

Joseph Fischer

Custom builder of O Scale model railroad cars

By Rosemarie Fischer Quintero, daughter

Joseph, my father, the oldest of three children, was born August 1915 in Cedarhurst on Long Island, New York, to immigrant parents who were from Europe. His father came from Grossaspach, Germany, and his mother from Hlohovec, which was part of Austria-Hungary and now Czechoslovakia. Dad's father was a carriage builder before immigrating and had many skills that he passed on down to dad and his brother Chris.

While in his early teens dad, his brother and sister lived with relatives in Europe for about five years and returned to the United States in 1931. It appears around this time that he and his siblings were exposed to the hobby of photography. Dad was an avid nature photographer and gardener. Along with his hobbies of photography and gardening, he and his brother Chris built model trains. We have photos dad took of model trains he and Uncle Chris made, which he identifies as 1936; he would have been 21 years old. In the early 1940's dad worked in a hobby store in New York City, and his 1940 draft card lists him as a model railroad car builder.



Dad enlisted in the Navy but was soon discharged due to his stutter. He continued making models and started building his business. His brother joined the army corps of engineers, which ended his involvement in what would become my father's business. In 1946, dad formally formed his business Fischer Railroad Models and filed with the Town of Hempstead on Long Island. We see him advertising in Model Railroader using his own name in 1947. We recently scanned and catalogued many of the photos he took of models he built. They are not all O Scale; there are many OO Scale and a few HO Scale models. He also made models of freight cars, interurban cars, street cars, and appears to have done some custom painting. While dad made model trains representing many different railroads, the Pennsylvania and New York Central railroads were closest to his heart.

Dad was an avid rail fan, and there are photos and souvenirs from some of the early fan trips. He also visited his sister and her family in California several times and documented his trips through pictures.

A young Joe with one of his cameras.



An early photo from the 1930's at the Kathryn St residence in Lynbrook, New York. Note the Mantua couplers on the cars. These are HO Scale cars.



Joe and his brother Chris had their own model railroad called the Silver Lake Railroad. Here Joe has posed some of their cars in the back yard for a photo.



Joe was a member of the New York Society of Model Engineers. He took this photo of their layout under construction. Those of you that are familiar with the layout know that one of the scenic spots on the layout was the Delaware water gap. You can see the large mountain in the background, which is where that scene was.



Joe and Rosa shortly after they were married. They were visiting the Shoreline Trolley Museum in Branford, Connecticut.

Model Railroader September 1946

There are also documents in his files from the Pennsylvania Railroad that allowed him access to the large Sunny Side yard to take photos during 1949-1952. He appears to have belonged to the New York Society of Model Engineers and took photos of their layout under construction in 1939.

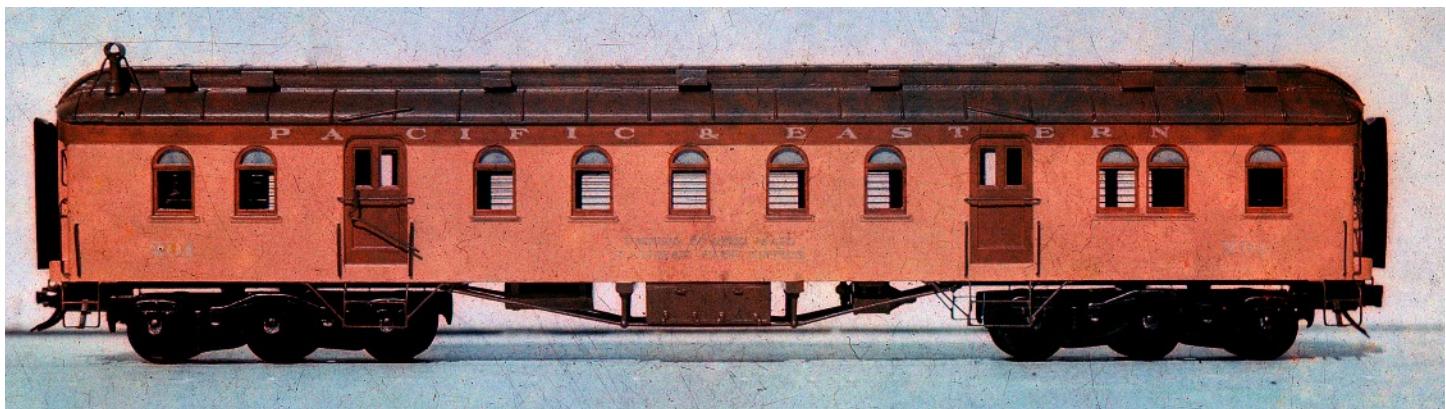
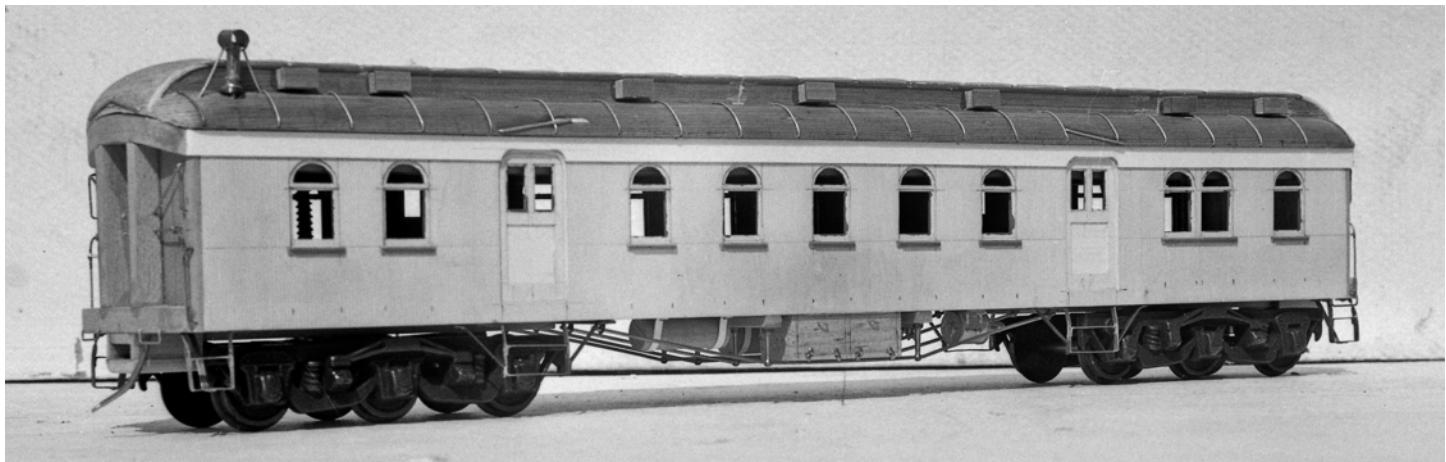
By the time he married Rosa Huckemeyer in 1956, he was already well established in his business. Over the next ten years, three daughters would be added to their family – Rosemarie, Dorothy and Susan.

