

N-Circle Railroad Update 21 – April 30, 2025

At winter's onset, I moved the workbench to the back of the garage under the heat lamp, as shown in Update 16, and made some progress on projects in December. Then many other activities took priority, and I didn't get back to N-Circle projects until late April.

Building an Atlas Signal Tower

The primary project for this Update was to build the reasonably simple Atlas Signal Tower kit, part number 2840, for the west end of North Yard, near the construction scene in described in the previous Update 20. This will enhance the background for videos of trains entering the yard from the west.

This kit is from the same series as the Atlas passenger station built in Update 9, with similar level of detail and assembly difficulty. I painted the tower with the same basic color scheme as the passenger station, as they are both owned by the railroad and were built in the same style time period, and are about a block apart from each other.

Here is a photo of the kit packaging, showing how Atlas finished it...

[N-Circle_24-11-27_Atlas_SignalTower_1](#)



The kit has very good, clear, detailed instructions with numbered parts. The pieces of this kit are sharply defined and fit together well. However, there are many very small pieces to be carefully aligned when glueing, so I would not call this an “easy” kit to build. Having experience working with tiny N-scale parts is definitely a pre-requisite for building this kit well.

For the triangular braces which go under the overhangs, the first step is to make sure they are clear of any tiny extra flash that could interfere with their fit. Then grasp them with fine-point needle nose pliers, apply liquid cement sparingly to the surfaces of the brace that will be against the building, and press it into place. I found that even though the nub on the brace may not fit into the hole in the building at first, the cement would soften the plastic such that it could be pressed into place after a bit of time.

I applied Vallejo Grey Surface Primer as mortar on the brick sections while they were still on the sprues, thinned it down by adding water and brushing a wash across the whole section, then gently wiped it off the surfaces with a small piece of paper towel, leaving the color in the grooves between the bricks.

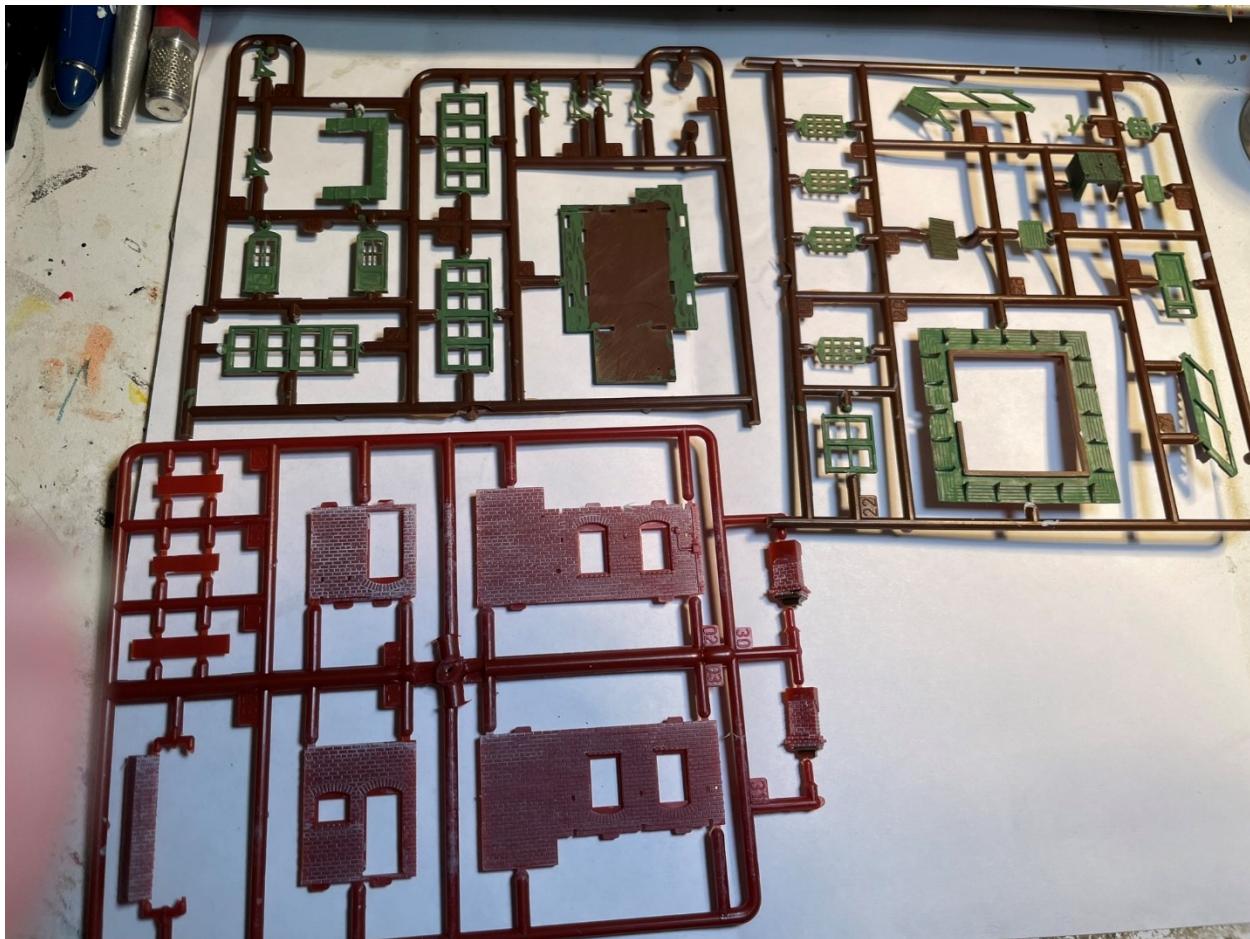
I also applied primer to the trim pieces before painting – this plastic is very slippery without a primer. The windows frames, doors and trim then received a “grass green,” the same color as used on the passenger station from Update 9. This yellow and green scheme works for 1950s Vermont CV, CN, and Rutland Railroad operating sessions, and the CV in the 1980s. It will have to do for when the layout is reset for Louisiana operating sessions, unless I eventually build a second station and tower in different paint schemes!

