

A Brief Overview of Paper Modelling in the United States – with a focus on Paper Models International (PMI) / Lou Dausse

By Lou Dausse / Matt Vance

Feb 2016

Paper models in the United States (U.S.) have been around for as long as they have been in Europe; they just were not marketed as well. A handful of models were printed in newspapers in the late 19th Century, and a few publishers produced quite decent buildings and some good airplanes. But, they went mostly unnoticed in the bookshops where they were placed. In the first half of the 20th Century, paper models were out-competed by the traditional stick and tissue airplane models and thick cardboard models of the era. There

were very few, if any, scale paper models being printed in the U.S. as we know them today, with the sole exception of the Jack Armstrong (Wheaties cereal box) models available during WWII. Metal had gone to war and plastic was not developed enough to be used extensively in toys and models. Cardboard soldiers, vehicles and planes, even a cardstock Lionel train in 1943 comprised what was available; all of these were intended, not so much as models but, as toys.



Figure 1. WWII Jack Armstrong reprint exhibiting the classic hybrid 3-D Wallis Rigby paper model design philosophy of combining geometric built-up shapes with tab and slot construction.

Then came a surprise that made a big hit with American boys. Wallis Rigby, from England, designed, among other paper toys, a series of WWII fighter planes, which not only looked like the real thing, but, with the addition of a penny in the nose, would fly and glide well. By today's standards these models are more representative (crude) than scale; however, at the time they were immensely timely, inexpensive and well-liked. The models were marketed by General Mills on the back of Wheaties boxes. Wheaties were, and still are, a popular breakfast cereal. The daily visibility on a morning breakfast cereal box was the key to sales. Every boy in North America sent in 25 cents and two Wheaties box tops for two pennyweight planes. There were 14 available models representing U.S., British, Japanese, Russian and German WWII fighters; everyone was getting them.

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With the return availability of metal after the war, and especially the widespread introduction of plastics into the hobby industry, models made of paper or cardboard largely disappeared in the U.S. Paper models degenerated into advertising novelties such as restaurant menus that had punch out toys to occupy children waiting for their hamburgers.

In the late 1950s one of those Wheaties kids, Louis (Lou) Dausse, then a student in Germany, discovered paper models of German castles that were fun to build and amazingly realistic. German publishers offered dozens of paper models of all sorts of subjects. Very interesting indeed, but at that time Lou was busy being a student. Ten years later, in the early 1960s, Lou was now a hobby salesman peddling the usual hobby items in the retail trade for wholesalers to supply hobby shops in California and Oregon. It suddenly occurred to Lou that there was a kind of modeling available in Europe that was virtually unknown in the U.S. Lou was sure that the American modeling public would be intrigued by paper models. Able to speak German, Lou went back to Germany and talked to the leading publishers of models. They agreed to supply him; so for a few years he carried German paper models around with him and dropped them off with his regular customers, always with a built-up model. Lou quickly observed that the built-up paper models that he provided were the key to, and directly responsible for, sales. By putting on demonstrations and exhibitions at shops and shopping centers, the word was spread locally. The potential began to look very interesting.

To proceed further and to gather ideas and support, in 1972, Lou went to see the only other person in the U.S. selling paper models, a retired Northrop aeronautics engineer, John Hathaway of John Hathaway Imported Hobbies, San Pedro, California. John was the real pioneer in the U.S. paper model market. His established business had been selling German (Wilhelmshaven and J.F. Schreiber) paper models by mail-order since the early 1960s. Lou was awed by John's knowledge and ideas, and didn't want to interfere in John's efforts so Lou kept his activities local, in the Oregon region. In the early 1980s, John became very ill and couldn't continue his paper model mail-order



Figure 2. A popular east coast U.S. restaurant chain, Steak-n-Shake, still distributes novelty paper cars to its younger customers. Shown are a pair of black and white, die-cut 1958 Corvettes before assembly; each comes complete with stickers (shown in the upper left of the photograph) so the young customers can customize their cars while they wait for their steakhamburgers (!).

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houses, who placed them in book stores where they were largely ignored. The idea of selling paper models to the hobby trade was evidently not seriously considered and / or was under-valued. Hobby shops were surprised when approached by PMI with the suggestion to sell paper models and quite cooperative. Searching out small publishers and following leads in Europe, PMI's paper model offerings steadily increased. Lou found that the best way to advertise a new product to hobbyist's attention was traveling to hobby and craft shows all over the U.S. with big exhibits, heavy on built-ups, and giving away hundreds of PMI catalogs. As his business grew, finding new models became easier because the people who designed their own models began to seek out PMI.



