

**Golden Empire Historical and Modeling Society**  
**Bakersfield, California**  
**by Larry Saslaw and Doug Wagner**

In January, 1987, a group of Bakersfield, California, model railroaders got together to try and form a model railroad club. At the first meeting, approximately 40 local model railroaders crammed into a meeting room, at the local Ford auto dealership. From that meeting, the Golden Empire Model Railroad Club—GEMRC—was formed in mid-1987.

Since the new club did not have a location to build a layout, it was decided to build a modular layout, in both HO and N scale. The N scale part of the club adopted the Ntrack standards, and the HO part adopted the HO modular standards as established by the NMRA. Around the end of 1987, the club had enough modules to have their first test run. So, the club started meeting one Saturday a month, in whatever local Veteran's Halls were available, as the Veteran's Halls were free to rent for clubs such as GEMRC, to set up both the HO and N scale modular layouts, and advertised the run sessions at the local hobby shops, in the quest for more members.

The club was still searching for a more permanent location so that the modules could be set up, full-time. About 1991, the club got an offer to rent a former swimming pool storage warehouse, which was situated along the Southern Pacific mainline, just west of the Southern Pacific passenger depot, on Baker Street, in Old Towne Kern. With no heating or cooling, you can imagine the toll it took, not only on the modules, but on the members (remember your last July or August in Bakersfield?). After putting up with either freezing during the winter, or sweltering in the summer heat, the club found a smaller, but cooled and heated, building in Oildale (north Bakersfield suburb). The club was actually in this location long enough that plans for a permanent HO and N scale layouts were developed—approximately 2 years. The one of the members, who is an architect, heard about the second and third floors, of a former department store—J.J. Newberry—was available as they were not useable by a “normal” business. GEMRC looked into it, and signed the lease on the 2 floors. With both floors at 3,900 square feet, we finally had enough room to set up the modules and actually start planning on some permanent layouts. The club moved into its current downtown Bakersfield location, in March 1994.

Before any layouts could be planned, the two floors had to clean up and paint approximately 10 years' worth of neglect. We were still without heat, but at least we had some good ol' Bakersfield swamp coolers to keep us half-way cool during the unbearable Bakersfield summers. In the meantime, each scale were planning out some permanent layout possibilities. In early 1996, the N scale members were able to start some benchwork, with the HO layout shortly thereafter. The N scale layout laid down its first stick of track, in what is now the Mojave staging yard. The HO layout laid down its first stick of track around the start of 1997.

In 2002, GEMRC became the Golden Empire Historical and Modeling Society, so that we could be incorporated and become a 501(c)(3) IRS tax exempt non-profit organization.

The Golden Empire Historical and Modeling Society (GEHAMS) HO layout occupies a 37 X 110 foot room on the third floor of a commercial building in downtown Bakersfield. The layout has over 848 feet (14 scale miles) of mainline track that cross mountains, valleys, river canyons, and hillsides between the large classification yards and engine facilities located at “Bakersfield” and “Mojave”. The scenery depicts the landscapes typical of southern California with citrus orchards, oilfields, small towns and industrial facilities such as petroleum refineries and loading racks, packing sheds, lumber yards, cattle pens, warehouses, and manufacturing businesses. There is a one mile branch line that serves the rich agricultural town of Norman. Operations are point to point over a single-track mainline that has 5 passing sidings and return loops that allow continuous running. The layout is designed to run along two-sided peninsulas so that the trains traverse separate scenes along the way. The railroad has 160 spotting points to serve 44 customers during operating sessions. There is a strong Santa Fe and Southern Pacific influence to the railroad property.

The layout has been under construction since 1997 and was expanded in 2010 to include a large 7-track passenger station with REA Express, US mail and LCL freight station facilities. A passenger yard was also constructed to service trains between runs. In 2013, intermodal and automobile yards were added near

“Bakersfield“ to operate these high priority trains. Additional improvements and upgrades are ongoing. The layout uses a Digitrax radio command system, supported by 4 NCE 10 amp boosters and home built power supplies. There are many loconet plugs located around the layout to allow both tethered and radio control of trains.

GEHAMS’s N scale layout is approximately 18’ X 80’, in size, and has 17.4 scale miles of mainline track. The current layout has gone through several makeovers, to the current “freelanced” Bakersfield to Mojave, layout that it is today. Mojave, the original staging yard, has over 10 tracks to set up trains on. The northern staging yard was added, in 2005, and has 10 tracks, and this staging yard represents locations to the north of Bakersfield. The layout also has our rendition of the Tehachapi Loop, which was constructed to look very similar the real Tehachapi Loop, by using Google Earth measurements, as best that we could get in about 7 feet!

The city of Bakersfield, located at the north end of the layout, has a passenger terminal. Yeah, we know—Bakersfield did not have a passenger terminal—but, heh, its model railroading! The other large part of the N scale layout, is the Bakersfield classification Yard, complete with turn table and engine servicing facilities. Just east of Bakersfield, is Edison. Railroaders operating in Edison have their job cut out for them, with the numerous packing sheds and other agriculture related industries.

After leaving Edison, the train makes it way, up the mountains, through Bena, Caliente and Cliff, arriving at the Tehachapi Loop. After the Loop, is the town of Tehachapi, where a branch line operation begins (heh, like I said, it’s a model railroading!), that takes you into the town of Kernville, where a local can spend hours sorting cars out at the various industries located there.

If you continue on the mainline, east from Tehachapi, you will pass by the Monolith Cement Plant, and then the double track starts at Cameron, where it will take you into Mojave, where you can either use the return loop, to head back to Bakersfield, or park your train, in the Mojave staging yard. Eastward, from the Mojave staging yard, is the latest addition to the layout, where the Trona Branch is being constructed.

GEHAMS hosts quarterly public open houses, and take parts in the local Amtrak Railroad Days, with displays set up at the local Amtrak passenger station. Both layouts are projects in progress—and they will be for many more years. GEHAMS also hosts its annual Bakersfield Model Train Show, each second weekend of March, and has become a very successful club show.

If anyone is interested in obtaining more information, they can make contact by emailing [carldw@aol.com](mailto:carldw@aol.com), or by phone at 661-589-0391. GEHAMS web site is located at [www.gehams.net](http://www.gehams.net) . Like all model railroad clubs, we are always looking for new members, to help construct two of California’s largest model railroad layouts.