When painting the trim, I intentionally did not do a perfect job (no, really...!) to allow the brown plastic and grey primer to show through some, giving a “weathered” appearance. This effect is easily accomplished with brush painting, as seen intentionally or unintentionally with much of the work done for the N-Circle Railroad...

I used a mix of dark brown and grass green colors on the ground around the base, as this area would be unkempt, with various junk added around it later.

Here we see a photo of the painted trim parts still on the sprues before installation.

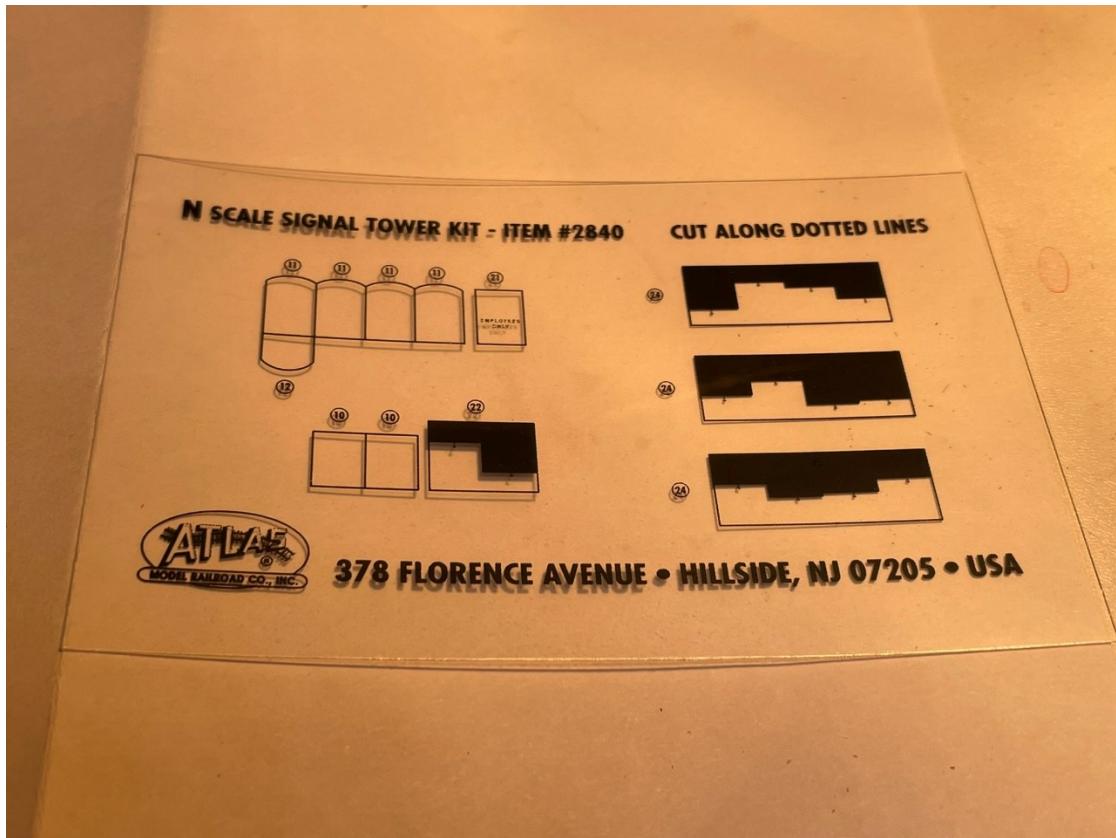
N-Circle_24-11-29_Atlas_SignalTower_1



If you build this kit, be careful to trim off and smooth any nubs on the sides from attaching to the sprues, as they press-fit into recesses in the walls. Also be sure to align the window units right side up. There are tiny grooves in the walls to accept the ends of the windowsills on the bottom of the units, but they could be easily overlooked and the windows forced into the openings upside down.

An interesting feature of this kit is the window glass with shades printed on them – a nice touch to add some realism!

N-Circle_24-11-27_Atlas_SignalTower_2



The instructions say to use Micro-Scale Kristal Klear to attach the window glaze – this is very good advice, as I know from previous unfortunate experience that styrene cement will damage and cloud the clear windows.

The roof is molded in grey plastic, but I applied a layer of dark grey paint to reduce the shininess of the bare plastic.

