

N-Circle Railroad Update 38 – June 21, 2026

Building and Comparing Three Small Laser-Cut Wood Food Stand Kits

This N-Circle Update will compare and contrast building three similar size and at first-glance difficulty laser-cut wood kits from three different manufacturers. These kits are smaller and less complex than the structures in Updates 24, 25, 26, 30, 31 and 32, but have more parts and intricacy than the simpler kits in Updates 34 and 36.

These three kits will be used on the N-Circle Railroad layout in the park scene on the east side and all have similar footprint sizes:

- Bar Mills: Swanson's Lunch Counter - 37 mm wide x 25 mm deep
- GC Laser: Country Market - 44 mm wide x 51 mm deep
- Osborn Models: Pete's Produce Stand - 41 mm wide x 41 mm deep

I built the three kits together at the same time as I did for the Rail Yards buildings in Updates 30 and 31, to reduce the amount of time setting up glues and paints for each step. For the most part I followed the instructions for all three kits versus following my own build sequence as I have for many previous laser-cut wood kit builds. Departures are noted in the discussions below.

Building the Bar Mills Swanson's Lunch Counter Kit # 0951

Bar Mills kits are generally considered "craftsman" level complexity to build, though this kit is smaller with fewer structural details than their larger structure kits. The packaging label is shown here for reference.

[N-Circle_26-04-28_SwansonsLunch](#)



The instructions for this kit are very complete and detailed, with diagrams and pictures. Therefore, I don't need to add much here, though there are a few confusing points and options that I will highlight.

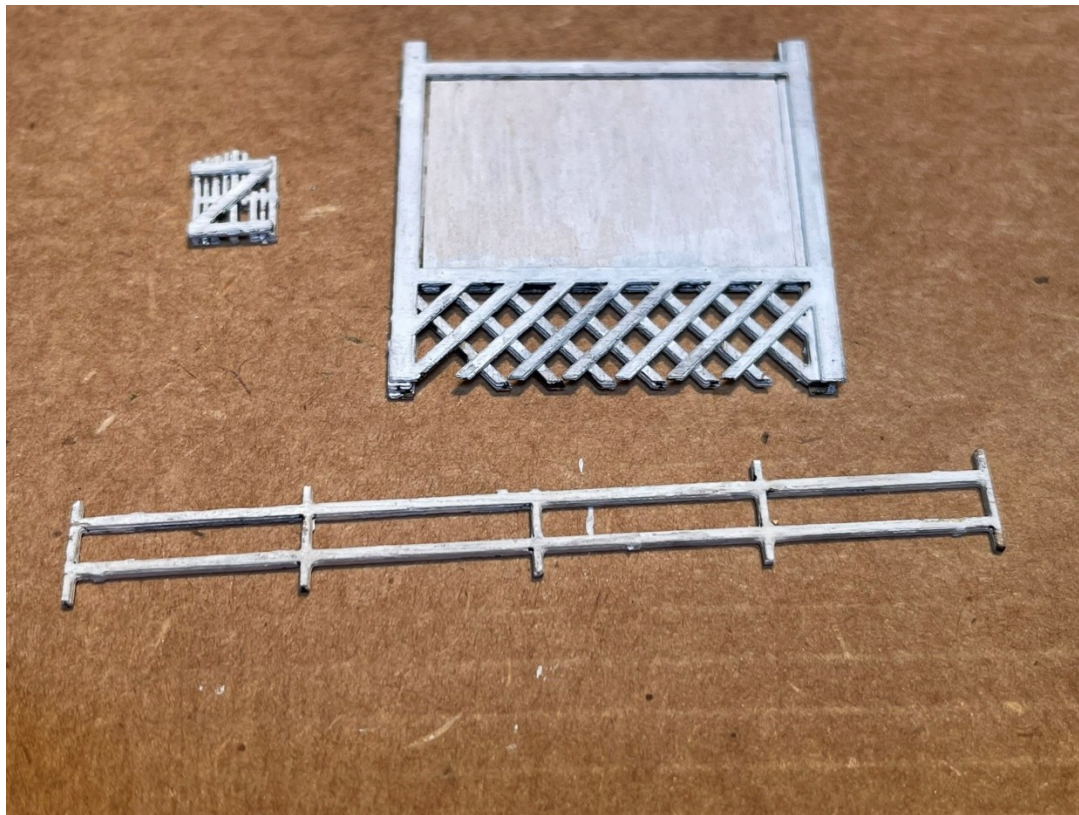
I started by finishing the fence and billboard first, rather than last as they are in the instructions. I probably will not use either immediately, so I figured this was a good way to practice with this kit before assembling the main building.

The instructions say to prime the wood with a grey primer, then apply a coat of white paint and when the white is dry, gently sand it to let some of the grey primer show through for a "weathered" look. I choose to bypass the primer and just apply a thinned layer of Polly-Scale Reefer White directly to the wood. This produced a decent look, so I did the same later on the structure's main walls.

The fence section was very easy to remove from the backing and paint. The gate was more of a challenge – despite careful handling, some of the very tiny, fragile slats broke off. The peel-and-stick Z brace holds the remaining slats more securely.

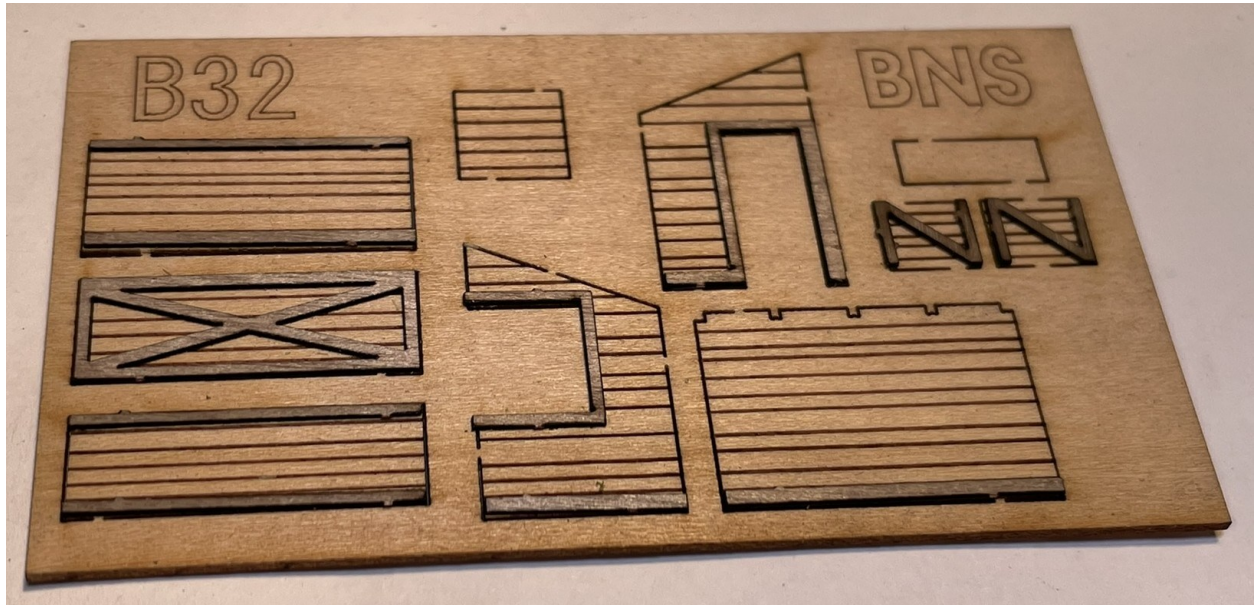
The billboard was easy to assemble with careful alignment of the peel-and-stick panel layers. Not knowing where I will use the billboard, I did not attach their sign graphic, I just painted the whole structure white and will apply my own graphic someday. Here we see these parts after painting, they will go in the detail parts box for now, for future use.

