

The Rahway Valley

This New Jersey shortline had plenty of modeling potential/**Steven A. Lynch**



TRAIL PHOTO: RAILROAD INDUSTRY COLLECTION; KENILWORTH, NJ; CIRCA LATE 1890s

Looking for a prototype to model with lots of switching, varied scenic railfanning features, and interchange operation possibilities? If so, then the Rahway Valley Railroad is certainly worth considering.

The Rahway Valley Railroad was a New Jersey shortline which connected the Lehigh Valley Railroad in Roselle Park and the Central Railroad of New Jersey in Cranford with the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western in Summit. It was one of the most successful short lines in U.S. history. During its lifetime, it was instrumental in the development of Kenilworth, site of its headquarters, as well as Union, Springfield, and other towns along its route. Created in 1897 as part of an industrial development project in New Orange (now Kenilworth), it was acquired in 1904 by *Social Register* publisher Louis Keller to provide passenger rail service to Baltusrol Golf Club, of which he was a founder. After 1919, run as a freight-only line, the Rahway Valley was vital



The Rahway Valley's yard in Kenilworth, New Jersey, as it was in the late 1930's, would make an excellent modeling subject. Consolidation No. 15 heads past the station (above) on its way to take on water at the tank. In the background the rear of No. 11's tender can be seen through the open door of the wooden, two-stall enginehouse. The crew of the 15 takes time out of their daily routine to pose for a photo (left). In a ritual of the steam era, No. 15 (right) takes on water.

to industry in the area, with customers ranging from small fuel companies to the giant Monsanto Corporation. As customers switched to truck freight, moved away, or went out of business, the Rahway Valley Railroad withered to the point that service ended entirely in 1992.

Originally called the New Orange Railroad, this 15.28-mile shortline started life as a four-mile passenger service railroad connecting New Orange (Kenilworth) with the Lehigh Valley and the Jersey Central at

Cranford Junction. Providing a vital link in the then rural Union County area of northern New Jersey, it was later renamed after the nearby Rahway River. Its passenger service carried students to Upsala College, commuters on their way to and from New York City, golfers to Baltusrol Golf Club, workers to and from factories, special excursions, and much more.

Motive power consisted of a variety of engines in the early years. An

American 4-4-0 was purchased in 1898 and became engine No. 1. Other engines included a saddle tank engine, No. 5, and 2-4-4 tank engine No. 7. The line's "signature" engines were Baldwin Locomotive Works 2-8-0 Consolidations 13, 14, and 15. The arrival of No. 13 was in 1905, and in 1929 two 1905 Baldwin Consolidations were bought from the Lehigh & New England and operated until their replacement by diesel switchers in 1951.



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RAILROAD MAGAZINE COLLECTION, CHICAGO LATE 1930S

The pilot deck of the 15 is pictured being used to transport boxes (above). Whether they contained railroad supplies or L.C.I. freight is lost to history. Both the 15 and No. 14 (below) came to the Rahway Valley from the L&NE. GE 70-tonner No. 16 (page 63) was built for the railroad in 1951. It and 70-tonner No. 17, delivered three years later, replaced steam on the RVRR.

With the increased freight traffic during WW I and the decline in passenger revenue, the Rahway Valley became a freight only line by 1919. Munitions plants, American Can, American Laundry Machinery Co., and other industries helped grow the railroad and the surrounding communities.

In 1911 a three-mile branch was built to Newark Heights (now called

Maplewood), near Newark, making the Rahway Valley "complete" except for the important Delaware, Lackawanna & Western connection in Summit (finally established in 1931). This gave the railroad important interchange access at both ends of its line and helped the company turn a profit by 1934 in the depth of the Great Depression.

Dieselization came to the Rahway

Valley in the form of two GE 70-tonners, No. 16 (1951) and No. 17 (1954). With the increasing inroads made by the trucking industry, closing of industrial plants, the decrease in home coal use, and turnover of customers, the line struggled to remain above water.

On March 28, 1986, management was notified their insurance coverage was not to be renewed. Nine days later Delaware Otsego assumed operations until the final demise as the railroad withered to the point that service ended entirely in 1992.