O GAUGE $\frac{1}{4}$ " SCALE

Custom-built, superdetailed passenger car models. Specializing in PULLMAN equipment.

Send 10c in coin or stamps for 2 post-card size photos showing models. No dealers.

FISCHER RAILROAD MODELS
14 St. James Place, Lynbrook, L. I., N. Y.



Joe used Strathmore board and wood to make his model. The top photo shows a car ready for paint. The bottom photo shows the same car painted.



One of Joe's streamline car models. We would watch him apply the stripes with a very fine paint brush.

Dad was doing what he loved, building models right up to the end. He had a massive stroke in June 1996 and passed away in July. He was survived by his wife Rosa, who passed in 2012, and by his three daughters, three grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

The advertisement features a black and white photograph of a long, detailed O gauge custom-built Pullman passenger car. The car is dark-colored with numerous windows and a sleek, modern design. Below the photo, the text reads:

O GAUGE CUSTOM-BUILT PULLMAN MODELS

Built by a master craftsman, for wide-awake model railroaders who take great pride in operating passenger trains consisting of accurate, well-detailed, high-quality models.

You can have the red, brown, and green 14 bedroom NIGHT GLOW, showing Pennsy's old-time black and gold striping, orange window sash, for only \$38.00 postpaid; or you can pick your choice from over 40 types of cars listed in my Pullman price list (not illustrated).

All models are built from prototype plans, they have all the exterior detail which can be successfully modeled. Streamlined passenger car models have fully-working diaphragms. Tell me what you want and I will quote you a price.

14 St. James Place JOSEPH J. FISCHER Lynbrook, L. I., N. Y.

One of dad's ads from The Model Railroader magazine May 1947 issue



Mac Lowry from Cleveland was one of dad's biggest customers. Mac had a habit of giving his cars serial numbers and it is estimated he had over 700 of dad's cars.



Dad also made models of interurban cars.

As a child, one of my greatest pleasures was going to work with dad and watching him build his models - cutting the sides and window openings, creating the roof, making the interior details and soldering various parts. However, when it came time for him to spray paint the cars, no one was allowed anywhere near. Once they were ready for detailing, I was back at it, watching him paint the stripes with a very fine paint brush and apply decals, all done with the steadiest of hands. Later, when he moved his shop to the basement of our home, I would watch from the basement steps, where I had a bird's eye view. My sisters and my two children have memories along the same lines. My son still talks about sitting on the basement steps watching grandpa create his trains.

Unfortunately, there are few surviving records of customers, and it is not possible to determine everyone he built models for. According to Dan Pantera, who has seen many of dad's models, Mack Lowery from Cleveland had dad build a lot of models for him. Dan told me that Mack would identify and serialize his models. Mack had over 700 cars built by dad. Dan and Mike Hill were working on a roster and they estimate that he built around 3,000 models in his life time.

Through the years, dad remained true to his original hand-crafted process. My uncle (mom's brother) knew quite a bit about dad's craft, and recently told me he always thought of dad's models as "authentic." Dad had a knack for knowing what detail needed to be used, even the smallest would make a difference, to create an authentic model. He did not deviate or take short cuts. Neither I, nor my family have ever really thought of dad as a hobbyist; we always considered him an artist, and still do. What an amazing legacy he left.



Belmont Lake State Park, photo by Joseph Fischer, one of his favorite places to visit and photograph.