



# The Crossbuck

## THE OSWEGO VALLEY RAILROAD ASSOCIATION

Newsletter, April 2026, Volume 4, #2, Kent Distle editor

PO. Box 205, New Haven, New York 13121-0205

### What's Going On in OVRRA?

Yes, without a doubt, winter is the slowest season for OVRRA but that doesn't mean that we are inactive. Here's what we have been up to: On January 31<sup>st</sup>, we held a potluck luncheon at the Palermo Community church followed by our January business meeting in which we elected officers for 2026. Those elected included:

Kent Distle, president  
Steve Rogers, vice president  
Charles Hewlett, secretary  
Secil Brown, treasurer  
Tina Rogers, board member at large  
Shawn Connelly, board member at large

Monthly business meetings will now routinely be held on the third Saturday (not Sunday) of each month at 2 pm to dovetail with the waffle breakfasts held by the Grange. This schedule will continue even those months when waffle breakfast are not held. (The first such waffle breakfast in 2026 will be held on May 16.)

Kent has been busy working on the wiring under the engine facilities and outside yard, replacing the old trailer wiring harnesses with Powerpole connectors. (See article to the right.) Charlie and Secil have been working on getting the 120 volt extension cords off the floor by installing the cords and powerstrips on the underside of the modules set up in the Grange.

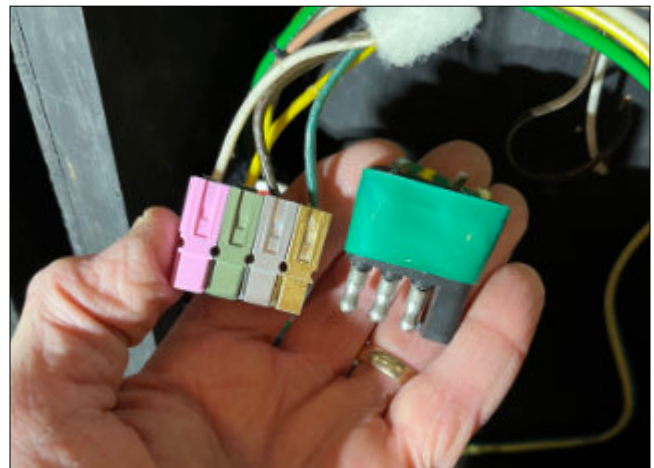
The OVRRA board met on February 22 to review the existing Constitution and bylaws for OVRRA and come up with a list of proposed revisions, to be voted on by the general membership later in the spring.

Kent has also been busy painting and lettering a set of boxcars in the OVRRA paint scheme be put up for sale as a modest fund raiser. (See article on page 3)

We are all looking forward to this year's Spring Time Express model train show which will be held on May 2-3 at the Volney Fire House.■

### Old Wiring Harness Connectors Replaced

Several years ago, the old wiring harnesses that are typically used to connect trailer wiring to the automobile were in use on our club's modules. At that time, we replaced all the harnesses that connected the mainline track wiring from one module to the next with Powerpole connectors and replaced the wiring itself with larger 12 gauge wire to help eliminate the problem of voltage drop as our locomotives traveled along the rails farther away from the power supplies. What we didn't do at that time was replace the wiring connectors on the secondary yard tracks, especially those on the "black cart" modules such as the "engine facilities", "ladder tracks", "grain elevator", and "end of outside yard" modules. This past winter, we finally did update all those secondary track connectors to Powerpoles.



*Figure 1: New Powerpole connectors on the left next to the old harness connector it replaced.*

Why was this necessary? We have received complaints from well-meaning club members who found the wire labeling system confusing, especially when some of the identifying colored tape had come loose and fallen off. And, many of the old trailer harness connectors were difficult to plug in and unplug, causing in some cases, the wires to come

loose. The Powerpole connectors are easy to connect together and release and they come in a wide variety of colors. In doing this installation, Kent decided to spray paint some of the connectors to give us an even wider variety of colors so that there would no longer be any confusion over which connectors were to be mated together. This project was finally completed in early March and we should be all set now for our first train show of the season during the first weekend in May. ■

### Train Station History The Revenue House

Those of us who have lived in the Oswego area for long enough know that the building that houses Paul’s Big M supermarket on the corner of West First and Utica Streets in Oswego was once a train station. Not only does it look like a train station with its distinctive overhanging station platform style roof, but there is also a mural of an arriving train painted along the wall facing Utica Street. Train tracks ran along the side of the building up until the early 1980s, but the station saw no more passenger service past 1947. Not very many people know that the former station, now supermarket that we see there today, was not the first train station to occupy that site. What came before it was a much grander structure. It was called the Lakeshore Hotel, originally known as the Revenue House.