[N-Circle_26-05-31_SwansonsLunch](#)

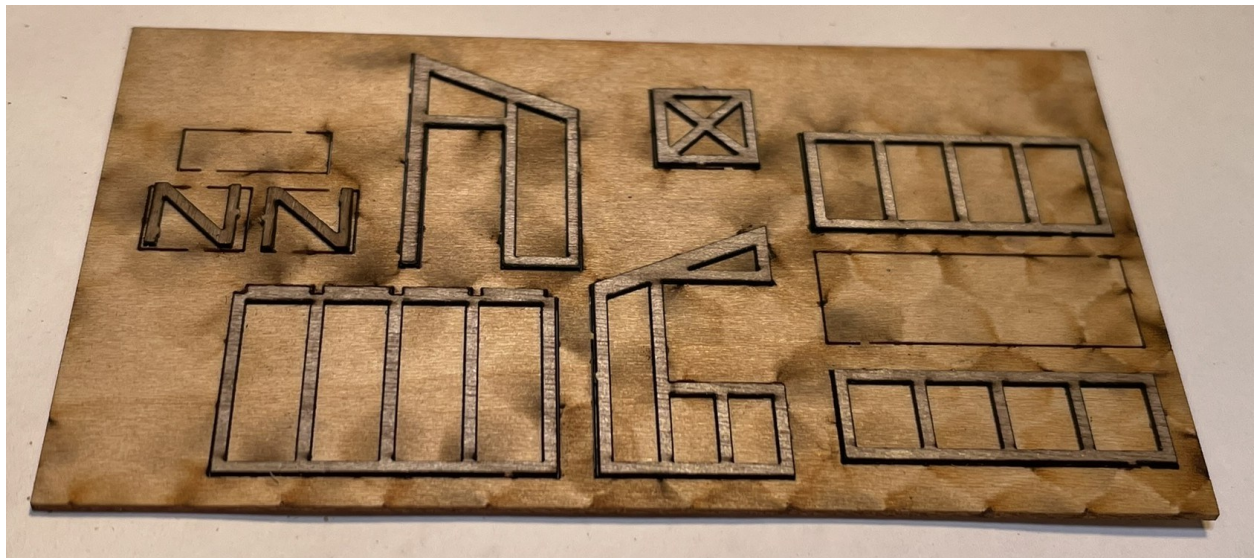


The wall panel bracing for this kit is done with peel-and-stick trim pieces which are applied to the interior and/or exterior of the wall panels. This is relatively easy to do, with careful alignment. I am not sure what the value of these pieces are on the interior of the walls, they will be only somewhat visible if one can view the front of the structure up close.

[N-Circle_26-06-01_SwansonsLunch_1_Cropped](#)

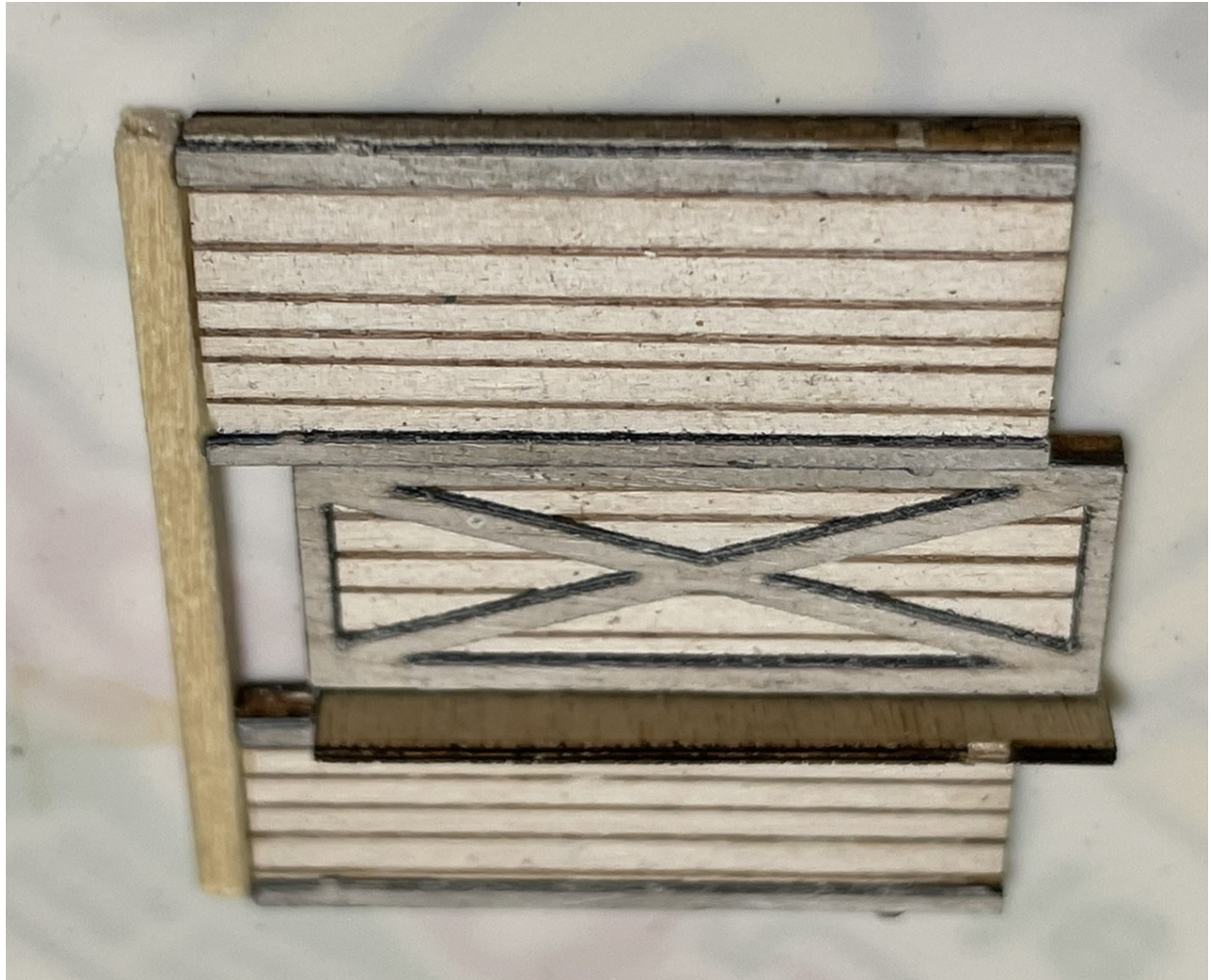


[N-Circle_26-06-01_SwansonsLunch_2_Cropped](#)



