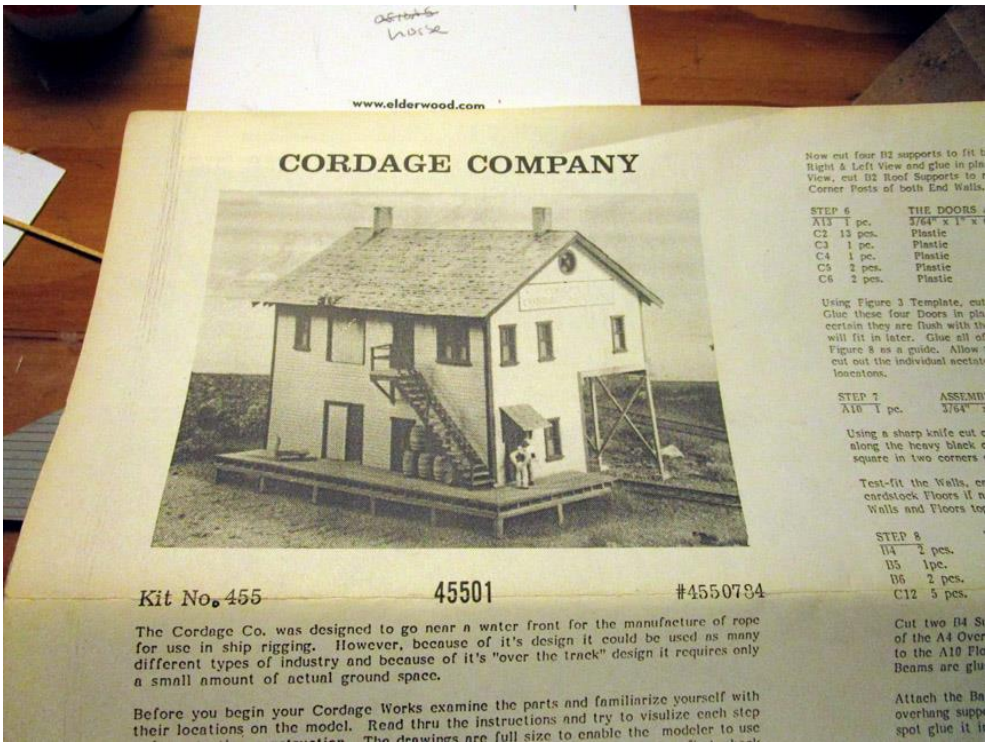
This is a clinic about building a wooden kit—what is commonly called a “craftsman kit”. I’ll try to take you through the important steps as I progress in my build.

I'm working on a building by Campbell kits--The Cordage Company. Campbell has been around for many years and has an extensive collection of RR buildings that look appropriate in many scenes. While I've tried building kits from many other manufacturers, this is probably my favorite line of structure kits,. The company changed hands a few years ago and the kits have gotten more expensive--although I believe they are worth the money. But so many kits were bought over the years and stored away on modelers' shelves that you can find lots of them on E-bay and at train shows for much less money than buying new. The kit I have was pre-owned but kept mostly intact.

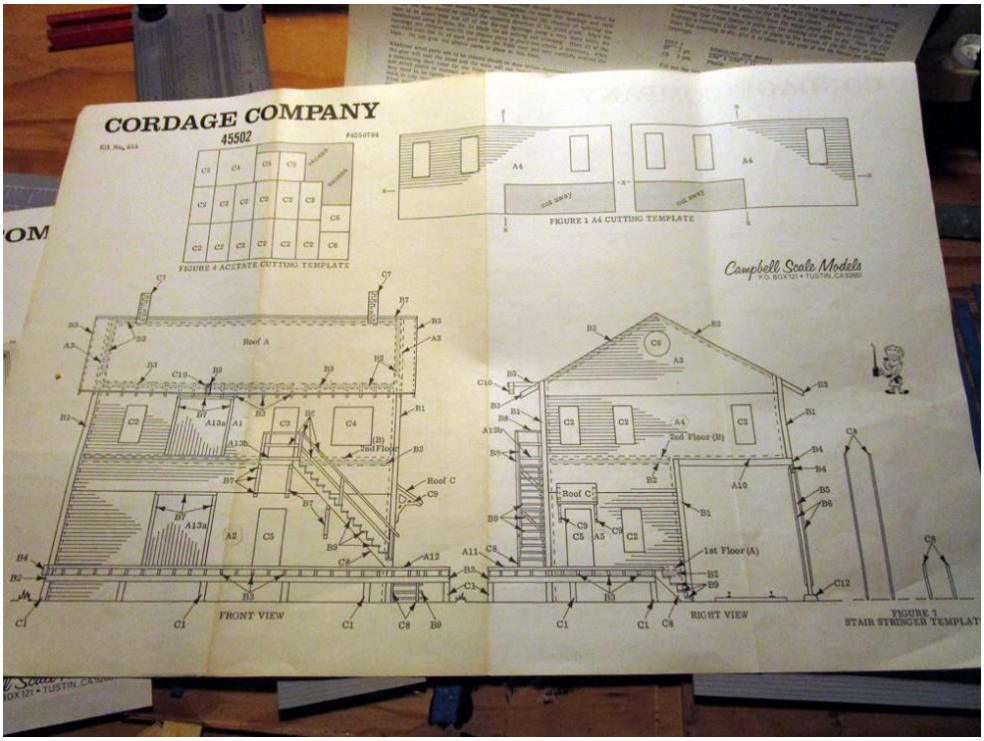
Here is what the finished building will look like.

