

# HISTORY OF THE MMRHS, Inc.

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Last updated 12/19/09

The MMRHS officially came into existence on Nov. 2, 1983. It did not come into being spontaneously, and was the result of a long chain of events starting sometime in the 1930's with the formation of the Flint Model Railroad Club. By the early 1970's this was an aged and inactive group. The few younger members eventually grew tired of trying to pump any life into the aged organization, and started a second club. This was the Genesee Valley Model Railroad Engineers, formed on Oct. 15, 1972. For several years (approx. 1972-79) there was an "Old Fuddy-Duddies" vs. "Young Whippersnappers" animosity between the two clubs.

The GVMRE remained an active group. In 1979 the then nearly moribund FMRC successfully bid to host the regional NCR-NMRA (North Central Region, NMRA) convention. They then found themselves totally unable to handle the work needed to put on the convention. They swallowed their pride, and asked the GVMRE to assist. This the GVMRE did, and a successful and profitable convention was the result. The proceeds were split equally between the clubs.

At this time modular N and HO gauge layouts were becoming popular. They were displayed at conventions and flea markets. Each owner brought their modules, and all were assembled into huge layouts. In the NCR there was a shortage of "corner" modules, sometimes making it impossible to complete a "loop". The GVMRE and FMRC decided to assist, taking their convention proceeds and successfully building two corner modules each (total four). In 1982 it was decided to add a couple straight sections and make a small layout..

A well-known Michigan model railroader, Jerry Drake, passed away and willed his railroad layout to the GVMRE & FMRC. Some scenery and many structures were salvaged. In honor of Jerry the layout was officially named the "Jerry Drake Memorial Layout". The layout was displayed at Durand Railroad Days in 1982 and 1983. The layout was displayed at Huckleberry Railroad for the first time in Aug. of 1983.

A group from Ann Arbor, HO-FUN, had a modular layout and displayed it semi-commercially at shopping malls. They came to Genesee Valley Mall on three occasions (1980-82). The group was committed to coming to GV Mall in Nov. 1983, but disbanded. They asked the GVMRE & FMRC if they would like to display in their place. The two clubs accepted.

The paid display at GV Mall presented several problems. The Mall required one Million dollars of liability insurance. For legal protection, all concerned felt it would be best if the organization was incorporated. As these legal restrictions would cause MAJOR changes in the clubs' structures, it decided to create a third group to manage the modules. This was the Modular Model Railroad Club, Inc., formed on Nov. 2, 1983. The ownership of all modules was transferred to MMRC, Inc. MMRC, Inc. displayed the modules at the Mall in Nov. 1983.

In 1984 it was decided to seek tax exemption. The terms "Model Railroad" and "Club" were immediately flagged by the IRS as inappropriate for a tax-exempt organization. This was seen as good opportunity to restructure the group, incorporating various changes desired by the current membership. The relationship with Huckleberry RR was developing nicely, and further support of the HRR and other historical operations (project 1225, etc.) was desired. A local "railfan and historical" as opposed to a purely "model Railroad" group was wanted. The MMRC's name was officially changed to in June 1984 to "Mid-Michigan Railway Historical Society and Scale Replica Railroad Association". Various other changes were made to agree with tax law and the new purposes of the organization.

MMRHS, Inc. first displayed at Huckleberry in August 1984, and GV Mall in Nov. 1984. The MMRHS tax exempt status 501 (c) 3 was granted in July, 1985. The layout was again displayed at GV Mall in 1985. New management at GV Mall then lost interest in the railroad display, and it has not been back since.

In the fall of 1985 the GVMRE hosted the NCR-NMRA convention in Flint. MMRHS assisted, displaying its modules for the convention. In March of 1986 the modules were displayed at the Lapeer Flea Market (as a favor, to repay assistance given at the convention).

Christmas season 1987 saw the modules on display at Sloan Museum. Christmas 1988 started the (since) yearly displays at Crossroads Village. MMRHS has continued to assist HRR, both with Railfan's Weekend and Christmas at Crossroads, and these have become the organization's primary "projects" each year. Many hundreds of hours of annual volunteer labor are donated to HRR. In addition, modest financial assistance is given to HRR and Project 1225.