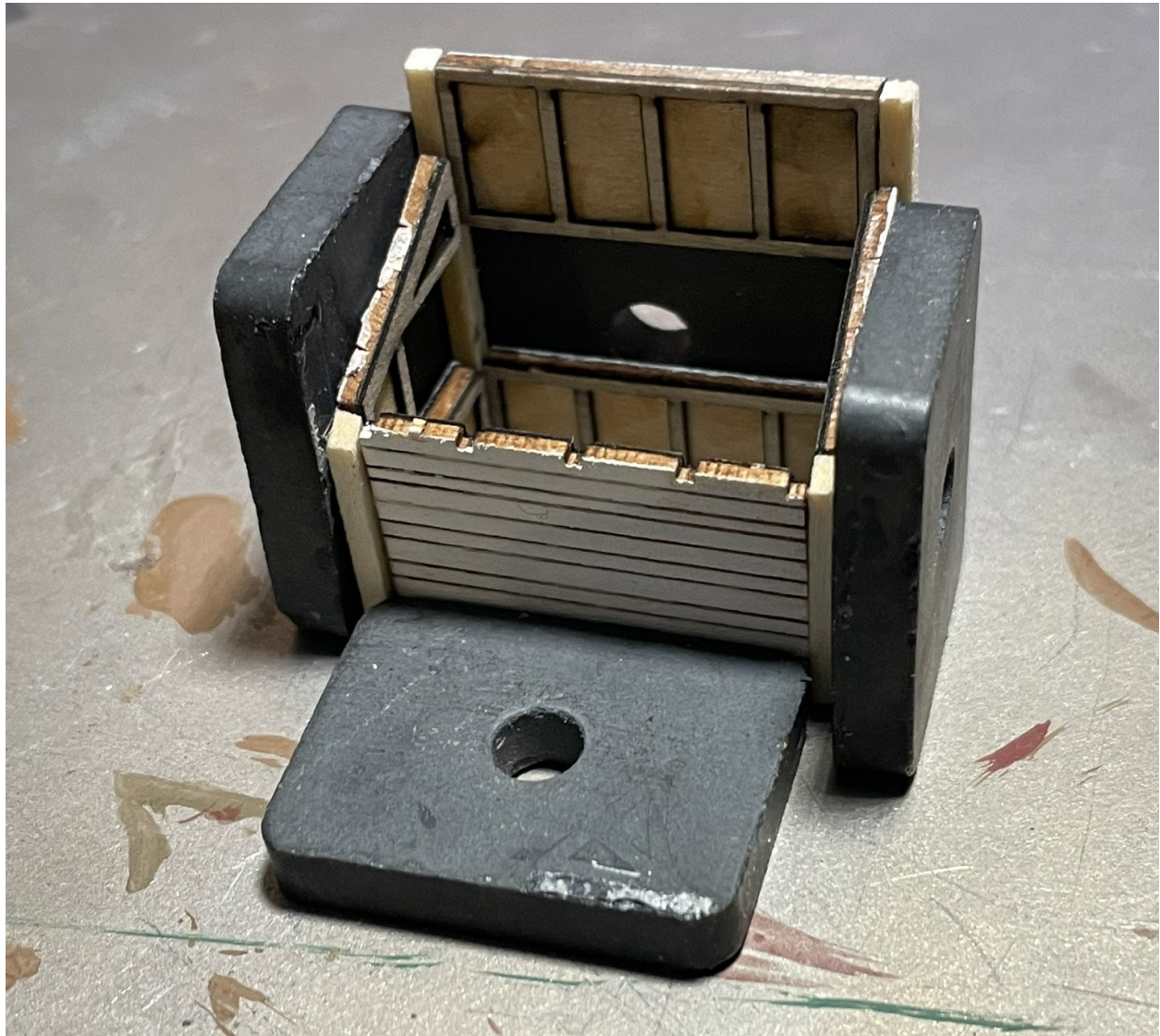
I sanded the edges of the wall sections with a fine fingernail sanding stick, that worked well. Aligning the corner posts to the edges of the front wall was easy, just follow the detailed instructions carefully. I placed the parts on a plastic cottage cheese container cover, so they would not be glued to the workbench, as shown here, and spaced the counter door and counter over some so they would not end up glued to the corner post.

[N-Circle_26-06-04_SwansonsLunch_Cropped.](#)



I later used the usual magnets on a steel sheet to hold the four walls square when gluing them together, as seen here.

[N-Circle_26-06-06_SwansonsLunch_Cropped](#)



While it is not noticeable in the photo above, the structure still did not come out square, one end wall is angled inwards a bit, so as always, check your alignment carefully! After the roof was in place, this was not noticeable from the front viewing angle.

I did not add interior corner shims to these three structures, as they are small and have wood floors and roof panels glued to them which form a solid square box on all six sides.

The side door is made from upper and lower panels, like a horse barn stall door. The kit includes a "sill" which is supposed to go in this stack but given the two door sections barely fit in the height of the opening, I could not see how that was going to work and left it out.

The kit includes a set of peel-and-stick flooring planks to lay around the base of the building. But given that these must be cut to random individual lengths and the instructions used the

phrase “time-consuming” twice in their description of the task, I decided that this was not going to add to fulfilling an objective of “model railroading is fun.” The base is already scribed with nicely spaced floorboards. So, I took the easy way out and painted them brown, with a later application of watered-down grey paint, and then some weathering chalks. This came out looking as good as any of my other structures. Plus, a minor concern, but I couldn’t see how this extra layer of flooring wouldn’t obstruct opening the door, if one were really nit-picking the details of the kit.

I added a shim under the upper edge of the front window to glue the swing-up door to, cut from a leftover length of the 1/16-inch wood for the corner trim boards. This will create a more realistic horizontal mount point for the door when it is open, as seen here. And the door will now protect the counter when it rains!

[N-Circle_26-06-11_SwansonsLunch_Cropped](#)