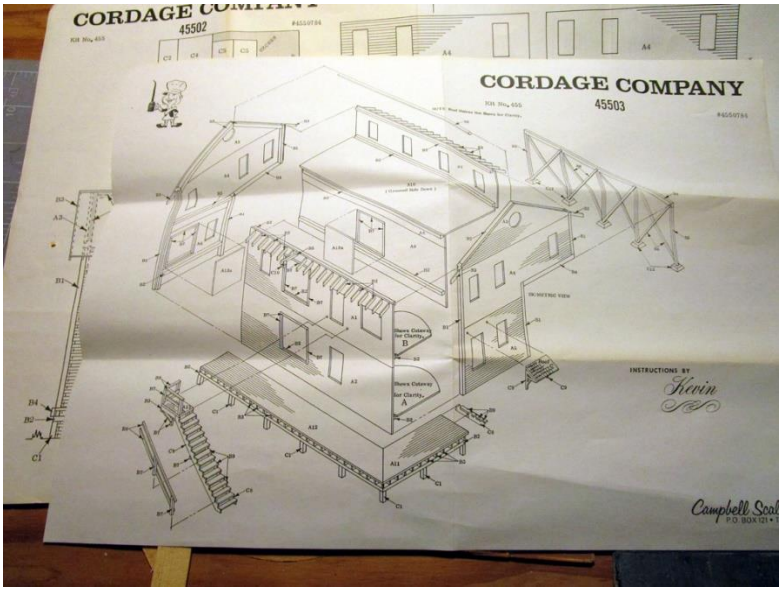


When you open a Campbell kit, you will find wood strips, wood wall sections, plastic doors and windows, cardboard roof panels, some type of finished roofing material, and often some small plastic accessories. There will be several pages of instructions. One of the best things about these kits is the excellent instructions, which include a detailed step-by-step sequence of building, and several scale drawings. While the number of parts can look intimidating, the instructions are far superior to those of some other manufacturers.

Here is the box opened up, minus some wall sections that I have already started assembling:

Here are some of the instructions:

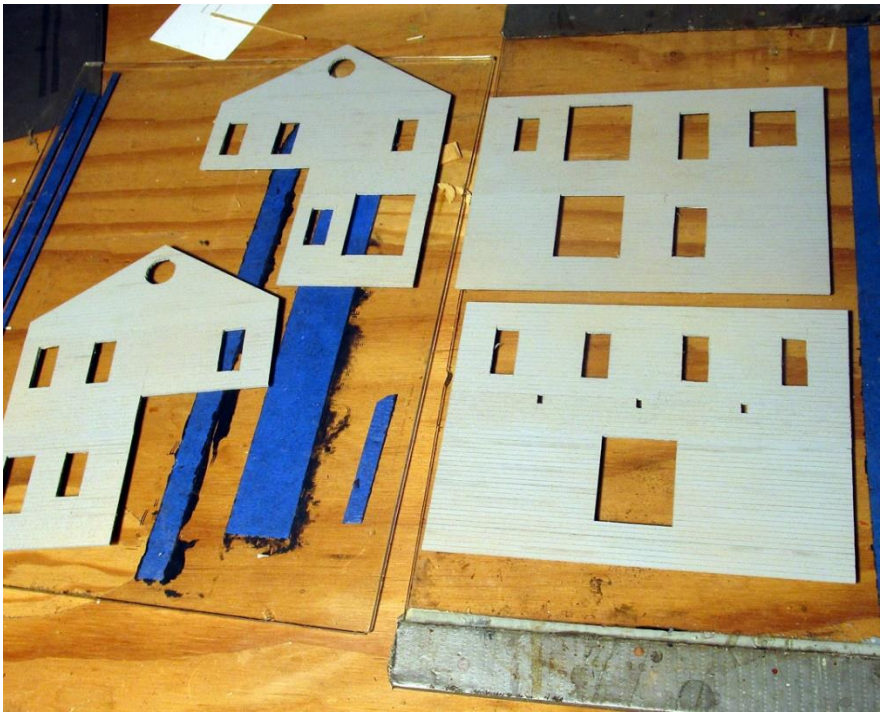




One of the first things I do when starting any kit is to do a google search for images that show more views of the completed building. Images may originate on Ebay, or from many other places on the web. In this case, I found several, including many pictures on Brass Trains.com of a competed Cordage Works.

These provided some views from various angles, in order to better visualize the finished building, and these will also be helpful so that I can check on an assembly to be sure that I'm following the instructions correctly (the details on the deck did not come in the kit).. As those of you know who attended my clinic on adapting a plastic building, I encourage this search as a first step, especially with a building from a popular manufacturer such as Walthers, so that you can get some ideas of how people have creatively modified the kit. This may help you build something that is more original, and not immediately recognizable as "just another Walthers Sunrise Flour Mill" or the like. I don't necessarily modify Campbell kits, as painting and weathering choices can go a long way toward making the kit more original. More about painting is below.

Following the instructions, my first step was to cut the window and door openings out of the wall sections. These are not laser cut as in some newer kits, but the outline of where to cut is stamped partway into the wood. A sharp #11 blade does the trick. As with all craftsman kits, the secret is to take your time and do each step carefully so that you don't make an irreversible mistake. But most mistakes can be fixed, so relax! Then I glued the wall sections into 4 large pieces, one for each side (actually I made a mistake by gluing up too many pieces to one wall, which you might note, but it was easily undone). For glue, I'm using my standard canopy glue, but most white glues would be fine, just use the glue sparingly. I also keep lots of weights handy to keep things in place while they dry.



I usually assemble buildings on glass, which is flat and easily cleaned.

Next, the walls were spray painted with a gray primer. Rustoleum spray paints are the way to go: cheap, easy to apply, and primers are flat, not glossy, which is what you want. I keep several colors on hand. I sprayed both sides in order to seal the wood—this is going in a basement and the humidity changes could warp unsealed wood. Plus, applying any acrylic paints will dampen unsealed wood and also cause warpage.

