

N-Circle Railroad Update – April 7, 2021

The fume exhaust fan from the March 8, 2021 N-Circle update worked has worked well and allowed many indoor styrene cementing sessions to complete the following buildings!

This update continues our theme of modular “personalization” of the N-Circle Railroad, this time focusing on interchangeable signs on buildings. This first will be demonstrated on the Piko Freight Transfer Office kit, (part no. 60027), which was also released by Model Power under a couple of different part numbers.

N-Circle_21-03-07_Piko_ForwardingOffice_1



I did not modify this structure, other than the rooftop sign, and some detail painting. I used the green window frames and roof supports in the original plastic color, as they looked good for this building, and applied dark grey paint washes to weather the walls.

The kit came with a rectangular plastic roof sign, that was to be glued vertically to the roof with plastic cement, with paper signs to be glued to the two sides. Given its very small contact surface, this sign was sure to break off over time!

The following photo shows cut and creased paper signs, glued sign structures and a vent cap displayed on the roof of the Freight House before final assembly, all which can be fitted into the hole that can be seen that I drilled in the center of the roof.

[N-Circle_21-03-21_Piko_ForwardingOffice_Signs](#)



The Northeast Freight and Roadway Express Inc. signs are 50 x 6 mm, and were created in PowerPoint, then printed on standard printer paper. The photo shows the signs after they have been cut out and folded, before being glued to the sign structures. These structures were made from thin cardboard and round wood toothpick sections, glued with Elmer's white glue. The center post is longer and tapered to fit in the hole in the center of the roof, the structure face edges align over the roof ridge pole, to keep it straight.

First, we see the truck docks side of the Piko Freight House kit personalized with the Northeast Freight sign. Note the Rutland Railroad delivery truck, and other details and signs added to the building. The storage cabinet on the corner of the base is a cast metal detail part purchased separately and painted brown with metal highlights for the hinges and latches.

[N-Circle_21-03-23_Piko_ForwardingOffice_Northeast_3](#)



Next we see what will be the rail siding docks side of the building with the same Northeast Freight sign and a Maine Central delivery truck to complete the scene. This personalization can be used in the 1950s Vermont operating scenarios for the N-Circle Railroad, with vehicles chosen to match the operations railroads of the day.

[N-Circle_21-03-23_Piko_ForwardingOffice_Northeast_6](#)



Shifting now to a 1950s Louisiana operating scenario, we see the same building personalized as a Roadway terminal with appropriate Roadway trucks at the docks. Later personalizations will be for the Southern Pacific, Union Pacific and Santa Fe Railroads, to go with fleets of 1950s trucks for each.

[N-Circle_21-03-23_Piko_ForwardingOffice_Roadway_3](#)



Finally, for those days when we don't want to be committed to any specific purpose for the building, we find it with just the optional roof vent!

[N-Circle_21-03-23_Piko_ForwardingOffice_NoSign_1](#)



Next, we will show a building signs personalization technique using magnets. My first implementation was with the Life-Like Volunteer Fire Company kit (part no 433-7483, re-released by Walthers).

[N-Circle_21-03-28_Life-Like_FireStation_1](#)



To begin, I cut off the ramp edge on the left side of the base, as it did not seem to serve a purpose, and would just limit placement of this structure adjacent to other buildings. I also did not use the recessed garage doorways seen in the photo on the box above, as I prefer to have the doors open, so we can see the fire trucks inside. For the trucks to rest flat, I had to cover the interior hole in the base, to make a complete garage floor. I cut a piece of thin styrene and added a piece of grey paper over it to fill the hole.

To be able to personalize the fire station for use in either Maple Corners, Vermont or Lakeview, Louisiana, the two towns of the N-Circle Railroad, I decided to use magnetic signs. Unfortunately, I did not decide this until after assembling the building! Fortunately, I was able to maneuver a small, round super magnet into place through the garage door opening using an L-shaped piece of sprue wrapped in double-stick tape to super-glue it to the back side of the front wall. The signs for the face of the building are then glued to rectangles of strips cut from one of those thin magnetic refrigerator calendars one receives in solicitations from charities.

Here we see the completed fire station, personalized for the Maple Corners Fire Department.