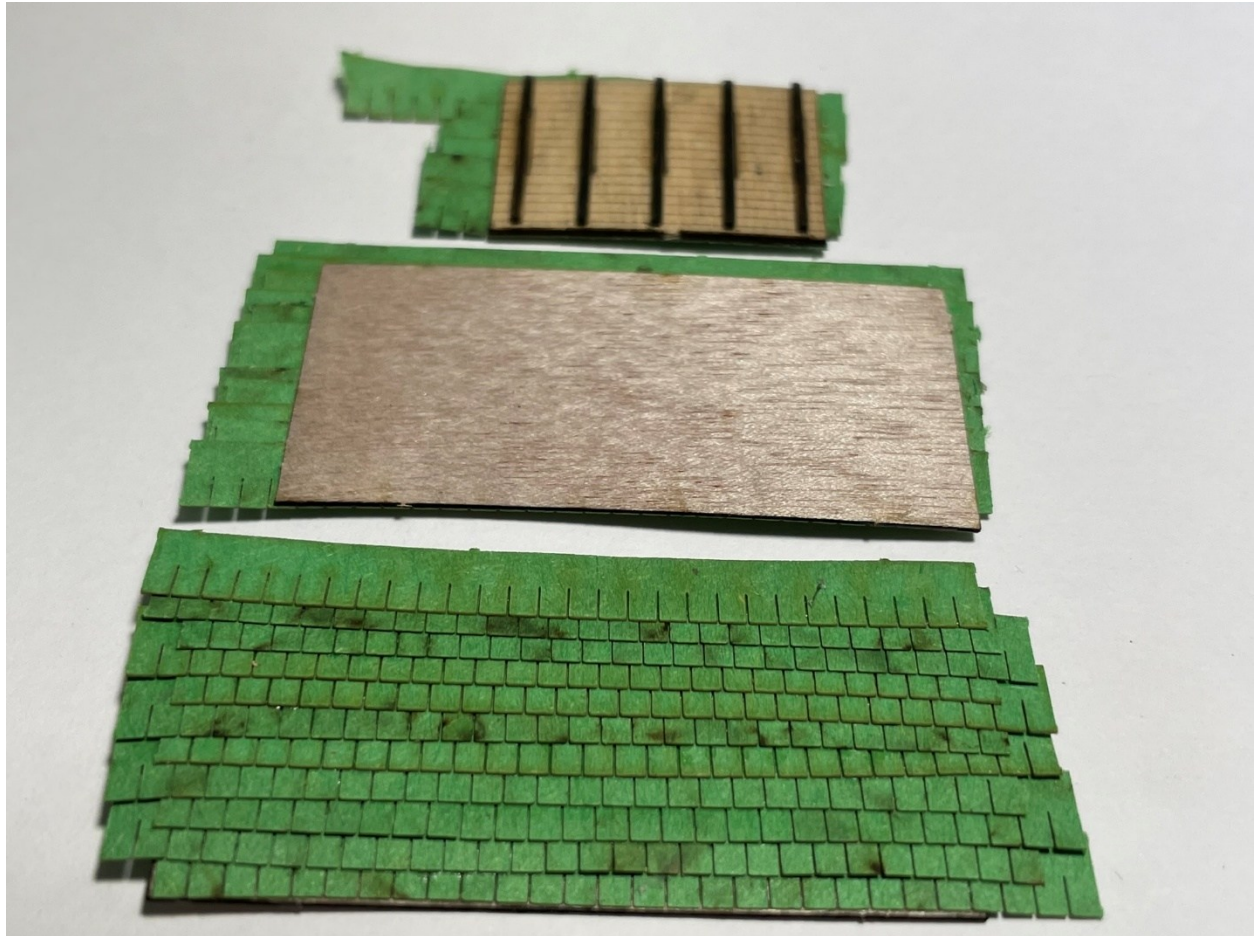
I then created two diagonal arms from scrap wood to hold the door up – this seemed more realistic than having no support like shown in the kit.

The kit comes with peel-and-stick roofing strips that are very simple...but seemed boring, so I used some of the shingle strips from the GC Laser Country Market kit below. These are more interesting, and there were more in the kit than needed to complete the Country Market roof, and the roof area for this Swanson's Lunch kit is quite small. (The advantage of doing three similar kits in parallel, you can swap parts around, which I did multiple times.)

These shingles are attached with white glue. I attached them to the roof before gluing the roof to the building. It was much easier with the roof flat on the workbench, and I could over-run the length on both edges and then just trim them to the edge of the roof later with a sharp hobby knife after the glue was dry. When drying, I pressed them under a weighted piece of glass to keep them flat. These photos are of the Country Market roof, which I did at the same time as the Swanson's.

[N-Circle_26-06-13_CountryMarket_1](#)





I painted the shingles black before attaching the roof to the structure – much easier not to have to worry about getting black paint on the structure!

The kit did not come with any sign for the building, so I made a custom sign for “Al’s Place.” The name is derived from a local fast-food business and a family name. I did not make a decal for the sign, I just printed it on plain copier paper and glued it to the scribed siding over the service window, to create a smooth surface white sign. In reality, the sign would be partially obscured by the open service door for N-scale people standing on the ground – poor marketing – so I thought of mounting it above the wall, but that would be a fragile structure, and I decided that only the most observant nitpickers would notice this issue once it is on the layout!

The kit contains many detail parts, including a wood counter block with stove and refrigerator appliances in it and multiple pewter metal parts for boxes of produce and garbage cans and other parts, some of which I used.

Note that the length of the counter and appliances is exactly the width of the interior back wall. Therefore, it is a very snug fit to glue it in place. In the process I slightly dislodged the stove top,

which is glued to the top of the unit, so it is slightly askew. But this will not be noticeable through the front window once the structure is in use. Revisiting a technique used in previous N-circle structures, I added a couple of counter workers from the Woodland Scenics “Farmers Market set” and the collection of people figures painted in Update 36 to disguise these imperfections!

Fortunately, I did a test fit of the people figures inside before gluing them in place and realized that the counter is too high in the kit – adult counter workers looked like children with their shoulders barely up to the counter. Therefore, I cut small wood shims to glue under their feet before gluing them into the building as seen here – the shims will not be visible down in the interior. But something to be aware of if you plan to add figures in this structure.

[N-Circle_26-06-15_SwansonsLunch_Cropped](#)



And as discussed in earlier N-Circle Updates, I typically add a spot of superglue to an elbow or the back to secure the figure against a nearby vertical surface. I did this for the two figures inside and the woman standing on the outside corner.

Among the pewter metal parts included with the kit were two small trays with shapes for items in them. I painted red, yellow and orange details on them for food trays to glue to the counters.

The pewter metal detail parts also included a large exhaust pipe. It is oversized for the structure's small kitchen and would only mount to the roof with a fragile surface glue joint. Bar Mills did not use it in their product photo. Therefore, it went in the details box for use on some future project.

They also included four plastic long gooseneck lights, but they are not discussed in the instructions, and it is not clear where one would use them, given the panel over the front counter opening swings up over the front of the building. Quite frankly, they appeared to include a bunch of random detail parts that did not necessarily go with this kit.

I did not attach any lights on the three kits at this point; I may later when their final placement on the layout is defined. I also did not use the food and soda signs included in this kit, as there is not much space on the building to place them. Most were intended for use on the billboard.

One can see the challenge in these final photos that even with an up-close, straight-on view, one still cannot see the interior details well. When on the layout, the impact of much of the detail work will be lost on the observer.

First, a straight-on shot of the finished kit.

[N-Circle_26-06-20_SwansonsLunch_1_Cropped](#)



Then a couple more at an angle to see the side details with the open doors.

[N-Circle_26-06-20_SwansonsLunch_2_Cropped](#)



[N-Circle_26-06-20_SwansonsLunch_3_Cropped](#)



Eventually this “Al’s Place” food stand will be placed next to the Dance Pavilion from N-Circle Update 36 in the planned park Micros Scenes.

This kit took about seven hours to complete over 22 sessions, including adding the interior details. Without the extra details it probably could be completed in about six hours by most modelers.