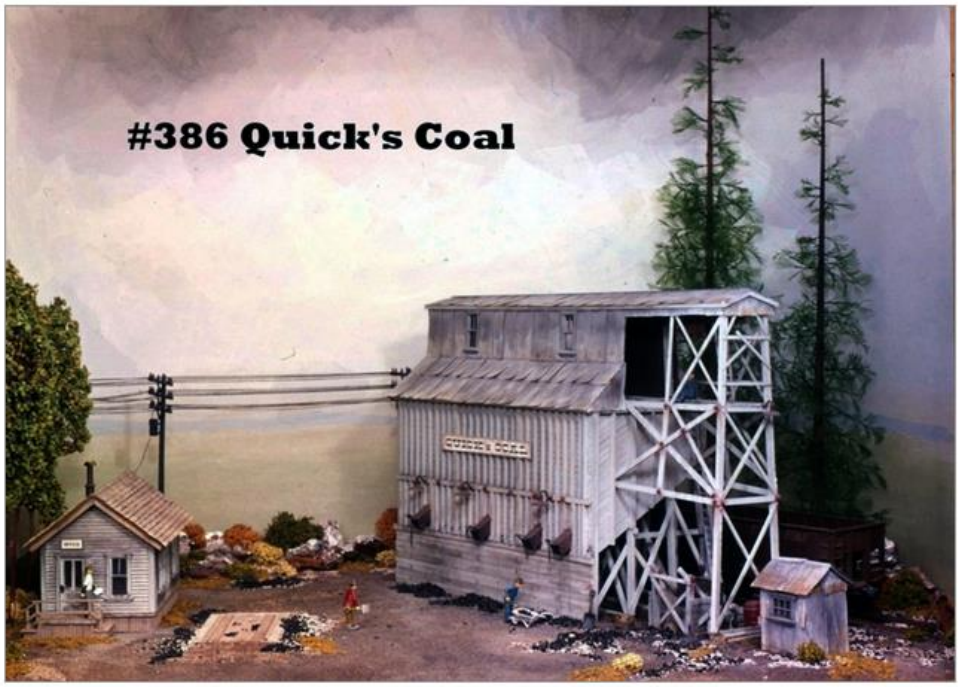
Now comes the critical stage—choosing a paint color. I cannot emphasize enough how important this step is, both the color and the application. This is the point I often agonize over, as it makes a huge difference in the appearance of the final model. The colors of the brasstrains model above are OK in my opinion, but too bright for my taste, and too regular in appearance. My own preference is to give buildings a well-worn look, which adds texture and makes them look more realistic. Weathering later will also add more texture, but can't fix a building that has a poor paint job. Some people think the buildings along the rails were not usually this worn out, but this is my taste. I also do not like bright colors.

Below are a few Campbell buildings of mine that I painted and weathered in my worn out style.


SAGE

It’s often sad to see how a builder has done a great job assembling a model, and then spoiled it, in my opinion, with a very bland paint job. Below is an example from Ebay of a well-built Campbell kit, Quick’s Coal, with a dull gray paint that makes the model look very unrealistic. It’s a coal dealer and it should be dirty and the roof should have some rust! When we look at a RR picture and try to determine if it’s real or a model, the difference is usually the uniformity of the model. In real life, there are few uniform surfaces.

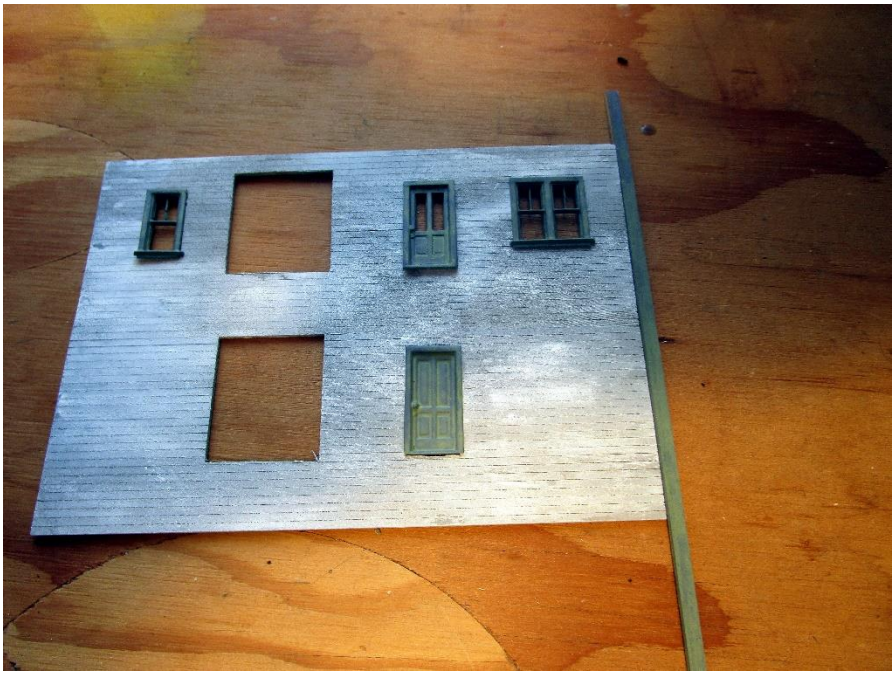
Below is the picture from the Campbell box—much better:



I decided to paint the walls as if they had been white and were badly faded and worn:

The white craft paint (other than the rattle cans, I'm using the various brands of craft paint sold at Michael's and similar stores) was applied quite sparingly. It's easy to add more, but very hard to compensate for adding too much. A lot of the application was done with a small piece of a kitchen sponge.

Next, I needed to choose a trim color. More experimentation. I chose to spray the trim with a darker gray, and then sponged on a light foliage green. Here is a test shot.

