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EM 12394

Switch ID Numbers from Farm to Layout

Although my home layout project begun in mid-2016 is now essentially complete, I occasionally add finishing touches – O-scale cars, figures, small buildings, and most recently switch ID tags. Hobbyists know there is no end to the Add Some More Stuff Syndrome (ASMSS), which is often delightful!

My 19 x 16 feet, L-shaped layout fits within the L-shaped room added to the rear of our house – formerly a home office for the previous owner but now a train room. The control panel is situated at the inside angle of the “L.” Because of that configuration, about half of the 11 K-Line O42 switches were not in direct line-of-sight from the control center; i.e., hidden by a building or located under the upper level. The switch controllers placed at the control center were conveniently numbered for reference at a glance. However, those numbers were just the first and obvious step toward a simple yet effective switch identification system. The arrangement of switches on the layout was logical, but sometimes my memory didn’t provide recall of a switch location quickly enough to inform a just-in-time switch-throwing decision.

I toyed with several methods of placing visible ID numbers at the switches: a small tent card with a large number, a trimmed and folded 4x6-inch index file number card, or an aluminum L-bracket with a press-on number. None seemed appropriate and certainly not railroad-ish. I considered adopting the acetate film switch identification numbers provided by Lionel for use with their FasTrack® switch controllers. That seemed elegant, but the acetate film wouldn’t stand upright.

I occasionally visit a local Tractor Supply Store for tools and parts. During one visit, a farm product caught my attention as a possible solution to my switch identification problem – Y.Tex Livestock Ear Tags. The number area of a bright yellow tag is about 1-1/2 inch square; ideal for showing a half-inch black press-on Helvetica number. I brought a bag home and started experimenting, with mental apologies to the bovines and owner of Old McDonald’s Farm.

When used with animals, the two parts of the tag are attached with a tool that pierces the ear of the animal and attaches the tag so the number side



This is the line-of-sight view of switch ID tags #10 and #11 at the north leg of the layout. Although both are located about 16 feet from the control center, they can be read at a glance.

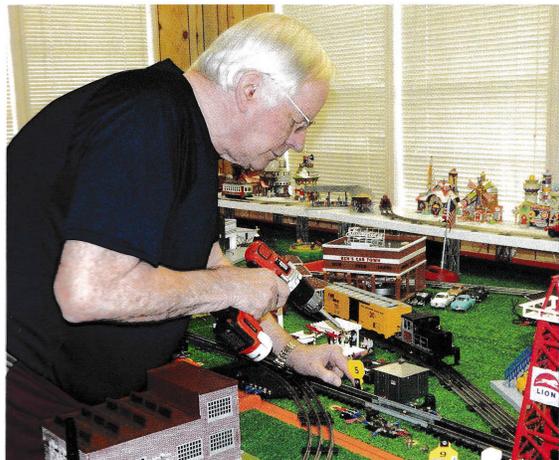
faces front and the clasp faces rearward – similar to an earring. For my project, I discarded the clasp and its black plastic inset washer as unnecessary parts.

I used 1x1 inch L-brackets as the mounting base for the repurposed tags. The two holes in the

bracket were ideally placed for my project. I used one of the holes to attach a tag with a 10-24 1/2-inch bolt and nut. A raised circle on the back of the tag held the nut firmly in place, a serendipitous feature. I used the other hole to install the bracket and ID tag near the appropriate switch on the layout with a short Phillips-head screw.

I installed an ID tag at each switch and oriented its numbered face toward the control center. For most switches, the ideal position was near the diverging rails. The only downside of this project: now I have no excuse for errant routing of trains because of FTI (failure to identify). 🚂

Photographs provided by Mike H. Mottler



I installed most of the switch ID tags near the divergent rails of each switch and oriented all tags toward the control center.



Each switch controller is labeled and mounted on a pull-out panel at the control center. When not in use, the panel slides under the platform. This view also shows switch ID tags #5 and #3 in place.