Building the GC Laser Country Market Kit # 0309

The packaging label for the GC Laser Country Market kit is shown here for reference.

[N-Circle_26-04-28_CountryMarket](#)



This is not a peel-and-stick kit, all the wood parts are glued together with yellow wood glue.

The instructions include many detailed and well labelled diagrams of the sprue sheets and the many steps of the assembly. The written instructions are brief and cryptic but are mostly adequate if you study the diagrams carefully.

Unlike the other two structures in this article, this kit does not include any framing on the inside of the walls; they are just single-layer flat panels.

Diverging from the instructions like with previous wood kits, I primed and painted the window and door frames before attaching them to the walls. I applied a watery Grass Green paint, producing a lazy “weathered” look, though they barely will be visible behind the counter and overhang.

The trim pieces for the windows are very thin and fragile – one shattered while removing it from the sprue, but I was able to piece it back together while glueing it to the window frame. I attached the glass to the inside with Micro-Scale Krystal Klear. The window and door units fit well in the holes in the walls; I secured them with a bead of wood glue around the edges.

Assembling the four main walls is a bit tricky. While the notches in the ends of the wall sections make alignment easy, getting the inner front wall in place in the center of the side walls takes a bit of manipulation with needle-nose pliers or tweezers. I glued the floor in place at the same time, as it seemed this would make it easier to get the walls all square. As with the other kits, I held the walls in place with magnets on the steel sheet while the glue dried.

[N-Circle_26-06-07_CountryMarket_Cropped](#)



During this assembly process I learned one of the hazards of not following the instructions and installing the windows and doors in the walls before assembling the walls. I had not noticed that the bottoms of the door outer trim extended a fraction of a millimeter over the slots in the front wall for the floor section. Therefore, a quick trim of these ends with a sharp hobby knife was required before the assembly of the front pieces could be completed! As always, think about how all parts that will follow will align to whatever you are gluing now!

Adding the triangular support braces under the counters requires care. There are two different versions – one set has a tab which goes between the horizontal beams. Even after studying the directions, I realized that I misplaced two of mine, though that is not critical. I glued the corner supports to the building to support the two ends of the three counter sections first. When those joints were dry, I then glued the counter sections to them. Once they were dry, I glued the final set of center braces in place, so that they would be snugly aligned to the upright posts and the counter undersides for maximum strength. The kit instructions provide no guidance for this assembly, other than a challenging-to-discern diagram of where the two styles of braces are to be placed.

The counter sections fit to the walls okay, but the stepped perpendicular meeting of the front and side counters did not align tightly. I will use the usual technique of placing items on this corner to disguise the gaps...!

The kit includes wall corner trim pieces, like wood kits discussed in previous N-Circle Updates. Be careful to place the narrower piece on the side wall, then the wider piece on the end wall to overlap it. Note the angled end on one end to align to the underside of the roof. And the pieces which go on the inner corner have a tiny extension on one side to extend past the floor. Note their orientation – there is no guidance in the instructions for these!

I did not use the horizontal trim boards on the two ends – they seemed superfluous on such a small structure.

The open area in the middle of the floor looked a bit forlorn, therefore, following the model of the Swanson's Lunch kit above, I cut a work counter with a refrigerator from a piece of scrap wood to place in the center, as one might find in a typical produce market.

I added counter workers from the Woodland Scenics "Farmers Market" and "Paul's Fresh Market" sets and one from the collection of people figures painted in Update 36, again strategically placed to disguise imperfections in the interior! I also used racks and baskets of produce from the Woodland Scenics "Farmers Market" set on the inside counter and later the outside counters. Here are photos of the interior detail with figures and produce on the counter before attaching the roof.

[N-Circle_26-06-15_CountryMarket_1](#)

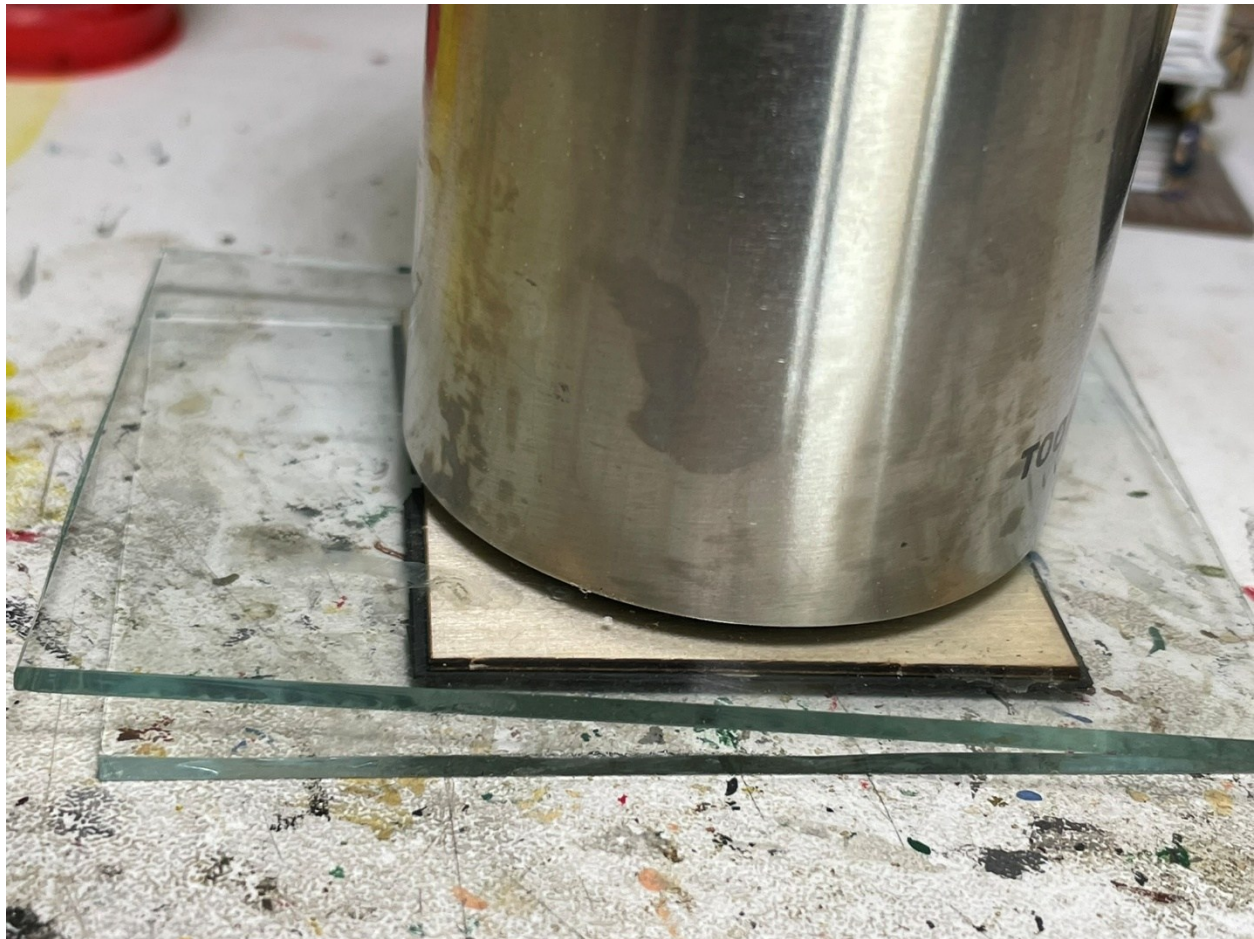




I did not add details inside the enclosed area in the rear of the building, as they will not be visible through the small windows unless one had their nose right down on the layout.

