouts since I was 12, three smaller ones as a child, then three as an adult.

MRH: How does this compare with the previous layout. Was that in this house also?



Kevin: No, it was not. It was in a room I specially built above my garage just for the layout. It was a 23 by 35 and was double decked. Much larger! This is what fits in my spare bedroom, but it has to share the space with an exercise machine.

MRH: How big is this layout?

Kevin: It's 12' x 8' which doesn't fill the whole room. It's a sort of lopsided T shape.

MRH: You said that your previous layout was a double deck; did you have any thoughts about double decking this layout?

Kevin: Without coming up with some kind of an elevator idea, there was really no way to get track between the

decks. Plus I'm not really fond of double deck layouts.

MRH: Why is that?

Kevin: Well for me, I didn't enjoy the sight levels [of the decks] and I found it was harder to work on. It was especially hard for me to work on the wiring underneath the second level - that type of thing. With the current layout, I like the height – not too low or too high.

MRH: Did you consider a mushroom plan?

Kevin: For this layout no, but in the future if I had that [large] size of room I'd consider it just because it eliminates a lot of the double deck problems.

Figure 2: Clever use of photo backdrops makes the main road through Port Andrews seem much longer than it really is. Attention to detail and color makes the scene come alive.

MRH: A lot of the stuff I'm seeing here came off your previous layout?

Kevin: That's correct.

MRH: How much is that here?

Kevin: Pretty much everything you see here is taken from a previous layout. I've made very few financial investments in this layout – I didn't need to, I had all the stuff I needed and more to build this size of layout.



Figure 3

Figure 3: When naming boats, Kevin says it's wise to not use names of women other than your wife or daughters. The Carol is tied up at the wharf in Port Andrews, a very busy place.

MRH: So most of the buildings, most of the track - anything else? Wire or lumber?

Kevin: Wire, I was fortunate that my father at one time gave me this huge spool of wire. It's not always the best gauge but I have tons of it. And it works!

MRH: Basically you built this layout for very little cash outlay ...

Kevin: Yeah, outside of the initial investments, there's probably less than \$500 in new purchases here.

MRH: This layout is a 1995 era?

Kevin: Currently, yes.

MRH: Did you change eras when you went to a new layout?

Kevin: Well the last layout I considered a current layout - it was about 1995 when I started that layout. So when I started this layout I kept the era. Once again it was the cost thing. I didn't want to have to invest in a bunch of new equipment.

MRH: So you haven't been buying a bunch of new cars and engines...

Kevin: No, I have not. Actually I've been selling quite a bit of my older stuff.

MRH: You said the previous layout was a current layout. Does that mean you picked 1995 - the current time when

you started and just stayed there, or were you trying to keep current with the present (like Eric Brooman – Utah Belt does)?

Kevin: No, I didn't want to be that committed to change. I just like the 1995 era. Everything that I needed to see was right in front of me. I didn't have to do a bunch of prototype research other than go out my front door and see what was running on the rails. I had no intention of upgrading and like I said, with this layout, I already had the equipment for 1995 so I just stuck with the era.

MRH: What made you pick 1995, other than going out the front door? Was there anything special about that time that appealed to you?

Kevin: No, not particularly. I did like some of the new locomotives that were coming out at the time. SD70s were fairly new then and I liked that type of power. Unfortunately with this layout I can't run a lot of that 6-axle stuff, it's all in boxes right now...

MRH: Too-tight curves?

Kevin: Yeah, and for switching industrial tracks, SD70s just wouldn't work

MRH: The Washington Northern, there's no such real railroad, no prototype for that?

Kevin: No, there's no prototype, this is a fictitious line.

MRH: Where did you come up with that name?

Kevin: I don't really know exactly if I had any particular motivation. I want-

ed to model Washington state – I've grown up here, lived here all my life. The previous layout is where the name started and it was larger, before, with a lot of mountain scenery. I wanted to pick a locale that would fit in with the real railroad map and the Olympic Peninsula was an area that was shy of a major railroad operation so I invented the city of Port Andrews – named after my son – which is sort of like Port Angeles is now, only it's a much bigger metropolitan area. It was the northern part of Washington state and so I just settled on Washington Northern.

MRH: Port Angeles, that's at the northern part of the Olympic peninsula?

Kevin: Correct, on the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

MRH: So the new layout features a lot of waterfront?

Kevin: Well yeah, as much as I could fit into this space. The marine aspect has always been an interest of mine and I wanted to incorporate it into this layout.

