A tale of two sheds

These common structures look great on layouts of any vintage

By Harold W. Russell/Photos by the author

Built in a variety of shapes and sizes, railroad maintenance sheds serve as more than just storage areas for tools, spikes, tie plates, and other track materials. Often used for decades, some of these simple buildings are large enough to house track speeders or even hi-rail vehicles. Other examples, equipped with an office, lockers, and bathroom facilities, offer a home-away-from-home for track crews.

These two sheds, located on the south side of the Burlington Northern (formerly Chicago, Burlington & Quincy RR) tracks in Macomb, Ill., show that a variety of unique right-of-way structures can be found, often right next door to one another. The sheds look like they’re of different vintages. The older, wood-framed building has a tarpaper roof and rests on timber footings. The larger, more modern structure sits on a concrete slab foundation.

The buildings probably serve different purposes. The wooden shed has no visible electrical connection running to it. Two pairs of beams leading to the rails indicate that this structure is a speeder shed.

The more modern shed is set up for track workers. A hi-rail truck might stand ready behind the wide front door. There’s no stack on the roof, so these track workers probably keep warm with an electric heater rather than oil or gas. There are electric meters and wiring conduits on the shed’s west end.

Modeling the sheds

You can model either of these sheds by following the plans and using the materials of your choice. I’ve outlined a few suggestions for each structure. (For more ideas, see “Build your own lineside structures” by Paul J. Dolkos on page 44. – Ed.)
TO CONVERT HO SCALE DRAWINGS TO YOUR SCALE COPY AT THESE PERCENTAGES:
N 54.4 percent
S 136.1 percent
O 181.4 percent

Drawn for How to Build Realistic Layouts by HAROLD W. RUSSELL
Magazine purchaser may have photocopies of these drawings made as an aid to personal or commercial model making or tool design but does not have the right to distribute copies of the drawings to others.
Commerically available clapboard sheeting and other basswood shapes could be used to build most of the wooden shed. Fine emery paper makes good tarpaper roofing. Don’t forget details like hasps and padlocks, for some realistic finishing touches.

The siding for the steel-sided shed would require a bit more work. I don’t know of any ready-made materials with the profile of the corrugated metal. Strips of styrene with angled edges probably match the closest. This material is also a good choice for constructing roof ribs, windows, and doors. Other distinctive details include downspouts and electric meters.

Both sheds are painted light gray or dingy white, though each is in a different state of repair. In this regard, modeling the older structure may provide more of a challenge. This building looks like it’s seen decades of service and probably started out even smaller. The vertical boards on the front and back hide a seam indicating that one half of the shed was a later addition to the original structure. Dull, peeling paint covers the walls, which also include some broken slats.

The steel shed, on the other hand, stood in relatively pristine condition, shiny and without any visible rust.

As these two examples have illustrated, lineside structures built for the same general purpose can vary widely in size, age, and construction. Each of these versatile railroad maintenance sheds offers a great project, whatever era you model.

A longtime O scale modeler, Harold W. Russell has published numerous prototype scale drawings in Model Railroader magazine.