The final chapter, however, has not closed on the Rahway Valley. Presently the line is being rebuilt as an operator, the Morristown & Erie, was selected in 2001 to repair and run the line. The new line is comprised of the New Jersey portion of the Staten Island Railroad between Linden and Cranford and the former Rahway Valley Railroad between Cranford and Summit. Both sections are now known as the Rahway Valley Railroad; thus, the RVRR lives again. (For additional information on the Rahway Valley Railroad—both past and present—you can visit the website: www.trainsarefun.com/rvrr/rvrr.htm.)

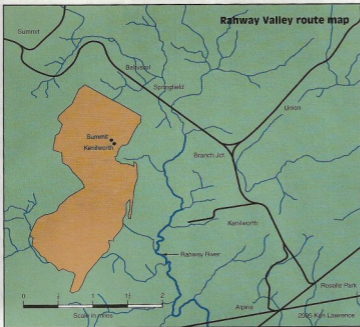
Freight operations on the Rahway Valley

Over the years, the railroad's operations followed a general pattern. Action began daily at the Rahway shop, a two-track wooden building next to the station at Kenilworth, at 8:30 a.m. sharp.

Normally, the first move of the day

F. J. DAIN, RAILROAD MAGAZINE COLLECTION, NEW YORK, NO. 1938





tween 4:00 and 6:00 p.m. during the evening rush hour when rail activity could back up the highway traffic all the way to New York City.

The railroad would make as many round trips between Kenilworth and Summit as are necessary. The Rahway Valley's biggest obstacle was the steep grade into Summit. The steam motive power couldn't handle more than eight loaded cars up the three-mile grade. (Perfect for modeling!)

During the steam era, the three Consolidations would sometimes switch only four or five cars one day, but 35 to 40 the next. Anthracite coal made up about 40 per cent of railroad's traffic during the late steam era (circa 1946-1950) and less-than-carload (l.c.l.) shipments were a mainstay for customers on the line. This might require a boxcar to be moved several times to be completely unloaded.

As for the amount of traffic handled by the railroad, records show that approximately 1,500 cars were interchanged with the Lehigh Valley in 1969. Around 90 percent of the freight traffic was inbound loads, with the other ten percent being outbound shipments.

was to proceed south through Kenilworth down to Roselle Park (LV interchange) and/or Aldene (CNJ interchange) and pick up northbound cars and set out any cars for interchange. The rest of the day would be spent northbound switching over the line to

Summit and Maplewood and heading back to Kenilworth.

Route 22, a major east-west commercial artery just north of Kenilworth, was typically crossed daily between 12:30 and 1:00 p.m. The worst time for a train to cross the highway was be-

Modeling the RVRR engines and freight cars

Modeling the Rahway Valley during the steam era has been made a simpler task with the release of Bachmann's excellent 2-8-0 in HO. Additionally, Roundhouse (ex-Model Die Casting)

RICHARD TAYLOR/ALDENE, N.J., FEB. 16, 1979



makes a vintage 2-8-0 that could easily represent Nos. 13 or 14. The original 14 passenger runs dwindled to six by 1909, and all were removed in 1919. Thus, passenger equipment would consist of wooden trestle rod coaches and

perhaps a combine to complete the train. Freight traffic over the line consisted of stone, coal, fuel oil, brick, building materials, lumber, chemicals, food products, paper, wire, plastics, sheet metal, and raw materials for

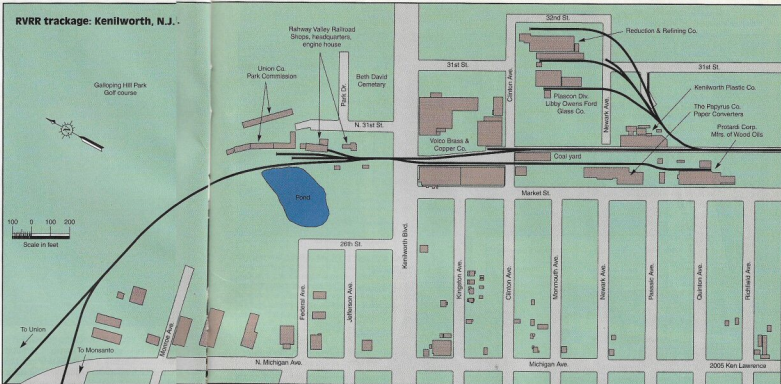


TWO PHOTOS: RICHARD TAYLOR, KENILWORTH, NJ, APRIL 4, 1989

From the mid-1950's onward, the 70-tonners handled the many switching chores on the railroad. At Kenilworth, the old wooden, two-stall enginehouse was replaced with a more substantial cinder block shop where the railroad's new diesels were maintained (below).