Myron Pardee constructed and first opened the Revenue House in 1858 as a hotel only, but not long afterwards came to host Oswego’s rail station for the Rome, Watertown and Ogdensburg railroad. Rail travelers could step off the train and go directly into the hotel from its Utica Street entrance. Numerous stores were to be found on the first floor with the hotel rooms occupying the upper three floors. James G. Bennett, a nationally known hotel manager, was hired to become the hotel’s proprietor. By

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### What Happened to All the Hobby Shops

Most of us are old enough to remember the hobby shops we visited in our youth where you could touch the trains and even watch them go on the display layout. One of the nicest things about them was that you didn’t have to travel very far to find one. Do you remember Sam’s Hobbies and Toys in the Northern Lights shopping plaza? Duffy’s Trains in Phoenix, Ed Guth Hobbies in Syracuse, Hojack Hobbies in Liverpool, and more recently Besser’s Whistlestop in Baldwinsville and Walt’s HobbyTown in Lakeland? Sadly, they are all gone!



Figure 2: Sam’s Hobbies & Toys was located to the right of W.T. Grants in the Northern Lights Plaza

These days we like to think that the internet did them all in, but the truth is that many of them disappeared years before the internet came on the scene. Let’s face it. Model railroading is a niche hobby and it’s hard for any store to stay afloat selling just to model railroaders. That was just as true back then as it is today. We still do have some “brick and mortar” hobby shops around and we do like to continue to support them (there’s a list below), but let’s face it. Most of us buy what we need from vendors at train shows, including the ones OVRRA hosts, along with orders off the internet. I know from my own experience that a hobby shop is great to have nearby when you need, glue, paint, sheet styrene, basswood, or scenery supplies.

#### Here’s a list of hobby shops that you can still pay an in-person visit to in the Greater Central New York area.

- J&R Junction Train and Hobby, Erie Blvd, Syracuse, NY (315)451-6551
- Lake City Hobbies, 437 Exchange St, Geneva, NY (315)781-6397
- Despatch Junction, East Rochester, NY (585)385-5570
- Performance Hobbies, Webster NY (585)872-4990
- Gardner The Train Doctor, North Rose, NY (315)483-6577
- Model Trains and More, Binghamton, NY (607)768-0678



### OVRRA Boxcars Now For Sale

About a year ago, we introduced the concept of rolling stock painted and lettered with our organization’s name “Oswego Valley Railroad Association”. Kent painted and lettered several examples or “prototypes” to run on our club layout. Those included several boxcars, a reefer, a piggyback trailer car, a pulpwood car, a number of coal hoppers, and a couple of cabooses. Charlie contributed a pair of F9 diesels and Paul Natoli sold us at discount a Baldwin switcher, all of which have been painted and lettered for OVRRA.

We’ve received a number of requests to purchase OVRRA cars which prompted us to look into having a manufacturer custom paint and letter them for us. Unfortunately, that couldn’t be done at a reasonable price with the paint and lettering scheme we had in mind. So we decided to go a different route. We bought ten undecorated Accurail boxcars and supplemented those with a couple more undecorated boxcars we picked up at recent train shows. Kent has painted them up and lettered them using a combination of inkjet printed decals and custom decals from a decal manufacturer (See article on page 5) One such boxcar is pictured at the top of the page. All have unique numbers.

Taking into account the club expenses include the cost to purchase the boxcars, the paint, and the custom decals, and our time and

effort, we are charging \$30 for a boxcar, which gives the club a modest amount of profit on each one. Each one is fully assembled and ready to roll. At this point 6 out of 8 finished boxcars have been sold and four more are being completed. Depending upon how sales go and if there is enough demand, we may purchase more to be painted and lettered. Also, if there is sufficient interest in another kind of car, such as a coal hopper, we might want to make those for sale as well. If you would like to buy one of the OVRRA boxcars please contact us via email at [president@ovrra.org](mailto:president@ovrra.org), or speak to us in person. ■

### Membership Dues for 2026

Regular members	\$24/year
Family membership	\$48/year
Junior member	\$12/year
Youth member	\$12/year
Associate member	\$12/year

### Donate to OVRRA

There are 2 ways:

Go to [OVRRA.org](https://ovrra.org) and click the “Donate” button

Or Scan the QR code to the right



## Creating and Using Custom Decals

For many years, freelance model railroaders have been using alpha-numeric sets of decals to letter their rolling stock. Many more modelers have also used them for making signs. Some decal manufacturers offer custom decal printing services which, despite the initial high cost, many modelers have availed themselves of. With the advent of inkjet and laser printers, even more lower cost possibilities have opened up to model railroaders who want to create professional looking custom signs.