The kit includes paper shingles to glue in strips onto the roof panels. I used the same process as described above for placing them on the Swanson's roof. This is a much larger roof, so it was a much more tedious task, aligning each strip straight across with the vertical cuts for the shingles alternately offset. I always come away from this task with wood kits questioning whether the resultant roof is that much better than a well-molded plastic one... But it is way easier to disobey the kit instructions and attach, trim and paint the shingles on the roof panel before gluing the panel to the building!

Unfortunately, gluing the shingles to the thin outer roof panels caused both to warp quite severely. I could see that clamping them flat to the inner panels after they were on the roof would be a challenge. Therefore, I glued the inner and outer panels together first and pressed them between two glass plates with a heavy weight as seen here, then when dry, glued the panels to the building.



This problem probably will not occur if one follows the instructions and glues the roof panels to the structure before applying the shingles. Being solidly glued to the building frame will probably prevent the panels from warping from the glue for the shingles. So it depends on which challenge you want to deal with: fixing the warping or applying and trimming the shingles with the roof panels already in place.

Though not shown in the packaging photo, the kit comes with two signs to be placed on the roof facing the sides of the building. But as I plan to place these structures side-by-side in a row, having the signs on the side would not make much sense. Therefore, I decided to place one sign facing forward on the front peak of the roof. To allow this, I cut off the extensions on the front peak of the outer roof panels in line with the main edges. That allowed the sign to be placed in this area, glued to the end of the roof.

I did not use the peel-and-stick "Paul's Fresh Produce" sign which came with the kit, as theirs was rather faded – I think their printer was running low on red ink when they printed it...! Therefore, I made a similar custom sign and printed it on plain copier paper, again not going to the effort of making a decal, I just glued it to the sign board, then glued the board to the front end of the building. I did build the two A-frame pricing signs to use in front of the market.

I did not paint or stain the exterior walls; I left them the natural wood color like in the photo on the kit's packaging and applied some weathering chalks. The walls have laser-scribed boards to add interest.

As discussed in earlier N-Circle updates, one of the challenges of laser-cut wood kits is that the edges of the pieces are burned by the laser and thus are much darker than the faces. If you paint everything with a solid color, this is not a problem. But if you do not, as I did not here, the edges are very visibly much darker. Therefore, I went over the edges with a watered-down tan paint, applied with a sharp wood toothpick, to lighten them. The results are not a perfect blend, but they are an improvement.

First, a straight-on shot of the finished kit.

[N-Circle_26-06-20_CountryMarket_1_Cropped](#)



Then a couple more at an angle to see the side details.

[N-Circle_26-06-20_CountryMarket_2_Cropped](#)



[N-Circle_26-06-20_CountryMarket_3_Cropped](#)



As with the Swanson's Lunch kit above, one can see the challenge in these final photos that even with an up-close, straight-on view, one still cannot see the interior details well. So, when on the layout, the impact of much of the detail work will be lost on the observer, though much will be visible with this kit with its larger counter openings.

This kit also took about seven hours to complete over 26 sessions, including adding the interior details. Like the Bar Mills kit, without adding details it probably could be completed in less than six hours by most modelers.

Building the Osborn Model Kits Pete's Produce Stand Kit # 3062

The packaging label for the Osborn Models Pete's Produce Stand kit is shown here for reference.

[N-Circle_26-04-28_PetesMarket](#)

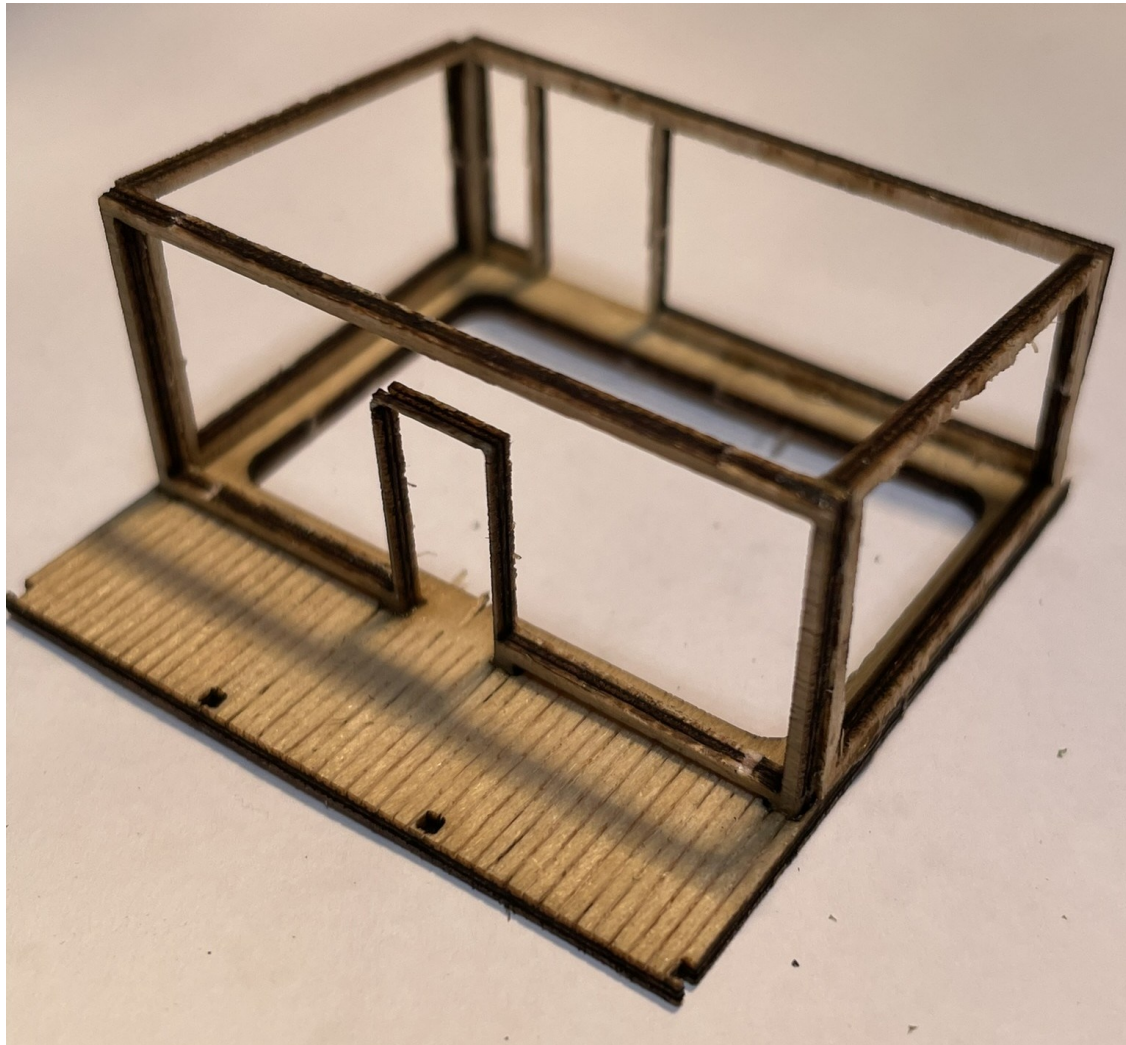


The instructions for this kit are limited in words, but the exploded and well-labeled diagrams make assembly of this reasonably simple kit easy.