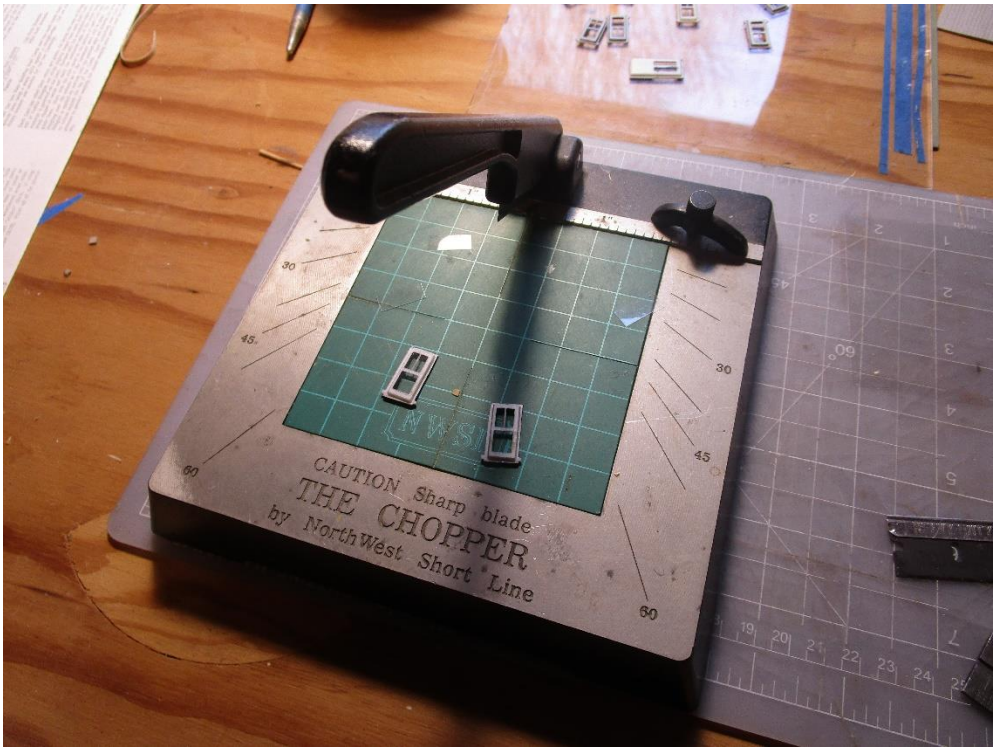


Next I added trim around the freight doors and on the sides of the walls. And this is as far as I've gotten. To be continued….

This is part two of a clinic on building a structure kit from Campbell Scale Models—the “Cordage Company.”

In the previous installment, I showed the walls with the windows laid in place (but not glued). The windows need “glass,” which in this case will be acetate included with the kit. It needs to be cut to size and glued to the back of each window or door.

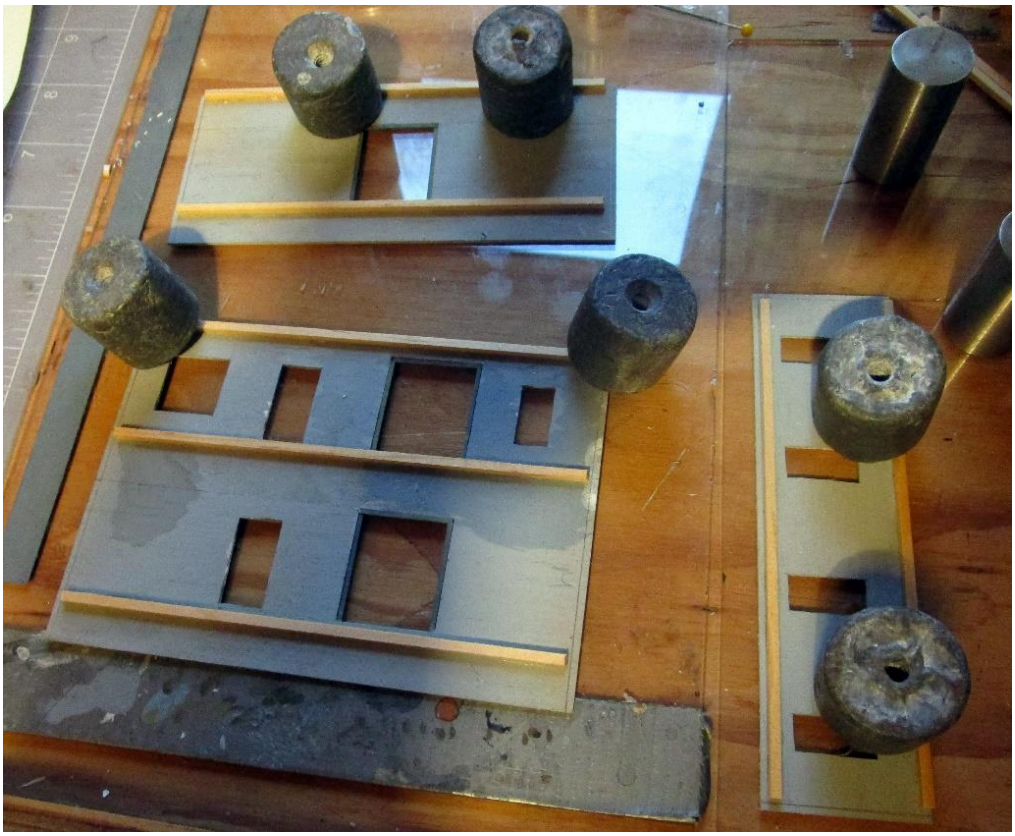
The Chopper is a handy device for cutting all kinds of small pieces in wood and plastic. It can be easily set to cut multiple duplicate parts.