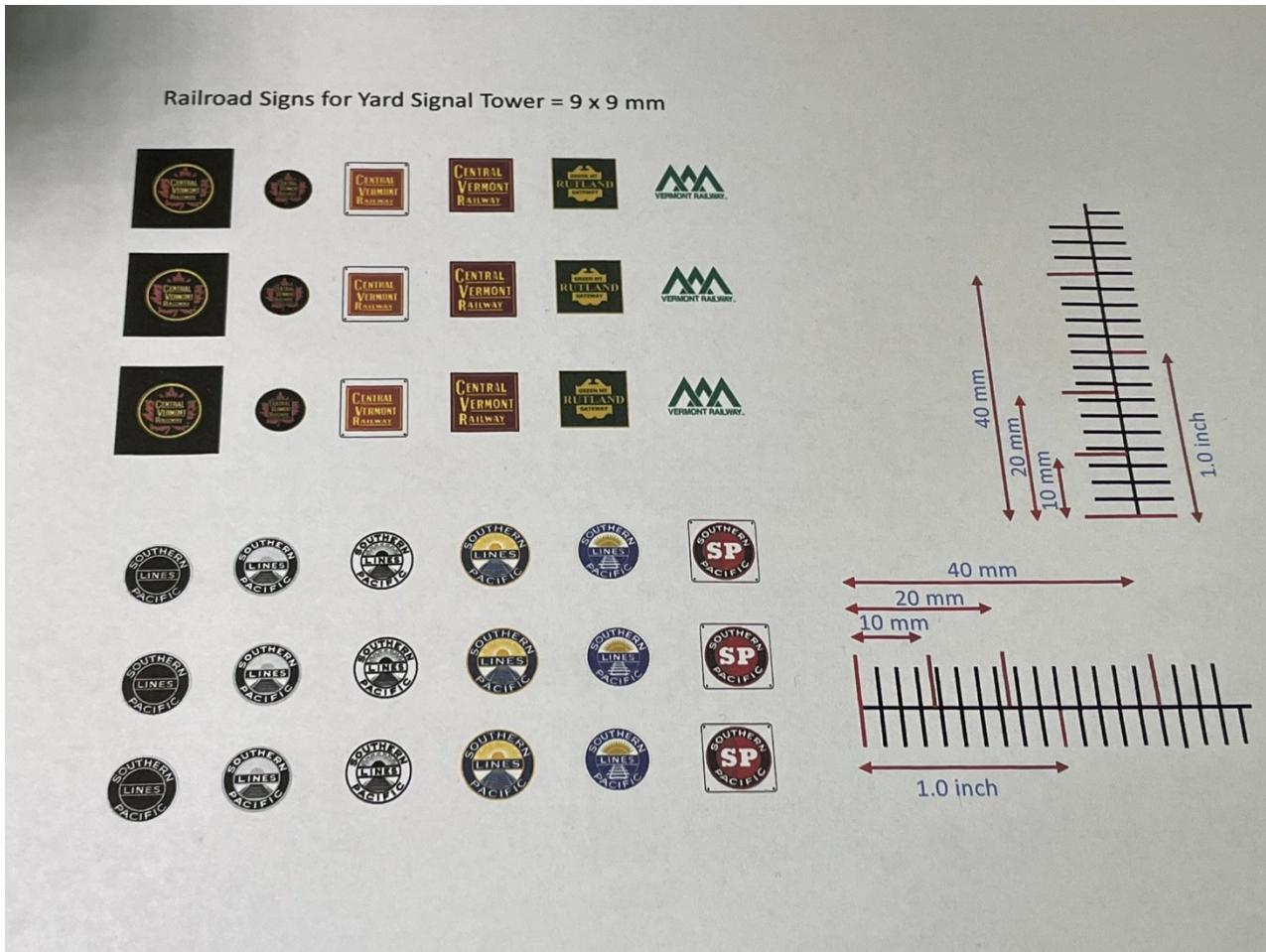
I also painted the downspouts, light fixture, etc. on the sprues – this is much easier. Installing the downspouts is tricky, but if they are carefully cut from the sprues leaving the alignment nubs, it is possible to carefully align the nubs to the holes in the walls and glue them securely.

Initially I considered adding railroad signs to the base of the tower using the magnetic interchangeable signs technique discussed in Update 7, to allow the tower to be used for both Vermont and Louisiana operating sessions in multiple time periods. Therefore, I did not create a custom decal to apply to the wall directly.

I started by downloading Central Vermont, Rutland, Vermont Railway and Southern Pacific heralds from the web, and inserting them into a Power Point slide. I captured mostly heralds from the 1950s for this initial build, I may add more 1980s logos later or just use “weathered” versions of these 1950s signs.

I then shrunk them all to 9mm in height, to fit on the lower brick wall of the tower, and printed the sheet on white copier paper, as seen here. The vernier on the slide makes it easy to insert an image, place it next to the vernier and shrink it to the desired dimensions for printing.

N-Circle_25-04-26_Atlas_SignalTower



However, by the time I made the signs, the lower section of the tower was already assembled, therefore it was too late to glue magnets to the inside of the walls to hold interchangeable signs in place. Therefore, I decided to just glue the signs to 9mm squares of thin styrene and attach them to the wall with a small square of double-stick tape. The tower will not be moving, so this should be structurally sound enough for the signs to stay in place.