RVRR trackage: Kenilworth, N.J.



Rahway Valley Railroad customer list by town

Maplewood

H. Boker & Co., Inc.
The Kroymon Co.
Menner Packing Co.
Wm. H. Barkhom Co.
Donkerfast & Williams
Hilton Brass Foundry, Inc.
Federal Cement Block Co.
W.A. Thornley Co., Inc.
Woolley Fuel

Newark Heights

Maplewood Building Specialists, Inc.
The Newark Heights Supply Co.

Union

Emsa
Jaeger Lumber
Western Electric

Summit

Stevens Miller Lumber
Houdaille Quarry

East Summit

Carter Bell

Springfield

Milburn Feed (leased the Springfield station)
Schalbe Oil Co.
Union County Coal & Lumber (Henshaw Ave.)

Kenilworth

A&P
Volco
Monsanto
Christie Enterprises (last RVRR customer)

Roselle Park

Schering/White Labs, now Schering-Plough

was a red caboose bought from the Lackawanna in 1934.

Transition modelers can utilize many of the earlier 20th century cars with a mix of newer post WWII designs. Bachmann Spectrum series has produced a 70 tonner to represent engines Nos. 16 and 17 in HO and Hallmark produced one in brass in the early 1970's. In O scale, Rick Yoder Scale Models offers a model of a 70-tonner. These engines are available through secondary sources such as e-bay or at train shows.

Modelers favoring the 1970's can make use of the Bev-Bel RV FMC leased boxcar alongside other favorites such as Railbox, Pickens, New Hope & Ivyland for example from that era.

Layout design elements

Modeling the various towns along the right of way can be accomplished in a linear fashion utilizing layout design elements, which are key prototype features captured in model form. Each layout design element would represent the prototype trackwork associated with that area and would get some trains up and running in a shorter period of time than building the entire main line prior to scenery and opera-

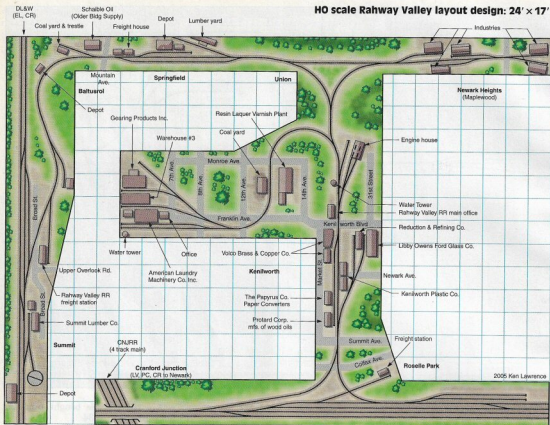
pharmaceuticals. Most of the traffic generated was from private sidings although Springfield had a team track.

The wide variety of commodities came by boxcars, gondolas, covered and open hoppers, flat cars, tank cars, and reefers. Early 20th century modelers

would favor double-sheathed, outside braced and early steel boxcars. Tank cars would be the early 8,000/10,000 gallon capacity USRA design (c.1924+). Gondolas would be wood sided and hoppers of the two-bay, 36-foot variety. The only rolling stock the Rahway owned

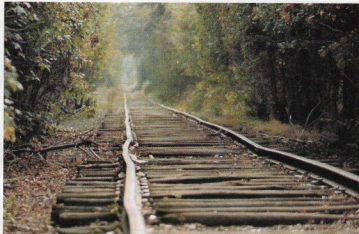
The Railway Valley

HO scale Railway Valley layout design: 24' x 17'



BOB FENNIS: RAILROAD AVENUE ENTERPRISES; ROSELLE PARK, NJ, DEC. 19, 1985





JOHN HANSEN, UNION, NJ, 1984

By the mid-1980's, the RV's mainline track was suffering from a lack of maintenance (above). Lightweight locomotives and slow speeds were the rule. While one of the 70-tonners works the Conrail (former Lehigh Valley) interchange at Roselle Park, a New Jersey Transit train rolls by (page 66).

tions commencing.