MRH: You weren't able to do that in the previous layout, so this is new?

Kevin: Yes, it is new here.

MRH: Since the previous layout didn't have a waterfront you wound up having to build some new structures.

Kevin: Yes

MRH: Was there one of them in particular you found especially interesting, that you scratch built?

Kevin: Correct, yes. The Sea Dog Boats and Marine Supply. It's a scratch-built



Figure 4: A distinctive Washington state highway bridge.

Figure 5: The scratch-built Sea Dog Boats and Marine Supply.





Figure 6

Figure 6: This part of Port Andrews is the most unfinished area on the layout. Kevin has been spending the last two weeks arranging and rearranging the buildings here looking for the one that works the best.

Figure 7. An example of Kevin's structure craftsmanship.



Figure 7

building - originally a warehouse. Then I put it on some pilings that were left over from the Walther's pier and crane kit that everybody is probably familiar with. I made it into a waterfront boat dealer marine supply store.

MRH: What materials did you make it out of, styrene?

Kevin: No, it's mostly made of wood and card stock.

MRH: You had fun building it I bet.

Kevin: Ah... yeah, it was interesting.

MRH: Did you make up the plans yourself?

Kevin: No, I got the plans from a gentlemen that had built other scratch structures. **Jerald Kinney** is his name.

MRH: Are you planning to do more scratch building if you can find the space?

Kevin: That's the big issue right now, the space - it was fun to do. I've recently started dabbling with craftsman style kits. Because of the era I model, a lot of those kits aren't era appropriate but it's interesting and fun and I'd like to try some more of that but I don't know where I'd put them on this layout at this time. Maybe sometime in the future when I have my basement empire.

MRH: There is one place on the layout that isn't really finished yet ...

Kevin: Yeah that's correct. That's kind of the city streets of Port Andrews.

I wanted to have a downtown, city street area - inspired by some layouts that I've seen recently in some

magazines and articles. As you can tell it's been a good two weeks rearranging these buildings (figure 6) trying to figure out what would be the best arrangement. It was kind of the last thing to be planned and I didn't have any specific arrangement of the buildings in mind when I started the layout. I'm experimenting right now and this area has been used as a workbench because it's the only free space I have in here right now!

MRH: What are you looking for in building arrangements?

Kevin: I'm just trying to come up with an interesting city street composition that I can detail fairly well and highlight some of the buildings I'm putting interiors into and that sort of thing.

MRH: How much rolling stock is on this layout, Kevin?

Kevin: I currently have about 60 cars in my fleet, down from probably close to 200 on my larger layout.

MRH: Is there anything special you're doing to the cars weathering-wise to make them look a more realistic?

Kevin: Well I've dabbled in weathering a bit. I've really been inspired by some of the examples I've seen on modeltrainsweathered.com and some of other sites. Some people are doing fantastic work and I'm learning a lot from them. I'm going to be diving into the weathering heavily when the layout itself is more complete and I have more time.

MRH: Are there any techniques you have in mind to give a try?