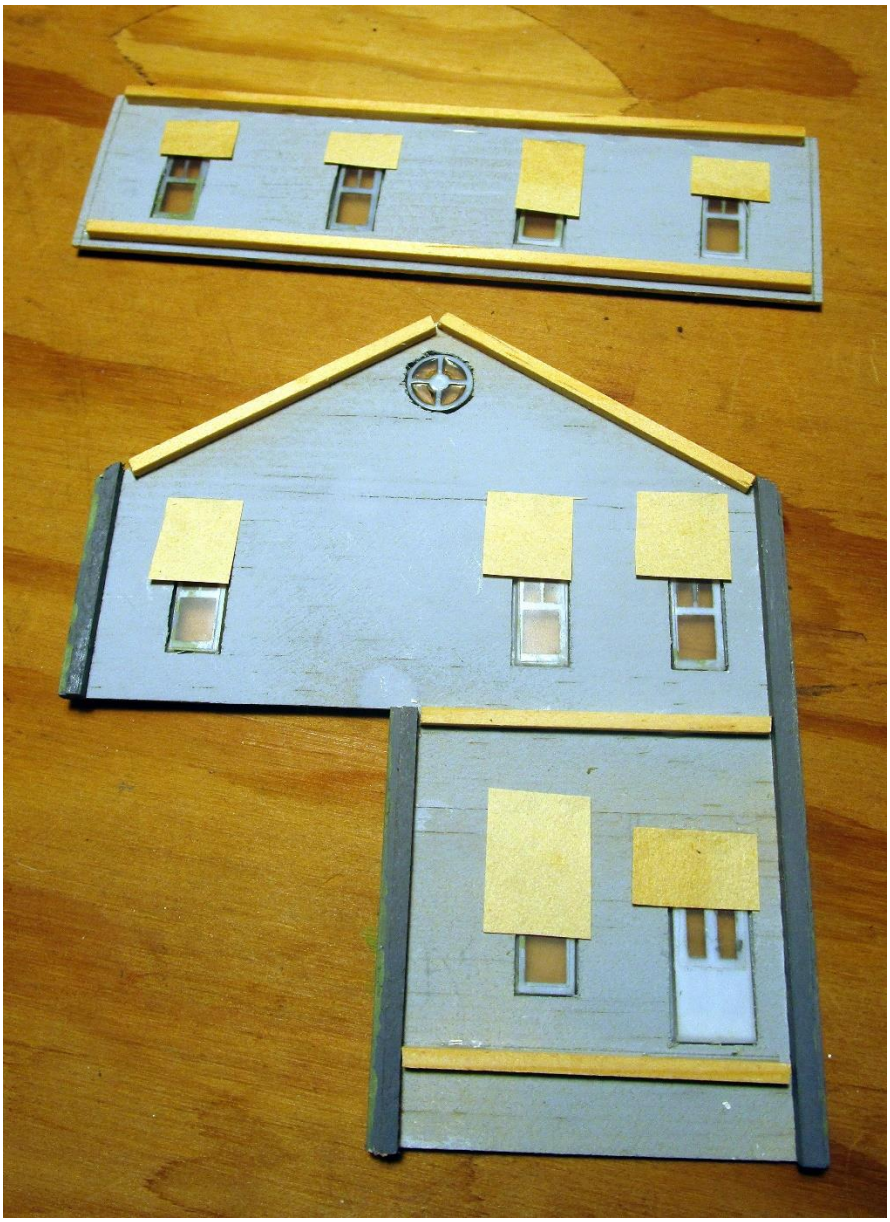
The acetate is glued onto the back of the windows using methyl ethyl ketone. This is basically the same stuff that model RR shops sell in little bottles for a lot of money—it forms a bond between pieces of plastic very quickly. I use it for assembling Walthers kits and anything with styrene. The MEK is applied with a little brush. A quart at the hardware store cost about $12, although I understand it is being phased out in place of a “safer” solution that also works. I should include the usual caveat—use with adequate ventilation and don’t use it excessively. There was a recent article about the great properties of this stuff in Model RR Hobbyist and the properties of the safer substitute.

Canopy glue, which I'm using for almost everything else in this model, also works well for making window panes if they are small. It will dry completely clear. In this case I didn't feel like cutting little circles to fit.

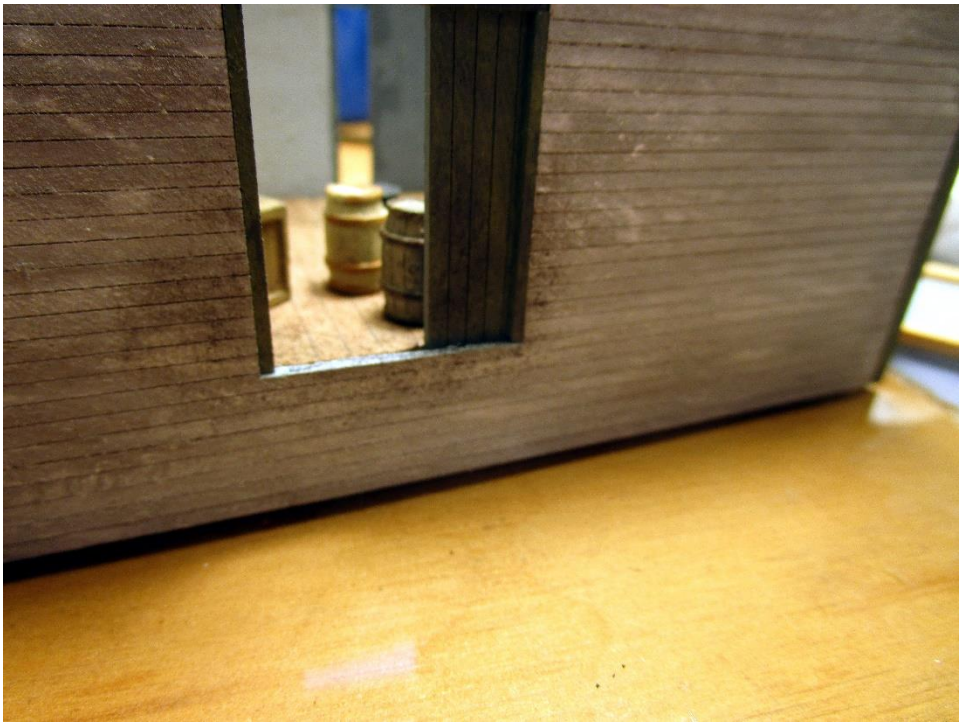
Before gluing the windows in place I used the wood included in the kit to stiffen the walls. This is an essential step. Since this wood won't be seen, it isn't painted, and it never hurts to put in extra, as the walls are often bowed at this point. I have a collection of small weights for gluing which I use all the time.