Today, it's quite easy for modelers with a computer, home printer and blank decal paper to create their own professional looking decals at minimal cost. And, as you will see, there are even ways for a modeler with some computer graphics skills to bring down the cost of custom decals ordered from a decal printing service. The decals used to letter the OVRRA boxcars (see article of page 3) are a combination of inkjet printer decals and custom ordered decals from Highball Graphics.

### INKJET PRINTER DECALS

Several suppliers including Walthers and Micro Mark sells blank inkjet printer decal paper. It's available in two varieties: clear background and white background. You would want to use clear background whenever you want the background color on the model to show through the openings and spaces within the lettering. That is what we used for the black lettering "OSWEGO VALLEY RAILROAD ASSOCIATION" that is placed on the light gray background on the club boxcars. Keep in mind that any colored image you print on an inkjet printer relies on a white paper background to render the colors correctly. This is not a problem for black lettering or for darker colors you wish to print, but if you want to print a light color such as yellow with your inkjet printer, that color won't render correctly unless the background the decal is applied to is white. If you have a herald or logo you wish to print that has lighter colors in it, you should probably use decal paper with a

white background. My own freelance railroad is the "Middle Atlantic" and here is it's herald. The gold color behind the letters "MA" looks best when printed on white decal paper.



After printing your inkjet decal images on to the decal paper of your choice, there is one more step you must take. The ink must be sealed so that it doesn't run off or bleed when you dip the decal into water in preparation for sliding it on to the model. You can spray the decal sheet with a clear sealer such as those made by Krylon. What I do, and is very effective, is to coat it with Microscale's decal restoration film. This brush on liquid was created to restore and seal old brittle decals that would otherwise disintegrate when dipped in water. It works just as well to overcoat and seal the inkjet printer ink on the decal paper its printed on. It's completely invisible when dry and does the job beautifully. The only real disadvantage in using inkjet printed decals is that you cannot print white lettering. There is no white ink cartridge in your printer. (Yes, there are a few printers on the market that can actually print in white ink but they are hard to find and the cartridges are very expensive.) Yes, you can choose white as your font color when you print, but the whiteness really comes from the white background paper. What you are really printing is a colored background that surrounds the transparent shapes of the letters that allow the white background to show through.

Here's an example:

You could try to color match the background you're printing on the decal to the paint on the model, but as you might expect,



that will be quite difficult to get just right. A better idea might be to create a rectangle filled with a different, contrasting background color and put your "white" lettering on that. Either way, you would want to paint the color white on the part of the model that would lie behind the decal or print your decal on white decal paper.

So then, maybe you don't like any of those options. You could buy a white alphanumeric set of decals from say, Microscale or Highball Graphics, cut out each individual letter and apply them one by one to the model. Yes, it's a bit tedious and time consuming, but if you are careful, you'll get excellent results. If you have a lot of pieces of rolling stock to do, the better option is the next one we'll talk about.

**ORDERING CUSTOM PRINTED DECALS**

Nearly all decal manufacturers will custom print decals for you, even in white if that's what you want, but in most cases, you'll have to order a large quantity and the price can be quite high. There is one manufacturer, Highball Graphics from which you can order as little as a single 8 1/2 by 11 inch sheet of custom decals for the price of \$40 per sheet. There is also a \$70 "art work" charge, but if you have some computer graphics skills and the right software, you can avoid that \$70 charge. This is the route we chose to go with for all the custom white lettering that appears on the OVRRA boxcars. On the Highball Graphics website, they tell you that you can avoid the art work charge by creating your own art work in CorelDraw and submitting it in that format. If you don't have CorelDraw there is a work-around. Many other graphics programs (that are much less expensive than CorelDraw) can produce art work in the "SVG" (scalable vector graphics) format. Kent created all the lettering we needed for the OVRRA boxcars using software he already had on his computer and exporting in SVG format. Kent sent a small test file to Highball Graphics to see if they could import SVG into CorelDraw. It worked! So then Kent created the full 8 1/2 by 11 inch sheet of graphics we needed in SVG and sent it in. They charged us \$40 and we got back enough custom decals to do 20 boxcars. Not a bad deal! Not only did we get the custom white lettering that we wanted but we also got whole words and expressions that can be applied at once as a single decal to the model. What a time saver this is when considering that the alternative is to

cut out all the individual letters and numbers and apply them one by one.