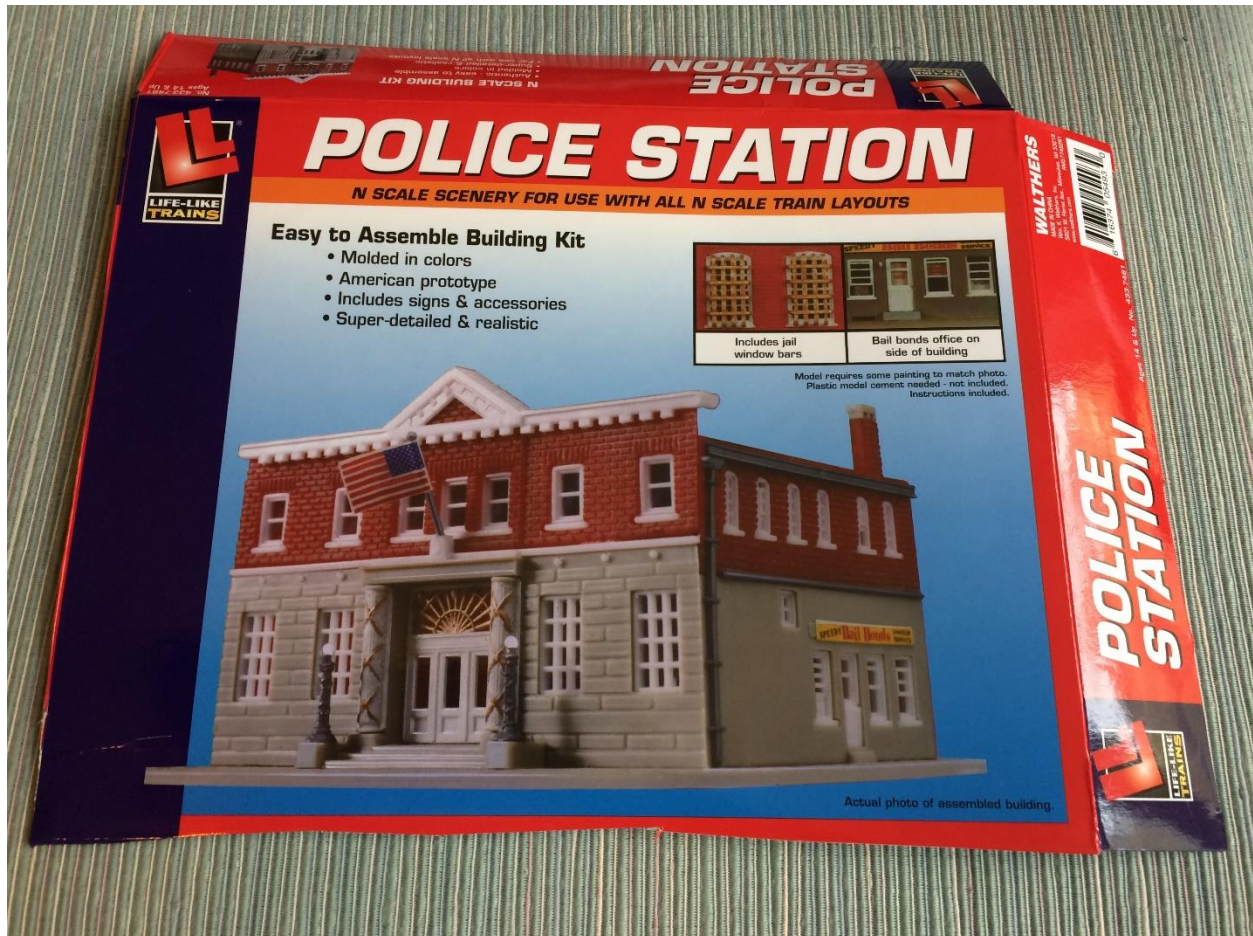
[N-Circle_21-04-05_Life-Like_FireStation_4](#)



I did not include the hose drying tower on the roof or the rain gutters, as they seemed like prime targets to be broken off, like N-scale grab irons on a locomotive! I should have added a floor panel between the first and second floors before assembling, as light from both levels of the rear windows can be seen from the front.

I next built the Life-Like Police Station kit (part no 433-7481, re-released by Walthers), to use as a City Hall and Police Station. This is a sister kit to the fire station: the rear and left wall panels are the same for the two kits, with different window and door inserts! Therefore, I was able to apply the learning from building the fire station above.

[N-Circle_21-04-03_Life-Like_PoliceStation_1](#)



I left off the really flimsy American flag until I come up with a better looking one someday, and the cheesy Bail Bonds signage on the side. I also did not use the lights on either side of the entrance as they are not great molds, I may add them later, with some park benches and pedestrians.