After the windows are in place, I like to add window shades. They help make the building look lived in. They are just pieces of manila paper glued to show shades at different levels.

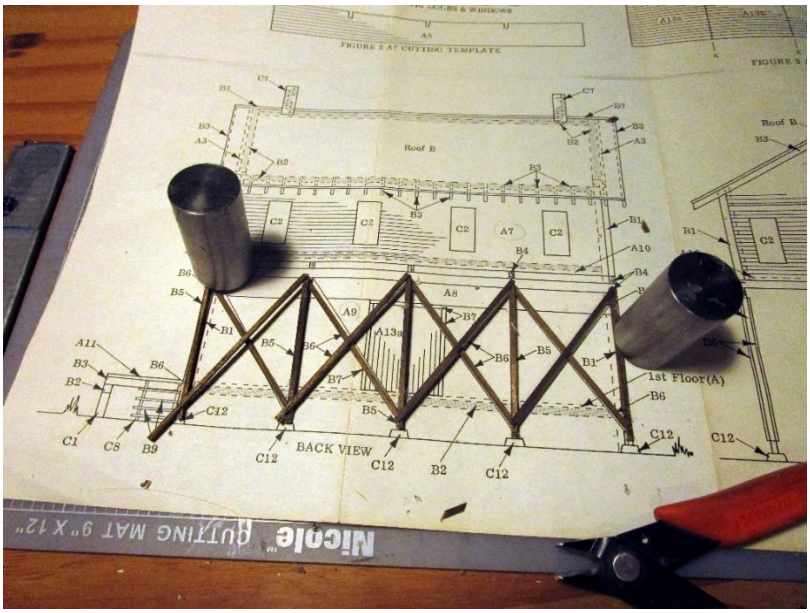


The kit comes with two internal cardboard floors, which are meant to help square and strengthen the building, but not to be seen. I've decided to leave a couple of the freight doors open, so I painted some floor boards and added a few detail parts by one open door. I've also begun some weathering, as dirt will certainly accumulate around a busy loading door.



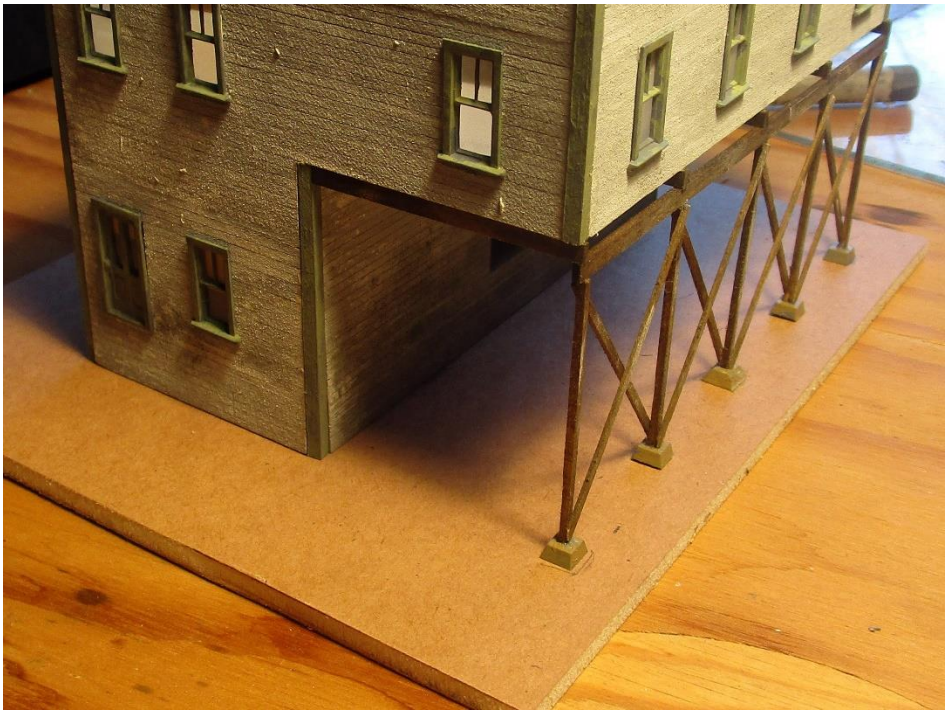
With some patience, the walls are assembled reasonably square.

Next are the overhang supports. As suggested in the kit instructions, I building this over the scale drawing in order to get the dimensions right.