It's not just freelancers that can benefit from custom decal orders. There are many model railroaders who model small regional railroads for which commercially painted and lettered models are not available. This is an excellent solution for them as well. I know that some modelers like to stick with the traditional methods. I for one am not afraid to use technology in situations where it can help me achieve professional looking results and reduce the tedium and effort to boot. That just might appeal to you too! ■



Figure 3: A portion of a custom decal sheet produced for us by Highball Graphics.

**Train Show Schedule for 2026**

Spring Time Express....Volney.....May 2 & 3

Thousand Islands.....Clayton.....Sept. 12 & 13

Holiday Express.....Volney.....Nov. 7 & 8

State Fair Show.....Syracuse....Nov. 14 & 15

Christmas in Mexico.....Dec. 5 & 6


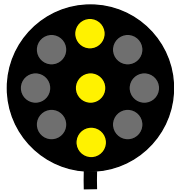
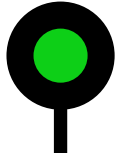

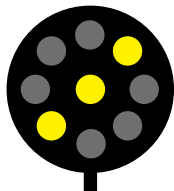
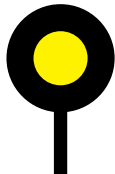
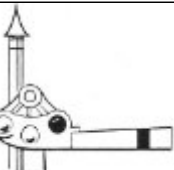
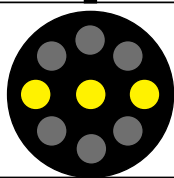
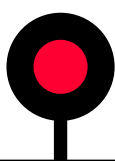
**Note:** It's not a mistake. This year our Holiday Express Show in Volney is held the week *before* the State Fair Show.

Back issues of *The Crossbuck* may be found on our website:  
[OVRRA.org](http://OVRRA.org)

### Understanding Railroad Signals

Just as traffic lights control the flow of vehicles on our highways and help prevent accidents from occurring, so do railroad signals perform a corresponding function for rail traffic. Although there are similarities, given the differences in the weight and responsiveness of trains vs. highway vehicles, and the nature of the corridors upon which they operate, there are importance differences in the ways those respective signals function. In the earliest days of railroading, semaphore signals were set by station operators using information acquired through direct observation of when trains passed through, along with telegraphed messages, and strict adherence to timetables. In today’s world of automation, automated detectors inform dispatchers of a train’s location, and along with two-way radio communications, GPS, and the internet, it is far easier to know where trains are located, what direction they are moving and how quickly. Nevertheless, signal lights along the right-of-way are still a necessary part of operations, especially where there is only a single track available for train movements.

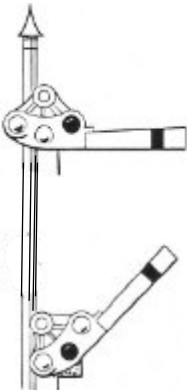
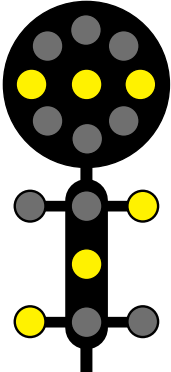
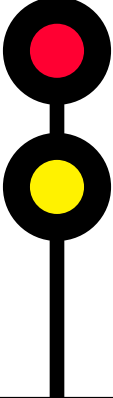
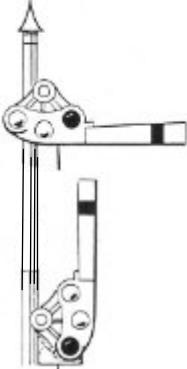
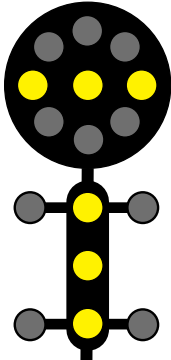
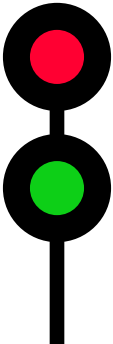
Besides the semaphore type, there are a number of variations within the electric light type of signal. You can have a configuration of two or three stacked lights (similar to traffic lights) although in railroad usage, the green light is usually on the top. You can have a circular disc with an array of lights on it called positional lights, usually all yellow (typically used by the Pennsylvania Railroad), or colored (as with the B&O), and finally the searchlight style with a single target (light) with interchangeable colored lenses. The following chart is probably the most basic way to understand the meaning of railroad signals, although as you will see, it is greatly over simplified.

