

**SUSQUEHANNA**  
**AND**  
**NEW YORK**  
**RAILROAD**



Welcome to the Susquehanna & New York Railroad! We hope you enjoy your visit, and feel free to ask questions and take photographs.

#### Prototype Background:

The (model) railroad is based on the Susquehanna & New York Railroad, a shortline common carrier located in the mountains of central Pennsylvania north of Williamsport. The S&NY ran from Newberry, PA (just west of Williamsport on the West Branch of the Susquehanna River) north along Lycoming Creek via trackage rights over the PRR Elmira Branch to Marsh Hill, PA. From Marsh Hill, the S&NY sent its own right-of-way northeast in the narrow Pleasant Stream valley, climbing upgrade to Ellenton, and then downgrade along Schrader Creek to the S&NY's eastern terminus at Towanda, PA on the North Branch of the Susquehanna. The railroad served the lumber town of Masten; the small farming villages of Wheelerville, Ellenton, and Monroeton; sawmills and wood-chemical factory at Laquin, and a large tannery at Powell. In addition, a short branch to Ralston, PA served a tannery and small coal mines.

At Newberry, the S&NY interchanged mostly with the NYC and Reading railroads, and the PRR to a lesser degree. The main interchange with the PRR was at Marsh Hill. At Towanda, the S&NY interchanged with the Lehigh Valley.

The S&NY was a wholly-owned subsidiary of the U.S. Leather Company, and was originally built to harvest hemlock bark for tanning operations. Traffic on the prototype S&NY was therefore largely based timber and wood products. Large hemlock and hardwood mills run by the Central Pennsylvania Lumber Co. (another U.S. Leather Co. subsidiary) were located at Masten and Laquin. Laquin also was the site of a large wood-chemical plant, a small veneer factory, a kindling-wood factory, and a hub and stave mill. Tanneries run by other various U.S. Leather Co. subsidiaries were located at Ralston and Powell, and a glue factory built to utilize other by-products of U.S. Leather operations was sited at Newberry.

Traffic on the S&NY peaked in the mid-1920's. As the largest tracts of timber were cut and depleted, the mills went into decline, and were largely gone by the early

1930's. The wood-chemical plant was shuttered in the very early 1930's, as the hardwood supplies were exhausted, and the chemical processes used to extract charcoal, methanol, and acetic acid from wood were superseded by other methods.

However, as war clouds loomed in Europe in the late 1930's, overhead interchange traffic from the NYC and Reading at Newberry, and the Lehigh Valley at Towanda, became an important source of revenue and the S&NY was back in the black (barely).

Unfortunately, WWII sent scrap metal prices through the roof, and despite making a small profit the scrap value of the S&NY was higher than its worth to the U.S. Leather Co. as a common carrier railroad, and the S&NY was abandoned and dismantled in 1942.

Model S&NY Givens, Druthers, and Philosophy:

I settled on the S&NY as an inspiration for a model railroad for a number of reasons. I first "discovered" the S&NY reading Tom Taber's series on the logging railroads of Pennsylvania as a youngster. Ed Kaseman's book "The Story of the Susquehanna and New York Railroad" also captured my interest. We have a family hunting camp not far from Marsh Hill, PA, and I found the idea that an entire railroad yard once existed where now there were only woods incredibly fascinating.

The "struggling shortline" theme has always had a certain "romantic" cachet that I believe can add a lot of interest to a model railroad, witness the innumerable Colorado narrow gauge layouts featured over the years in the model railroad press. I had taken a few trips to the EBT years ago, and the atmosphere there had an influence as well.

Another increasing influence was the concept of modeling "jobs", not just trains, as promulgated by Tony Koester and others. This was reinforced by a trip in 2010

to the Nevada Northern in Ely, NV. With participation in the steam locomotive rental program came the realization that operating a steam locomotive was *work*, and required one's full attention at all times. The increasing sophistication of locomotive DCC decoders means that a (model) engineer must devote more of his attention to running an engine in a realistic fashion, and this in turn opens opportunities for a second crewmember to act as brakeman/switchman/conductor. In fact we have used 2-man crews at least half the time or more during our early op sessions with fairly good success. The op session participants remain philosophically divided on the matter as individuals, however.

An even deeper influence is the fact I played a lot of wargames and role-playing games in my teens and early twenties, and I think this has carried over into the desire to model jobs, not just trains.

As a practical matter, the S&NY is certainly obscure, and I felt I could mix and match various elements and bend a few modeling "rules" without arousing the ire of any hardcore fans or rivet-counters (unlike say, modeling the PRR...) This obscurity would allow a certain amount of necessary freelancing, without detracting from the overall flavor of the S&NY.

The S&NY was small enough that a model railroad could be built, maintained, and operated by one person, yet hopefully have enough operational interest to keep a small group of operator friends engaged and entertained for an evening. (Luckily, this has proven to be true thus far.)

On a related note, the S&NY was simple and relatively short as prototypes go. I was not interested in complex track arrangements or signal systems, nor extremely long mainlines requiring helices and multiple decks. Neither did I want to be a personnel manager trying to entertain and keep on-task a group of 20-25 operators.

On the other hand, I did want a model railroad large enough to give a sense of actually going somewhere, with a mainline run long enough and sufficient trains to allow TT&TO operations as was done in the 1930's. I am interested in TT&TO

ops not as an end in itself per se, but as another way to add to the atmosphere of a 1930's shortline for the operators.

Construction:

Construction began in 2001, starting at Newberry yard and the NYC/RDG staging. Progress ensued in fits and starts as family activities and job requirements allowed. The first operating session was held on 25 January 2014 to finally test "proof of concept", and two more have been held since.

The layout is a mixture of L-girder with plywood and homasote in the western staging yards and Newberry to Laquin sections, and foam on plywood at Towanda and the LV interchange/staging yard. Backdrop and fascia are 1/8" hardboard. Homabed roadbed was used throughout. Overall track plan is linear, once-through-scene. Operators are always looking north essentially, with westward to the left and eastward to the right. Minimum aisle width is about 24" in 2 places. Hidden track, duck-unders, and switching puzzles were specifically avoided. Track is a mix of ME code 70 and code 55 flex, and CV branchline tie strips, with Walthers code 83 on the PRR Elmira Branch and LV interchange/staging. Turnouts are a mix of Central Valley and Proto87 Stores kits, with a few Walthers/Shinohara curved turnouts in places. I am in the process of replacing all of the original CV plastic frogs with metal frogs from Proto87. These will all be power-routed through contacts on the Tortoise switch machines. All of the turnouts are controlled by DPDT switches recessed in the fascia, and powered by Tortoise machines with the exception of NYC/RDG/PRR staging.

Control system is EasyDCC by CVP. All throttles are wireless radio units. The railroad is divided into 3 power districts, plus one reversing section encompassing the staging at the Newberry end. Power distribution is via units from Tony's Train Exchange.

## Regrets and Do-Overs:

Were I to start over, I do wish I had at least a preliminary trackplan in hand before finishing the basement; as it was, the basement was finished before I put pencil to paper. I would have divided the space a bit differently, had I a plan to work around.

I have been satisfied with the EasyDCC system, but I purchased it before getting involved with the local modelers, who all use Digitrax systems. Using Digitrax would have saved some expense on dedicated throttles, and local expertise would be available for any troubleshooting. That said, several of my operators have said they prefer the EasyDCC throttles to the Digitrax UT types.

Finally, I would have tried to avoid any grades in the design. This might have been a problem scenically, but would save aggravation building bridges on curved track on grades.

Again, thanks for visiting!

Mike Hauk

[www.snyrr.com](http://www.snyrr.com)