First, we see the button magnet superglued on the back of the front wall to support the interchangeable sign. (Before completing assembly of the building this time!) We also see a simple interior insert to create a floor between the first and second levels, and interior walls to block light from front to back on both levels. The windows on this building are so small there is really no need to add interior details – one would have to have their nose on the building to see them!

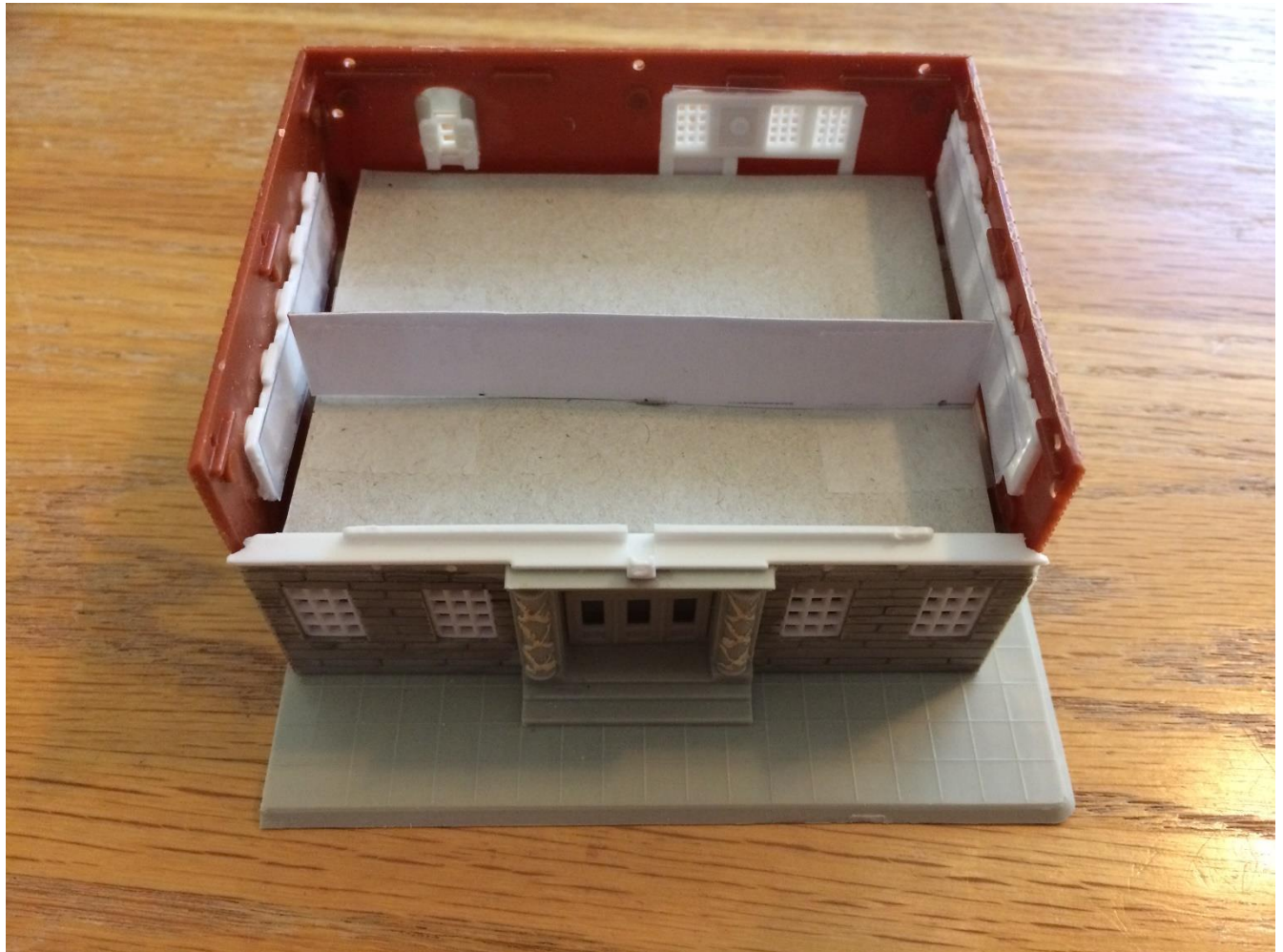
[N-Circle_21-04-03_Life-Like_PoliceStation_2](#)



Remember that magnets are polarized, so they will either attract or oppose, depending on how they are oriented. Therefore, one needs to cut the magnetic strip for the sign and determine how it needs to align to attract to the fixed magnet before gluing the paper sign to the strip. Another challenge with this technique is that the magnetic polarization may cause the sign to not want to align perfectly square to the building surface. This can be overcome if one edge of the sign can abut to an outcrop on the building. This worked well for the final placement below the eaves on the City Hall building, not as well in the center of the Fire Station face, as will be seen in the photos of the finished buildings that will follow below.