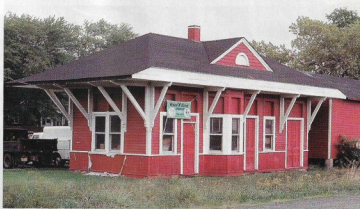
Kenilworth, in and of itself, could in fact be the entire basis for a shelf style switching layout. Utilizing manual ground throws and raising the layout to 54" or more would provide plenty of "hands on" railroading. Staging could be at either end and represent the rest of the off-line world.

Proceeding north from Kenilworth would be the Monsanto Branch, offering a number of switching locations. The large Monsanto facility could be represented by a chain link fence, sign and white water tower with the large red "M" Monsanto logo.

Continuing north, the wye offers several possibilities besides turning trains. The eastward Maplewood branch could be off-line staging, modeled completely as suggested in the overall layout track diagram or simply turnouts and track to suggest the connection.

Next would be Springfield with its runaround track and team track setout. The station and freight house still stand today. It is currently a quick-print shop. Just east of this location would be the signature trestle bridge crossing over the Rahway River, a favorite location for railfans to watch trains and take photos.

The final northbound layout design element would be the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western interchange at Summit. This area from Overlook Mountain provides a grand view of the



TWO PHOTOS: RICHARD TAYLOR; SPRINGFIELD, NJ, SEPT. 6, 1976

Typical of many shortline stations, the Springfield depot (above) survived long after the end of passenger service. Located next to the station was the freight house (below). These two buildings were featured in a one-page article in the December, 1947, issue of RMC.



Rahway Valley and the Watching Mountains to the south. As there was no facility to turn RVRR engines at Summit, a back up interchange move to the DL&W occurred in many cases.

South of Kenilworth would be Roselle Park, the interchange with the Lehigh Valley. Here, an interesting diamond track configuration existed that could add operational interest to a layout. The entire line in that area was to run at "yard speed," which limited operations to a maximum speed of 15 m.p.h. and would allow a train to be able to stop short of any obstructions. Near the diamond there was a switchstand that had about a ten foot high switch target on it. It was not connected to anything but the high target and it would be set one way while the LV switched the stub, and set the other way for the RV. Upon throwing the

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The diesel shop (right) was home to not only the railroad's two 70-tonners, but also a collection of maintenance-of-way equipment (above). A large, above-ground steel tank held fuel for the diesels. Next to it was the cinder block pumphouse (bottom right).

lever which rotated the target, it would show "clear" to go across the diamond for the LV to service the industry east of the diamond. After switching the industry, the signal was returned to its normal position of clear for the RVRH crows to run across the diamond crossing to switch the interchange. As with Summit, this interchange would have setouts and pickups providing a reason to have the foreign road locomotives operate in the area.

Modeling freight operations on the Rahway Valley

Modeling operations can closely follow the general pattern of the prototype. Using switchlists and waybills the morning 8:30 a.m. local heads south to the Lehigh Valley interchange at Roselle Park to setout and pickup the interchange loads. These would arrive via staging for the Lehigh Valley and be left on the interchange tracks. The Lehigh Valley local would also pickup any setouts left by the Rahway Valley from previous sessions.

After switching Roselle Park, the local would work its way back north switching the local industries in Kenilworth, Springfield and arrive in Summit to interchange any cars for the

DL&W. These cars would have arrived via the staged DL&W local (much like the LV local job). The day's end would be to return to the Kenilworth shops.

Between sessions new cars would be staged at both ends of the layout for local setouts at the interchanges. Cars returned from the interchanges would get the five finger "big hook" and exit the layout. Depending on the size of your fleet it would take many operating sessions to perhaps view the same car again being switched by the RVRH local.

Acknowledgements

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