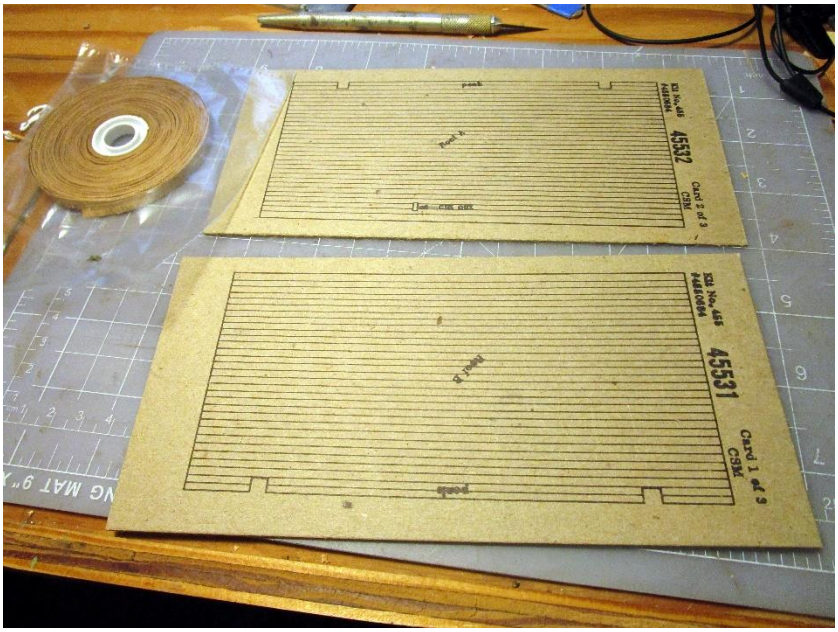


I think the supports look a little flimsy for the size of the building, but that's the way they are going to be. I dyed the wood using Hunterline dark brown. I recently acquired some bottles of Hunterline stains at RR shows and they are very easy to apply.

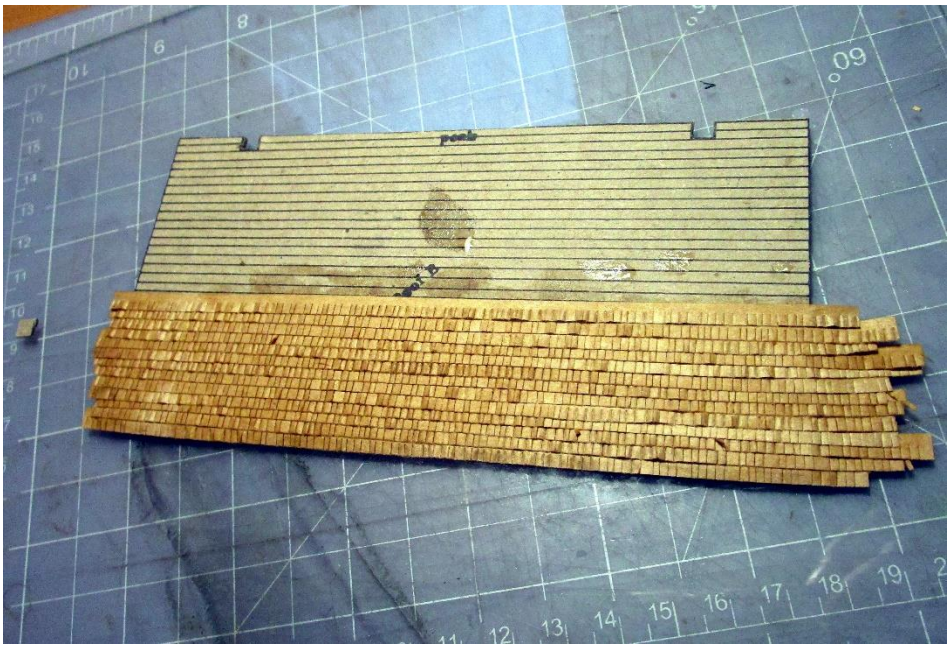
After lining up the supports in more or less the proper orientation, I glued the structure to a piece of gaterboard to keep it from being damaged in further steps.



Time for the roof. This starts as two pieces of stiff ruled cardboard.



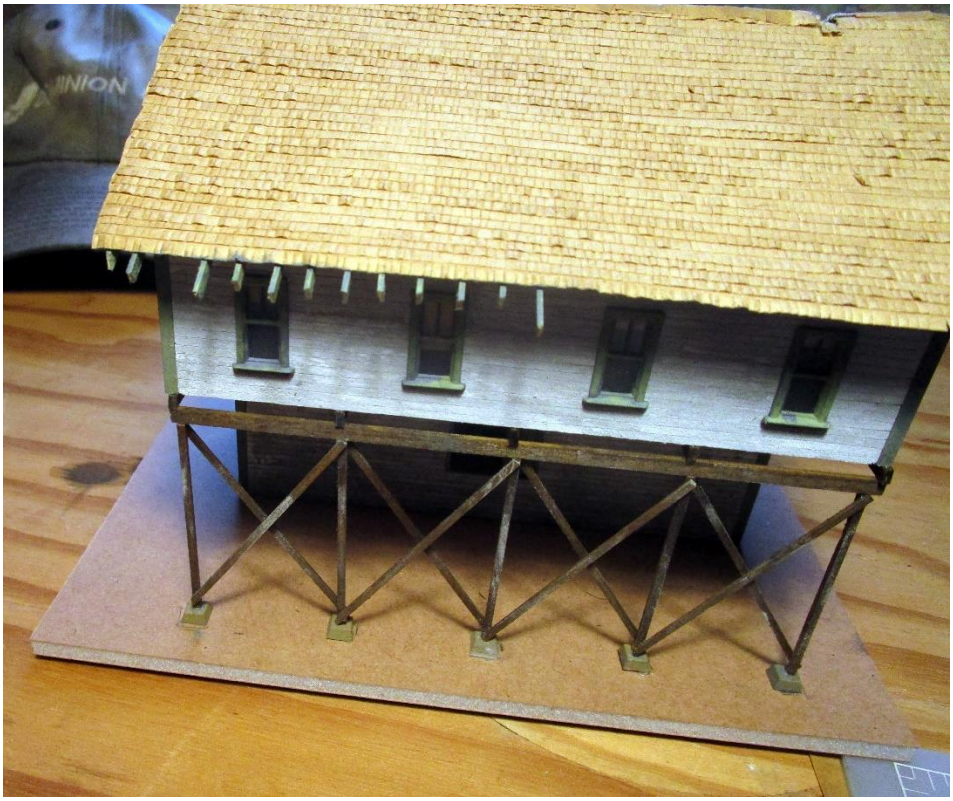
Campbell buildings generally have either “wood” shingles or sheet metal roofing. The shingles come in rolls gummed on the back. They go on one row at a time.