Next, we see the interior placed in the building, before completing assembly of the roof. I attached it with white glue to sprue sections cemented horizontally to the interior of the walls, but it was cut to fit the interior snugly, so it should not move much anyway. This interior technique is not rocket science, but it reduces the otherwise toy-like appearance these simple multi-level building kits would have with light coming through from all sides, and through any gaps in the panel joints.

[N-Circle_21-04-03_Life-Like_PoliceStation_3](#)



The next photo shows the completed structure, personalized as “City Hall” for now, serving a dual purpose as City Hall and Police Station, as occurs in many small cities.

[N-Circle_21-04-05_Life-Like_PoliceStation_3](#)



Both the fire station and police station will require modifying the surrounding roadway and sidewalks to align with the height of the base. Both kits came out as good “three-foot” buildings: they would not rate well in a modeling contest, but they look pretty good from three feet! Hopefully you will agree from the photos of them integrated into the layout at the end of this update.

Our fourth structures project this month was the Heljan Furniture Factory (part no B-672) kit.

[N-Circle_21-03-07_Heljan_FurnitureFactory_1](#)



I did not modify this structure, other than adding supports under the loading dock roofs leftover from another kit (I had three, needed four! Good to keep leftover parts for future kit bash projects). I did repaint all of the surfaces, so they do not just look like the picture on the box, and I used thin clear plastic from sheets from another kit for the windows, rather than the thick semi-frosted plastic blocks that come with the kit. I also added crates and barrels details on the docks and will add detail signage and people to all of these buildings eventually, and some weathering chalks before applying a coat of DullCoat when it is warmer to spray paint in the garage.

First, we see what will be the rail dock side of the completed building.

[N-Circle_21-03-23_Heljan_FurnitureFactory_2](#)



Then the opposite street-side truck docks.

[N-Circle_21-03-23_Heljan_FurnitureFactory_4](#)



Note that for all of these structure kit photos, I used new parking lot underlay and scenic backdrop panels, printed from the backdrop and parking lot panels introduced in earlier N-Circle Railroad updates. They highlight the buildings better than just photographing them on the work table. For future projects, these panels need to be wider, to fill the picture in corner shots of the structures.

Finally, we see the new Freight Terminal building replacing the 1980s brown steel building that appeared in the previous N-Circle Railroad update's photo of the food service freight terminal area on the north west corner of the layout. In the foreground, a Central Vermont Railway S-2 switcher is poised to shuffle the reefers at the docks...

[N-Circle_21-04-06_FreightTerminals_RailSide-1](#)



...and the Furniture Factory, Fire Station and City Hall with new underlay panels start to fill in the north east corner of the layout.

[N-Circle_21-04-06_NorthEast_MainStreet_3](#)





This last shot provides a good scene for the collection of 1950s police cars – the fourth is down the street in front of Rosie’s Coffee Shop! And Café Gumbo does a strong business with the municipal employees!

Note that for these layout photos, we have repositioned the backdrop panel introduced in an earlier update, to produce a better background than just the stacks of supplies around the room.

I hope this discussion of personalizable signs sparks some thoughts for you. We will use these techniques on the large Shell oil refinery complex we will eventually build for the south east corner of the layout, as while many of the structures could be used in both the 1950s and 1980s, Shell changed their pecten logo during this time, so the 1950s version would probably not have still been seen on their structures in the 1980s.

Certain NWV members would say that this modular personalization of scenes is all just because I can’t make up my mind about what I am doing (like the show floorplan...). But after over 30 years of collecting rolling stock and trucks, I have equipment for more diverse scenes than I could ever realistically incorporate into an 8x3 layout all at one time! And building up a collection of structures before attaching them to the layout allows rearranging to see how they will fit together best to create a scene. Unfortunately, many (most?) kits do not show all sides of a building on the box, so you don’t really know what you have until you build the kit.