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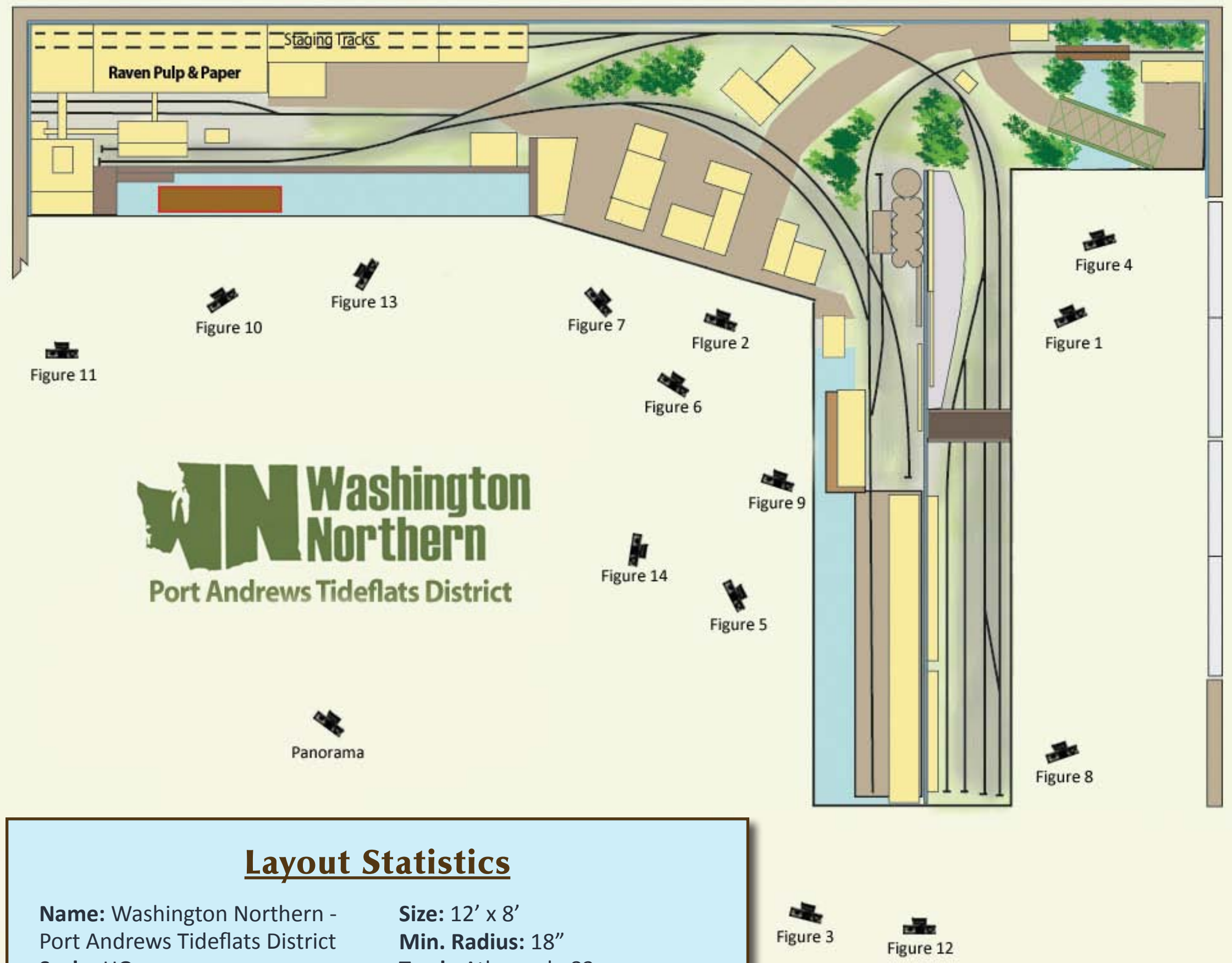


Kevin Klettke photo

Kevin Klettke lives just south of Seattle, Washington with his wife and dog Bentley. Kevin can't remember a time he wasn't interested in trains. He grew up in Eastern Washington watching trains on the GN and later BN roaring through town. After visiting a layout in San Francisco in 1972 with his father, he became a complete train nut. His modeling exposure started that year with an HO at Christmas. 37 years later he's still at it. His first layout was a 4' x 8' hinged to a wall in his parents garage. The last two of his six layouts have been the fictitious Washington Northern.

His other interests include the Seattle Seahawks, Mariners, and salt water aquariums.

His train website is wnrr.net.



Layout Statistics

Name: Washington Northern - Port Andrews Tideflats District
Scale: HO
Era: 1995
Locale: Olympic Peninsula, Washington State
Style: Proto-freelanced
Trackplan: Switching with staging connection

Size: 12' x 8'
Min. Radius: 18"
Track: Atlas code 83
Turnouts: Peco with Tortoise
Turnout control: Hare & Lenz stationary decoders
Control: DCC - Lenz
Construction started: 2009

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Kevin: Yes, there are a lot with washes and oil paints, along with some of the weathering powders that are out now. I used to use pastel chalks and there's big improvement on some weathering powders with self adhesive in them. There are some different things being done with cosmetics sponges too.

MRH: Have you tried anything with powdered chalk mixed with alcohol?

Kevin: No, I have not. I've seen that done and with good results - airbrushing as well. I have an airbrush but it's a cheapo so I might need to invest in something that's a little bit better if I'm going to use the airbrush for weathering.

MRH: What kind of techniques are you using for scenery on this layout? I see a rocky beach with dirt and sand and some weeds (figure 9) that looks really good.

Kevin: Umm, I've gleaned a lot of things from different web sites and some from Joe Fugate's tutorials that he's had using tempera paints mixed in with sand. I also use real dirt I collected. But I don't have a lot of land forms here, being that it's a flat industrial layout. I plan to make a static grass applicator soon because I want to dabble with that. I've never done that before, but I've seen some great scenery made with static grass.