Figure 5. A typical PMI display used at hobby and toy shows around the U.S.A in the 1960s and 1970s. It measures 10 feet x 10 feet. As the company expanded and added more items the display expanded as well. In the 1980s and 1990s the display became 10 feet x 20 feet.

A significant development for PMI in the early 1990s was discovering the large and diverse supply of models produced in Poland. At that time, these were virtually the only type of models available to the Polish public. The designs were good but the paper and the printing quality were inferior to what is enjoyed today. And, disappointingly up to that time, the Polish authorities discouraged the printing of past and current western aircraft or tanks. PMI took some of the Polish models on consignment and waited to see how well they would be received in the U.S. market. Because they were new and different, sales were adequate, but not as impressive as had been anticipated. Then in 1989 the Polish

government changed dramatically as did the quality of Polish paper models. In a short time, the paper quality was up to western standards, the printing quality was first class, detail and parts count increased significantly and the companies began to publish the very popular WWII planes. These newer Polish models sold very successfully for PMI.

The Polish publishers were turning out new models at a terrific pace but often neglected to reprint them when needed. Many of the new, popular, models disappeared after a short time. They were eventually reprinted but PMI could not determine when. This situation presented PMI a classic business challenge – the balancing of demand with stock. Since PMI had an excellent laser printer and paper models are very easy to copy, PMI came up with a workable solution; PMI would locally print high-quality color copies of the models that were out of stock in Poland. When a model went back into printing in Poland, PMI would stop printing it in the U.S. and order the model in the traditional manner. The beauty of this business approach was that the Polish

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companies did not have to do anything except wait for a check from PMI every time a previously agreed-to number of their models had been sold. This was, of course, all done on trust and PMI had that built that trust with the Polish publishers.

Another significant investment PMI made to help minimize the sporadic Polish model availability was letting a contract with a Polish paper model draughtsman, Andrzej Krasnicki, for a series of six American WWII fighter planes in 1/32 scale. PMI received the original six designs, did the color work and layouts and had the models professionally offset printed in Beaverton, Oregon. In the late 1990's, PMI was quite proud of their new self-published ("house line") of paper models' quality, and with reason - the customer response was so positive that the "PMI house line" was carried in the short-lived PastTimes © hobby catalog for a couple of holiday seasons. Four additional WWII planes were added to the line, followed by a series of five 1930s U.S. light, civil, single engine aircraft. The final four WWII PMI models (PMI 107: F-4-F3 Wildcat, PMI: 108 SBD-3 Dauntless, PMI 109: P-39M Aircobra, and PMI 110: P-47D 'bubble canopy' Thunderbolt) were computer-drafted; eventually the entire line was reprinted with computer enhancement. The "PMI house line" models remained popular offerings for the remainder of PMI's company life.



Figure 6. The PMI WWII "house line" were self-published, 1/32 scale paper models. A total of 10 different aircraft were available. Shown are 8 of the 10, only PMI 102: P-40C Flying Tiger, and PMI 104: Grumman F-6-F3 Hellcat are absent. The last four releases were computer-enhanced at initial offering. The first six releases were also reprinted with computer enhancement from the hand-drawn originals. Quality for the line is comparable with J.F. Schreiber 1/50 aircraft.

The final computer-enhanced versions of the PMI house line are comparable in quality to the JF Schreiber 1/50 scale models. Fit and coloring are vibrant and accurate for each aircraft. The original six, hand-drawn models, while accurate in color, presented some challenges to builders as occasionally pieces did not fit properly. This was most noticeable in the engine cowlings. Even to an inexperienced modeler, this situation was easy to remedy by simply fashioning a small splice where necessary. All known inconsistencies were addressed with the computer enhancements.

Instructions for each 1/32nd WWII "PMI house line" model were written by Lou Dausse and offered only in English. The instructions for the 1/24th "PMI house line" models were written by their designer, Robert Kaelin, also offered only in English.