This, like some other steps in building the kit, might look pretty fussy and tedious. It really isn’t. I do a bit at a time, while listening to an audio book. Take a break and do some more.

Here is the roof, all shingled. I'm now putting on some roof trim. These handy clamps are just clothespins with the spring reversed, so that the tips that squeeze are narrow.

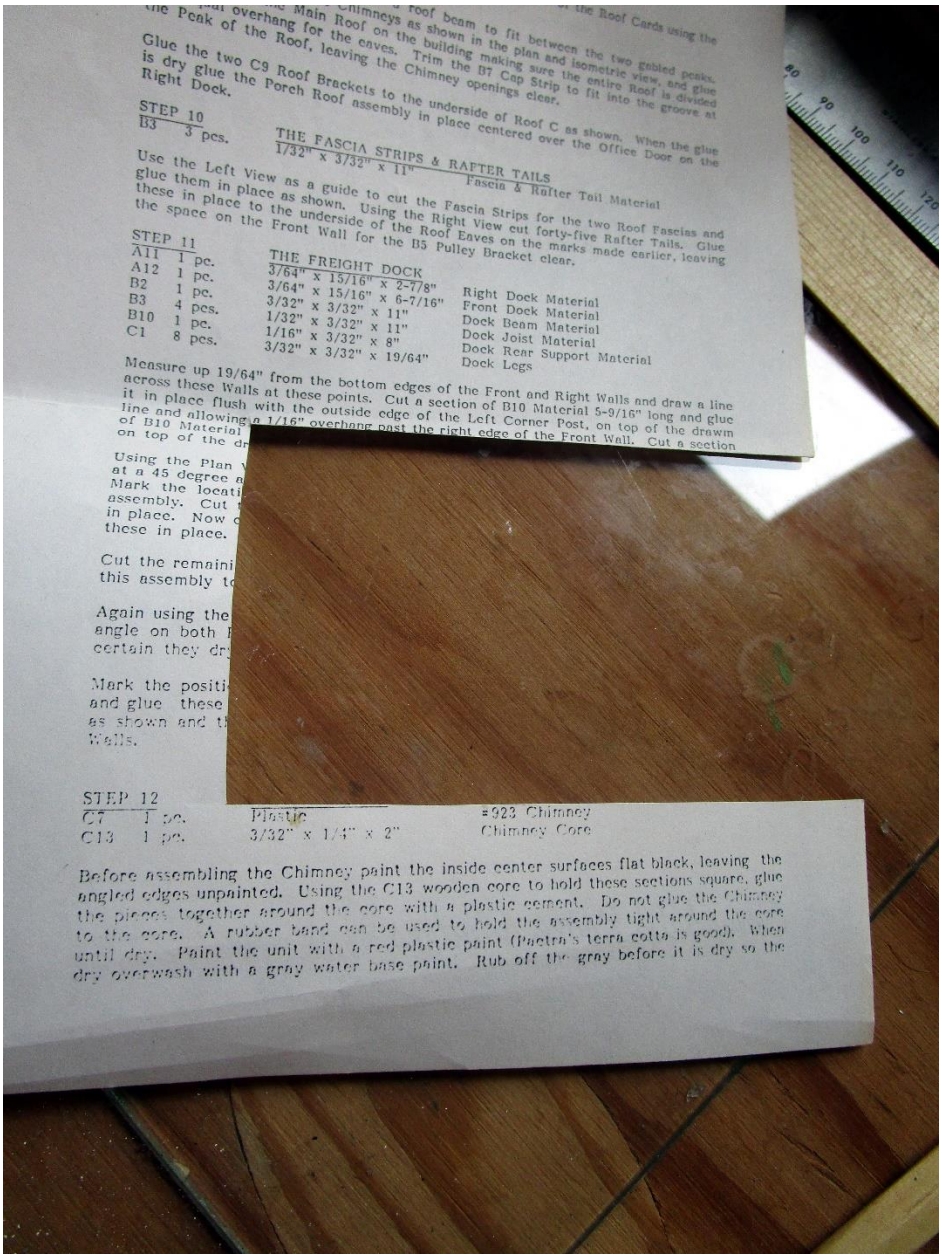
A lot of old buildings have exposed rafter tails. These add a lot to the general appearance of the roof, in my opinion. This might look like an especially fussy step, but it really isn't. I glue them on long, then when they are dry I snip them off at the right angle.



As you can see, I've toned down the roof color with a gray-brown stain, added chimneys and some more weathering to the walls and roof.

Still to go: on the front of the building and on one side there will be a freight dock and stairs which are fairly complicated.

This might be an interesting challenge, as the instructions I got with the kit leave something to be desired. There are also a few missing parts for the dock—but I will figure it out.



Also needed, more weathering, some signs, and odds and ends for details. To be continued…

April 16, 2020: Tim Wilmot added pigeons to the project:

HO scale pigeons have arrived at Lost River (which is located somewhere on my layout). This is why they make optivisors. One of the good things about buildings structures is that you have plenty of freedom to imagine things and fool around with them, which is much harder with freight cars and locomotives.