This also is not a peel-and-stick kit, all wood parts are glued together with yellow wood glue.

This kit has an interesting approach to wall bracing: frames around the perimeters and opening of the walls are erected first, with tabs glued into slots in the base, as seen here. The wall panels are then glued to these frames later. Assembling the four frame sections was easy – the tabs on the inner frames fit nicely into the slots in the base.

[N-Circle_26-06-01_PetesMarket_Cropped](#)

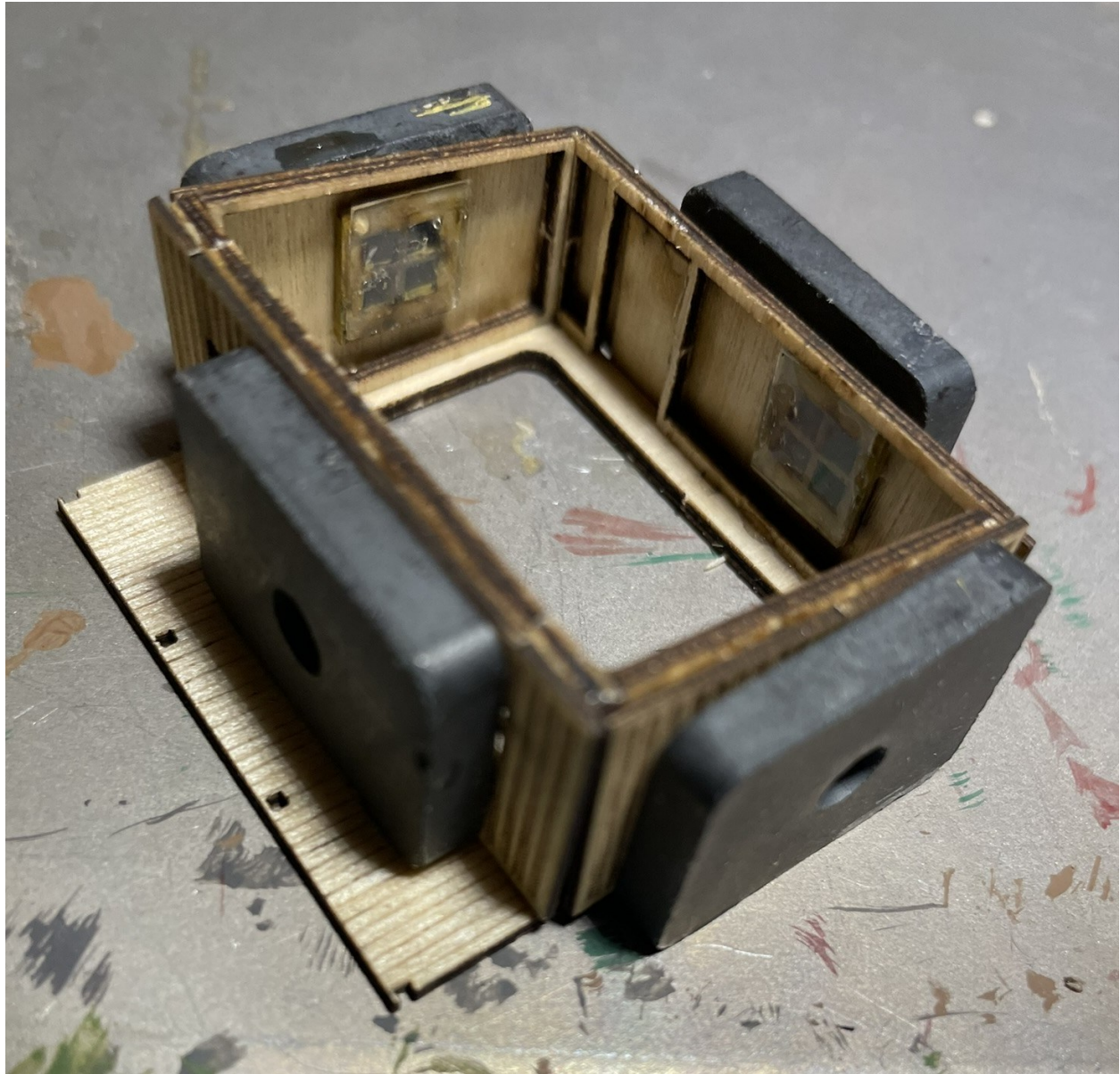


I decided to add some color by painting the window frames and doors and trim a darkish Reefer Yellow. I applied one coat without a primer beneath, to allow the poor coverage to create a “weathered” look from the wood beneath. I attached the window glaze to the back of the windows using Micro-Scale Krystal Klear, to minimize the visibility of any glue over-runs into the window openings.

The window units are glued to the inside of the walls; they do not actually fit into the openings in the walls as the instructions imply. I used white glue around the edges.

Gluing the wall panels to the wall frames was straightforward, I used the usual magnets on a steel sheet to hold them in place to dry, as seen here. Being aligned to the frames which were already aligned to the slots in the base, these came out square without effort!

[N-Circle_26-06-06_PetesMarket_Cropped](#)