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Figure 7. PMI-102 Curtiss P-40C Flying Tiger, Used in the early days of WWII, the “Flying Tigers” were American pilots who volunteered to serve in the Chinese Air Force in 1941-1942. This particular model had its spinner repainted bright red and was constructed with the landing gear retracted, 1/32 Scale, 13.5” wingspan, four 8.5” x 11” sheets (design 1989: Andrzej Krasnicki, constructed 1994: Matt Vance)



Figure 8. PMI-109 P-39 Airacobra, Second-tier fighter plane, but dependable in service, 1/32 Scale, 12” wingspan, four 8.5” x 11” sheets (design 1995: Andrzej Krasnicki, constructed 1995: Louis Dausse)



Figure 9. PMI-110 Republic P47-D Bubble Top, Improved version of the P-47D with 360° pilot visibility, the bubble top was inspired by the British Typhoon fighter; this is an example of the 2nd generation PMI models that enjoyed computer enhancement, 1/32 Scale, 15” wingspan, four 8.5” x 11” sheets (design 1998: Andrzej Krasnicki, constructed 1998: Louis Dausse)



Figure 10. PMI-108 Douglas SBD Dauntless, Early WWII U.S. Navy Pacific theater carrier-born dive bomber, similar role to the German Stuka but instead of land-based targets, the Dauntless was targeted against naval vessels with a single weapon released by a mechanical sling, 1/32 Scale, 16” wingspan, four 8.5” x 11” sheets (design 1994: Andrzej Krasnicki, constructed 1995: Harry Frye)

Lou and his wife Barbara translated a number of Geli, Möwe-Verlag Wilhelmshaven and a few other publishers’ German instructions into English, affixed a PMI logo to those translated instructions, duplicated them with their home office printer and included these with each sale of a respective model.

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Figure 11. PMI-201 Taylorcraft Model B, A classic U.S. civil light plane. This model was repainted from the original yellow and blue sheets on which it was printed, 1/24 Scale, 18" wingspan, four 8.5" x 11" sheets (design 1990: Robert Kaelin, constructed 1996: Matt Vance)

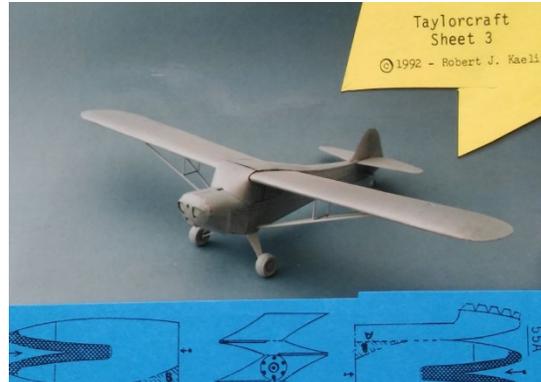


Figure 12. PMI-201 Taylorcraft Model B, Here is the undercoated model after assembly accompanied by a sampling of instruction parts from the original yellow and blue sheets. At this point in the construction, all windows are masked with dummy paper parts which were then removed after the final red and black painting was completed, 1/24 Scale, 18" wingspan, four 8.5" x 11" sheets (design 1990: Robert Kaelin, constructed 1996: Matt Vance)



Figure 13. PMI-201 Taylorcraft Model B, Another view of the re-painted model, of potential interest, the designer (Robert Kaelin) recommended that the cabane struts (those that brace the wing roots with the fuselage and are visible as a black inverted "V" immediately behind the clear windscreen) should be fashioned from dry spaghetti noodles. This worked surprisingly well, the noodles are easy to sand, paint and glue, 1/24 Scale, 18" wingspan, four 8.5" x 11" sheets (design 1990: Robert Kaelin, constructed 1996: Matt Vance)



Figure 14. PMI-104 Grumman F-6F Hellcat, Reputed to be the finest U.S. Navy WWII carrier-based aircraft, 1/32 Scale, 15" wingspan, four 8.5" x 11" sheets (design 1989: Andrzej Krasnicki, constructed 1990: Matt Vance)

PMI was running smoothly with business growing at a comfortable pace each year. It began to look like paper models in the U.S. could become a big business. So much so that in the early 2000s it seemed PMI would grow beyond the capabilities of the three people running and managing the company. It became very likely that a warehouse and an increase in the number of employees would be required shortly. The owners

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(Lou and Barbara Dausse), now being 15 years over retirement age, began looking for a younger person to take over the company who could build further on the business foundation they had so methodically and patiently built.