Semaphore	Positional	Searchlight	Name	Indication (meaning)
			Clear	Proceed, block is clear
			Permissive	Proceed slowly; be prepared to stop
			Stop	Stop and stay stopped until instructed to proceed

Some railroads also make use of a lunar white searchlight style signal, which in most cases means clear, but move at a restricted speed. Yards often contain small signals mounted close to the ground called **dwarf signals**.

Functionally, there are two types of signals: **Block Signals** that control access to a defined section of track. Their job is to keep trains that are moving in the same direction spaced far enough apart that one doesn’t run into the back of another. The second type is the **Interlocking Signal** that protect train movements through passing sidings, crossovers, crossings, junctions, and even drawbridges.

In practice, signals that control a particular track can be used in combinations or, in other words, be stacked one above another in a group. This allows for a wider variety of messages to be communicated, such as in giving an engineer advance warning of what to expect at the next signal down the line. Here are some examples:

Semaphore	Positional	Searchlight	Name	Indication (meaning)
			Medium Approach	Proceed at medium speed on diverging route prepared to stop at next signal.
			Medium Clear	Proceed at medium speed on diverging route. Following signal has clear or approach aspect.

Of course, we’ve only scratched the surface here when it comes to all of the different indications that railroad signals can provide. If you are interested in learning more, here are some additional resources.

- Conrail Trackside Signal Chart <https://www.trains.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/MRH0523-Trackside-signal-aspect-chart-Conrail.pdf>
- CSX Signal Rules and Chart <https://signals.jovet.net/rules/CSX%20Signal%20Rules.pdf>
- Union Pacific Signal Aspect chart <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://data.nts.gov/Docket/Document/docBLOB%3FID%3D40425417%26FileExtension%3D.PDF%26FileName%3DUP%2520SSI%2520Signal%2520Aspect%2520Chart-Master.PDF&ved=2ahUKewisvt2qyayTAXWv14kEHS1ZHyIQFnoECB4QAQ&usg=AOvVaw3UYjY4DC9VQJRxrSBfZts>
- Chubb, Bruce A., *How to Operate Your Model Railroad*, chapter 9 Signals and Communications
- Armstrong, John, *All About Signals*

Train Station History continued from page 2

the late 1890s, the New York Central Railroad had complete ownership of not only the hotel itself but the entire block of buildings as well. Under a five year lease agreement, Bennett was charged with turning the establishment into a first class hotel. To that end, he installed a billiard parlor, two ballrooms, updated heating and toilet facilities, and a hydraulic elevator. The building also housed a drug store, bookstore, clothing store, and fresh fruit market. By now, the name "Lakeshore" had been applied not only to the hotel itself, but also to the entire block of buildings.

All of this came to a swift end on the morning of March 6, 1904. At 2 am, flames were discovered shooting out of the building. By the time firemen arrived on the scene, the fire was so far advanced that all efforts were redirected to saving the adjoining buildings. Embers from the fire were carried on the winds as far a two blocks away where other structures were ignited. By the time the fires were extinguished, the hotel building, and all the other businesses within it including the railroad station, and the various stores were a total loss. Fortunately, the structures in the neighboring blocks were saved, including the Oswego Candy Company on the east side of West First Street. It was said that the Delaware, Lackawanna, and Western railroad, whose station was right across the street from the hotel, graciously made their facilities available to

the New York Central in the aftermath of the fire. Financial losses from the fire amounted in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. That's equivalent to almost \$10 million today. The grand hotel and stores were never rebuilt. The New York Central did rebuild its station; it's the building we see there today which now houses Paul's Big M market. Next time you stop in Paul's Big M for a few groceries or pick up a tasty treat at P.J.'s ice cream stand, think about what once stood there 125 years ago!■



Figure 4: Smoldering ruins of the Lakeshore Hotel

References:

- Perkins, Robert L., EdD, *Do You Remember? A Glimpse into Oswego's Past 1870-1925*, pp. 114-116.
- Oswego County Historical Society
- Anthony J. Slosek Collection

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