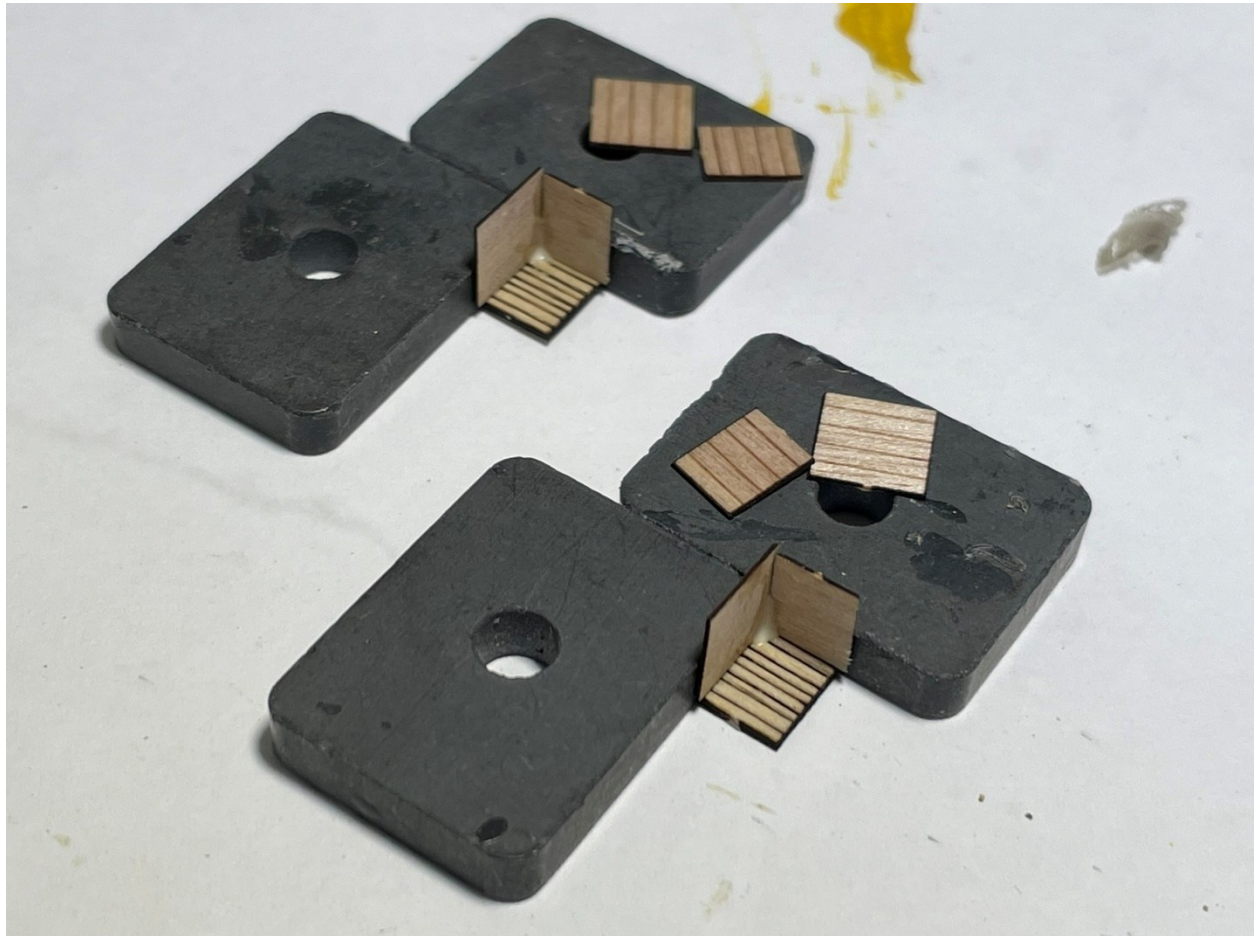


I glued the main roof in place, then waited to install the front roof and front support posts until the sign was ready to install at the same time, to ensure that the tabs on the bottom of the sign would fit in the slots between the two roof sections. This final assembly step was easy and went well.

Like the Country Market above, I did not paint or stain the exterior walls; I left them the natural wood color like in the photo on the kit's packaging and painted the dark burned edges with a tan wash, as for the Country Market kit above. I later added some weathering chalks. These walls have a laser-scribed pattern on the boards to add interest.

Glueing together the tiny produce boxes on pallets was a challenge, again I used the magnets, but this time just as weights on the workbench, the metal plate below was not needed to hold these tiny parts!

[N-Circle_26-06-02_PetesMarket](#)



I later added clumps of green ground foam with spots of colored paint to look like produce in the boxes.

As with the Country Market kit, I did not add details inside the enclosed area of the building, as they will not be visible through the small windows. But I did add a produce guy (Is that Pete?!) from a Woodland Scenics "Paul's Fresh Market" set on the front porch and painted the produce racks with colorful red, yellow and orange fruits and vegetables. The produce boxes above do not fit on the porch, so they will be placed nearby when the structure is used in its final location.

I used the "Pete's Market" sign panel provided in the kit, with the lettering etched into the wood board. Initially, I painted the board white and went over the letters with black paint. The etched lettering is a bit sloppy; at first, I thought it looked "rustic," then decided that indeed it just looked sloppy and printed a sign on white copier paper to glue over it. This looks cleaner and more professional.

[N-Circle_26-06-20_PetesMarket_1_Cropped](#)





This simpler kit only took about five hours to complete over 19 sessions; without the details the basic assembly could probably be completed in about four hours by most modelers.

Eventually these the two produce stands will be placed together in a new Micro-Scene for the park area. An up-close temporary setting is shown here.

[N-Circle_26-06-20_ProduceMarkets_3_Cropped](#)



The three finished structures are generic enough to be used in 1950s and 1980s, Louisiana and Vermont operating sessions, so they will be permanent additions to the N-Circle layout! But for now, they are placed on the existing scenery panels as seen in the following two photos.

First, we see that the open storage shed from Update 36 has been moved to the other side of the parking lot, next to the min-golf course, to allow Al's Place to be located close to the dance pavilion. Only the peak of the cornice on Al's Place is visible above the pavilion roof in this first photo from the north.

More visible are the two food stands placed on a temporary scenery panel in the southeast corner on the other side of Park Street. The gravel driveway allows access for trucks delivering more produce!

[N-Circle_26-06-21_ParkOverview_2_Cropped](#)



This view from the south provides a closer view of the two produce stands from the rear and Al's Place can be seen to the right of the dance pavilion.

[N-Circle_26-06-21_ParkOverview_3_Cropped](#)



The curled PowerPoint panels obviously detract from these scenes, but they eventually will be replaced with more permanent Micro Scene panels.

Comparing the Three Kits

The Osborn Models Pete's Market kit was the easiest of the three to build, even though it is the physically largest. The wall frames fit nicely into the base, making adding the wall panels later easy. The windows and doors fit into the walls well, and the pre-patterned roof just required painting.

The Bar Mills Swanson's Lunch was a bit more challenging, with the fussy peel-and-stick inner wall framing and window and door pieces to deal with. Modeling it with the service window panels open presents some gluing challenges.

The GC Laser Country Market was by far the most challenging kit to assemble, with multiple wall sections to align and then many tiny detail parts for the counter supports and trim pieces.

I did not find the interior wall bracing of the Bar Mills and Osborn Models kits to have any advantage over the GC Laser approach other than aesthetics where visible. As always, I prefer just attaching trim pieces with glue rather than peel-and-stick, but that may be a matter of personal choice. And the GC Laser trim pieces were thinner and more fragile to work with. The three took similar amounts of time to complete: five to seven hours each.

All three kits are still available to purchase; there have been recent listings on eBay. The Bar Mills and Osborn Models retail websites still list these kits as in production, and I found the GC Laser kit listed on the TRAINZ website.

In conclusion, I would recommend the Osborn Models or Bar Mills kits as a good "starter kit" for a modeler wanting to try building N-scale laser-cut wood kits for the first time. I would only recommend starting with the GC Laser kit if you already have experience building complex detailed N-scale kits in other mediums. I then would recommend making sure that you enjoy working with one of these kits with its fragile, intricate parts before buying a stack of more complex laser-cut wood kits!

And if you have been following the chronology of N-Circle Update reports, you can see that of course I did this the other way around, starting with more complex kits in earlier Updates, so don't feel bad about not taking my "advice" ...!