MRH: Static grass applicators work great. When you start, you'll feel like a scenery hero.



Figure 8

Kevin: Yes, I'm looking forward to adding that to the scene because, if you're modeling this part of the country there's greenery everywhere.

MRH: So you're saying Washington's just filled with greenery?

Kevin: It is, except for eastern Washington.

MRH: What about your trees?

Kevin: The deciduous are mostly sagebrush armatures that I collected myself

over in eastern Washington. I made the canopies with ground foam. The conifers have carved trunks. I used some [furnace] filter material to make the branches and added flocking to that.

MRH: How do you plant your trees, spikes in the bottom?

Kevin: What I did on the conifers, I drilled holes and put some finishing nails in the bottom to give them a little spike. Then I drill or punch a hole in

Figure 8: Washington Northern 102 pulling into Union yard next to an AD&N box car.

Figure 9: (next page) Blue Star Ready Mix in Port Andrews is near the beach. Caboose 52 shows signs of heavy use or maybe it's just all the salt air near the sea front in Port Andrews.

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Figure 9



Text continues from [page 51](#)

the ground where I need it and plant them that way. Being that this layout has a plywood surface I needed to drill the holes instead of punching into nice pink foam that many people are using.

MRH: What about the sagebrush trees, did you put spikes in them too?

Kevin: No, I drill large enough holes in the plywood to hold the trunks. I tried doing drilling a hole in the trunk for a spike and found that sagebrush trunks are pretty delicate – by drilling them I kind of was destroying the trunks. So I’ve just been drilling holes [in the plywood] about the size of the trunk, add a dab of white glue, and plop in the trees.

MRH: You’re getting into operations phase now that you’ve got the track in and have rolling stock. What are you trying to do with operations?

Kevin: Well I’ve always enjoyed an industrial switching layout. I do miss

the long mainline runs, but since there wasn’t room for that, switching was the next best thing. I’ve developed a car card and waybill system. It’s a two-step waybill - basically one step is onto the layout from staging and the second step is off. That keeps it easy. I’ve got a two track staging yard that’s hidden behind the paper mill. I pre-stage my trains and I run two trains in an operating session.

MRH: When you run a train you come out of staging, then what?

Kevin: Trains come out of staging and they go to the small yard at Union. If sorting needs to be done, it can be done there. There’s also a couple of industries along the backdrop (figure 12).

It will usually run around the train and take it over towards the paper mill and the Tideflats area where the scrap dealer, Olympic Copper and Pipe, and the concrete plant are located. It col-



Figure 10

Figure 10: Raven Paper Co. in Port Andrews is a major shipper on the Washington Northern.

Figure 11: Some of Kevin’s well-labeled car card boxes.



Figure 11

lects the outbound cars and brings the inbound cars in and heads back to staging when its done.

MRH: I see the concrete spur faces the opposite direction from the Tideflats spurs.

Kevin: Exactly, when I stage the trains, I have to figure which cars are going to facing and trailing spurs and make sure the cars are blocked properly in the train.

MRH: Right now, you're running just by yourself. Does the layout allow running with another operator?

Kevin: I think so, I kept that in mind when I adapted the track plan - that

two people could run simultaneously. That has yet to be tried

MRH: You're using DCC?

Kevin: Right, I'm using Lenz.

MRH: How did you pick Lenz?

Kevin: Actually I picked Lenz because my local hobby shop – the man I was getting most of my stuff from back on my old layout, recommended it. He knew it thoroughly and could answer all my questions so it seemed like a logical choice. I'm satisfied with it.

MRH: You've got a few sound locomotives too...

Kevin: Yes.

Figure 12: The peninsula backdrop. Union yard is on the right, Tideflat area is on the left. Kevin emphasized marine operations on this version of the Washington Northern.