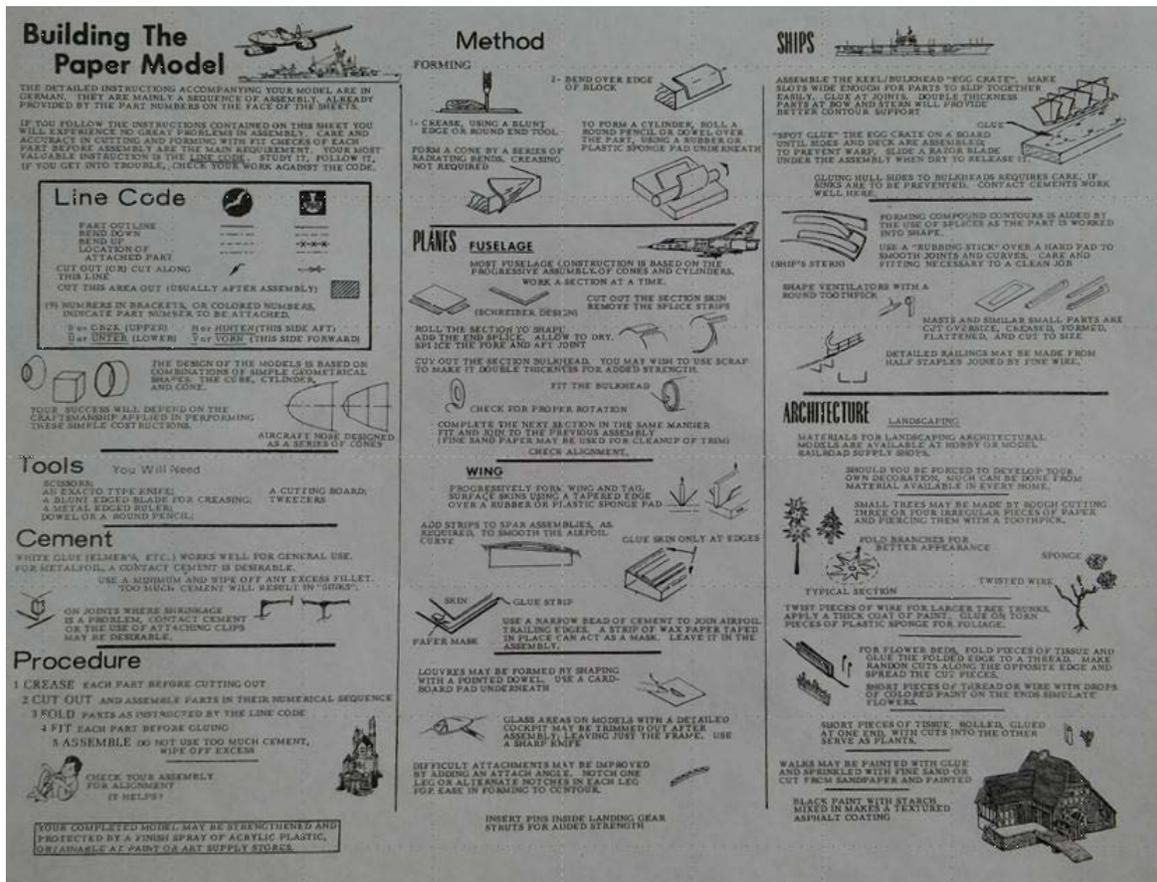


Figure 15. One copy of John Hathaway's "Methods sheet" was originally supplied by John Hathaway Imported Hobbies with each German paper model sale and subsequently updated versions were also supplied by PMI to their customers. Envisioned as a universal set of instructions to avoid the need to translate from German, John borrowed both the line codes and most of the generalized drawings from Wilhelmshaven and J.F. Schreiber. Both company's codes and logos are visible in the Line Code box; this is an early version of John's "Methods sheet", circa ~ 1965, later versions included extra diagrams/explanatory text and a section on architecture, 8.5" x 11". The layout and general orientation of PMI's version of a "Methods sheet", which is shown here, was essentially the same as John Hathaway's last version but with refined typeset, more graphics and significantly more explanatory text, 8.5" x 11" (design: Lou Dausse)

There was a fellow from California who was very enthusiastic about taking over PMI. He was an experienced paper modeler and seemed very capable of handling the growing business. A proper deal was struck in 2009 and Paper Models International

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was sold with all assets, inventory and customer databases intact. Very unfortunately; however, since the sale, nothing has been heard from the new company.

The combined influence that John Hathaway and Lou Dausse have had on the U.S. paper model market can only accurately be described as profound. This pair of businessmen established a hobby industry in the U.S. where there really was none. U.S. paper modelers are indebted to John's and Lou's tenacity and enthusiastic willingness to endorse a different hobby medium. The next installment of this history article will introduce some of the higher profile paper model publishers (Monte Models, Peter Zorn, Alan Rose, Matt Bergstrom) in the United States and discuss their flagship paper model products. We will also discuss the positive influence of the British Micromodel line on U.S. modelers.

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