At the '1988 Annual Meeting, the Board was reduced from seven Board members to five.

1989 saw the passing of our (then) only Honorary Member, Al "Hafey the Bo" Zale. Al was an active 'N-gauger,' and a cornerstone of our group. This grand old gentleman was a genuine railroad hobo, and Oh, the stories he could tell! More than a few were even true, as some of us later learned. Those who never knew him missed a lot.

Summer 1991 saw the start of the "volunteer's" program at the HRR shops, allowing individuals to assist with restoration of the historic railroad equipment. MMRHS members undertook, as their project, cosmetic restoration of the East Broad Top Hopper car. This was successfully completed. Further work is planned on a variety of projects, including cosmetic restoration of a steam locomotive.

In 1997 FHRR purchased two 3' gauge Fairmont gasoline speeder cars from Cedar Point, OH, along with a rare wooden velocipede. At the same time we assisted Huckleberry Railroad with the acquisition of various narrow gauge freight car components and trucks. All this material was stored at Huckleberry.

Early 1998 saw major problems, with a warning letter from the IRS that the organization had not filed its annual (non) tax forms since 1992! This was the fault of the President, who assured the other officers that he was doing this. The Board immediately took charge of the matter, consulted with the IRS, decided this matter was beyond their ability to deal with in the time available, and hired an accountant to correct this mess. The President resigned, and at the 1997 Annual Meeting (held in March '98) a new President was elected. The Board was returned to its original size of seven Board members. The tax problems were eventually settled, at considerable expense to the organization in accounting fees and IRS fines. All this kept us busy, and broke, most of the year.

In 1999, we were still short of funds, so little of an ambitious nature was contemplated or done. The layout was displayed several times, at the usual events.

In 2000, the FHRR purchased a small second-hand barn-shed, and moved it to a location near the Huckleberry RR shops to house our two Fairmont gasoline speeder cars. Much of the summer was spent installing a foundation for the building, making structural repairs, and weatherproofing the building. The speeders were oiled to prevent further deterioration until they can be restored. The year also saw a lot of work done on the layout modules. Some track was relocated, and several new structures were installed. Construction continued on new control panels for future installation on the MMRHS layout.

Late 2001 began a grim period of several months, extending into early 2002, with the organization losing five members to various illnesses. In November of 2001, we lost our second and only remaining honorary member, with the death of Dr. Harold Allen. Dr. Allen was an amazing fellow, and his wonderful 12-inch gauge live steam railroad in Ann Arbor provides many of us with countless pleasant memories.

2002 saw much work done on actually installing the new control panels, and extensive rewiring of the modules themselves. Heavier wire was installed to reduce voltage drops. A basic DCC system was installed allowing Command Control to be used in place of one block position. Thus allowing both DCC and conventional DC operation on the layout at the same time.

In 2008 the MMRHS/FHRR undertook the repainting of the HRR steam locomotive #4, which had earlier been placed in the "logging" exhibit about halfway along the HRR route. The loco was pressure washed, and repainted in basic black with silver smoke box. Also of note was the rebuilding of the badly deteriorated wooden velocipede we had purchased from CP&LE back in 1997. Our Restoration Project Manager, Mr. Dan Kempf, performed almost all of this work himself, though a few items had to be contracted-out. 100% of the wooden parts were rotted or splintered, and had to be replaced. The car is now fully restored to virtually like-new condition.

In 2009 the MMRHS/FHRR began the rebuilding of our two Fairmont gasoline “Speeder” cars acquired in junk condition along with the Velocipede. Members Gary Hirschlieb and Dan Kempf took on this project, and made excellent progress. Various parts had to be purchased, and many repaired. One car is now operational, and the other is torn apart and progressing. Currently, member Mark Meader is working to sandblast the frames and repair rust damage. Members also assisted the HRR by refurbishing nine of the 12 HRR whistle and mileposts.