Figure 12

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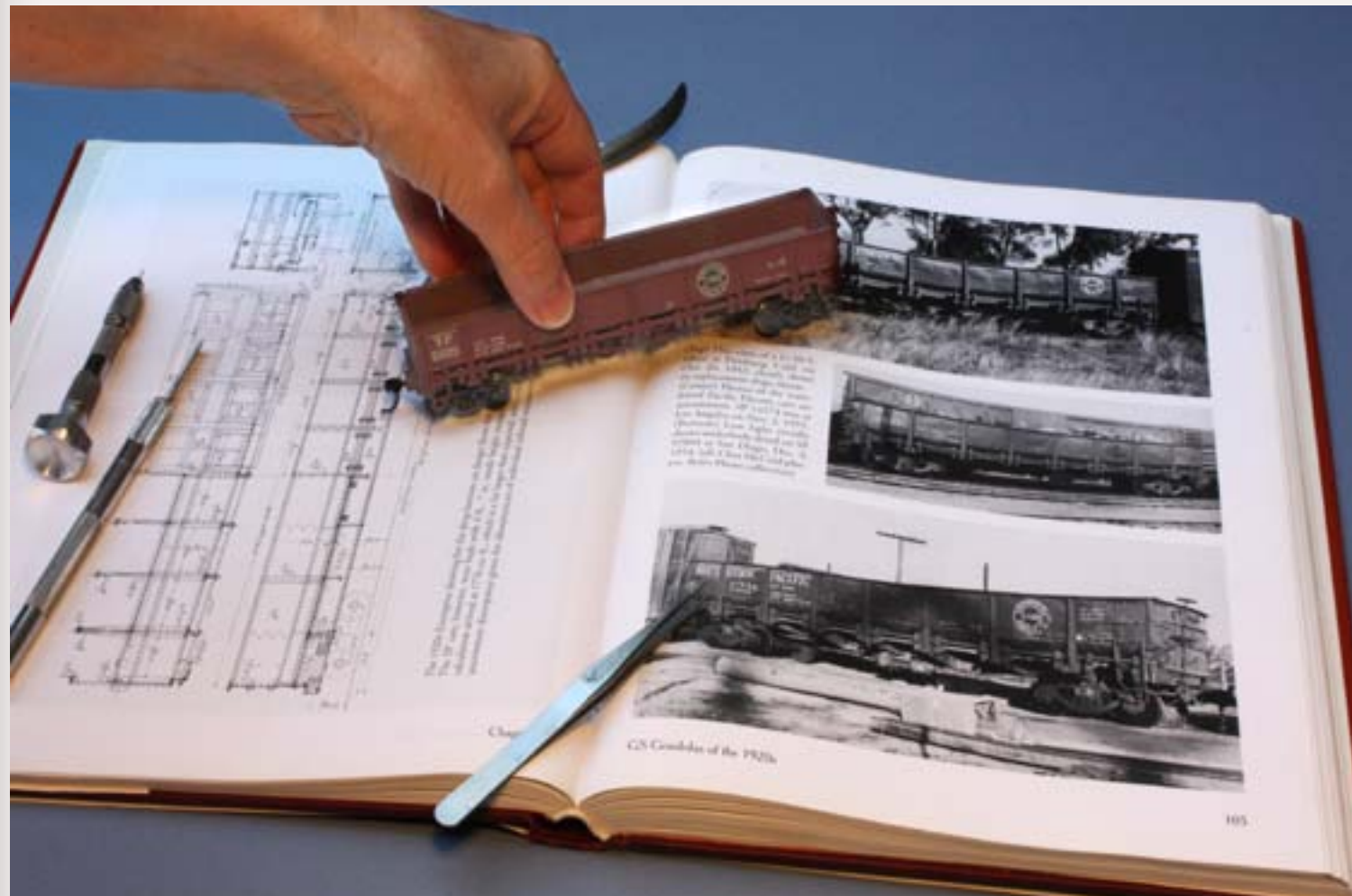


Figure 13: Another view of the Raven Paper Company, the biggest industry served by the Washington Northern.

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MRH: Do all the locomotives on the layout have sound?

Kevin: All the ones that I run have sound. There's a number of DCC equipped locomotives that are awaiting sound to be installed. That will come as I deem necessary. I have three or four locos now with sound and that's all I need to operate.

MRH: That's an expense, going to sound decoders.

Kevin: Yes it is, it is and with two kids in college we're trying to cut expenses.

MRH: Did your kids show any interest in the railroad?

Kevin: My daughter Tara did. On the last railroad she actually did help a

bit. She liked getting her hands messy when we did the plaster over wire screen. She liked doing the scenery. She's out of the house now so she had nothing to do with this one.

MRH: How long have you been working on this layout?

Kevin: I started in 2009.

MRH: Geez, you're a fast worker Kevin! You're doing a great job in here. Thank you for having us. This layout is really nice now and when you get the town area behind you finished it's going to be even nicer, I think.

Kevin: Thank you for coming!



Figure 14

Figure 14: Switching the wharf at Tideflats.