I also added "Keep Out" signs from a Blair Line set, and various junk around the base of the building. The crossbuck was cut off the top of a cheap RR crossing sign, I used a black Sharpie pen to "paint" the white pole. The pallet and barrels came from my saved detail parts boxes. Because the various pieces were made from dissimilar metals and plastics, I attached them with simple white glue.

The man on the top of the stairs is from a set of station figures, attached with styrene cement.

Here we see photos of all sides of the completed tower, with 1950s Southern Pacific Lines signs attached.

N-Circle_25-04-27_Atlas_SignalTower_1



N-Circle_25-04-27_Atlas_SignalTower_2



The next photo will be the primary view of the tower, as will be seen from the front of the layout on the north side.

[N-Circle_25-04-27_Atlas_SignalTower_3](#)



[N-Circle_25-04-27_Atlas_SignalTower_4](#)



In the next two photos we see the completed scene with the tower placed on the layout on a temporary scenery underlay panel, as used on all sections of the layout at this point. The Southern Pacific signs have been swapped out for 1950s Central Vermont Railway signs for the current N-Circle Railroad Vermont 1950s operations. I also added some green ground foam shrubbery around the base of the tower, attached with white glue. The tower operator at the top of the stairs now overlooks the construction scene developed in N-Circle Update 20.

The railroad signal stand adds a “finishing touch” to this initial scene and also came from the random detail parts box, picked up from somewhere years ago.

Sooo...another open area of the layout has been filled with a preliminary scene!

[N-Circle_25-04-30_Atlas_SignalTower_1](#)



N-Circle_25-04-30_Atlas_SignalTower_1



Building More Resin Vehicles Kits

In the early stages of this signal tower project, I couldn't resist buying three more Bruce Richardson Cars 1950 Chevrolet kits...I didn't have the coupe or the station wagon, though I already have built three of the 2-door and 4-door Fleetlines, but the three kits came together in one listing on eBay.

I followed the same build process as described in N-Circle Updates 17 and 18, so I will not repeat the details, but just show the final results here.

The wheels for all three were cast in flat black plastic, so they only required trimming the flash and adding a spot of silver paint for a chrome hub cap center. The sprue for the wheels of all three kits was imprinted with "CNS," revealing their heritage as Cars N Scale molds before being taken over by Bruce Richardson.

I applied a layer of Krystal Klear to all windows after painting them dark gray – how do they look after Gloss Cote?

I confess that the sprue pieces used to reinforce the back of the wheels were too thick, and are holding the front wheels off the ground slightly, hopefully that won't be noticeable from a distance...

[N-Circle_24-12-15_BruceRichardson_Chevrolets_1_Cropped](#)



[N-Circle_24-12-15_BruceRichardson_Chevrolets_2_Cropped](#)



As discussed in previous N-Circle Updates, Cars N Scale, Bruce Richardson's Cars, and Fine N Scale vehicle kits have a rib in the front wheel wells that allows the wheels to be attached at an angle. Pretty much all Ready-to-Run vehicles like Classic Metal Works and other kits only have the front wheels straight forward. So having a few vehicles with their wheels turned allows more realism when placed at a busy intersection like seen next.

[N-Circle_24-12-15_BruceRichardson_Chevrolets_3_Cropped](#)



With careful observation, you can confirm from the above photos that I remembered to have both front wheels turned in the same direction on all three of these cars!

But this makes me think: I don't believe I have any 1980s period vehicles with front wheels that turn! Cars N Scale, Bruce Richardson's Cars, and Fine N Scale only made vehicles through the 1950s. A future project to consider! It may be possible to do with careful carving of the front wheel wells on some kits.

With the completion of these three kits, that brought the total for 2024 to a nice, round fifty vehicles completed!

One general thought – through building all these vehicle kits for the 1950s operating period of the N-Circle Railroad layout, I have learned a lot more about antique cars and the evolution of their styles than I ever understood before. The rounded, bulbous body styles of the late 1930s through the early 1950s slowly evolved to lower, flatter hoods by the end of the 1950s. Model railroading can lead to learning about the history of many things beyond just trains!