Photography for Model Railroaders

Ted Culotta Prototype Rails August 10-12, 2019

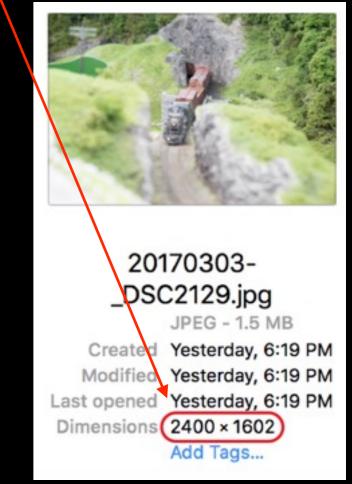
This file will be posted to prototopics.blogspot.com

What equipment to use? What do I use?

- The best camera is the one in your hand. Mine:
 - iPhone
 - Sony a7r DSLR (mirrorless electronic viewfinder)
- Macro lens or zoom with macro capabilities
- Tripod if you plan to use photo stacking do not skimp; you'll end up buying two tripods if you do
- Head ball head with Arca-style quick release is highly recommended
- Cable release
- Software
 - Adobe Lightroom Classic
 - Adobe Photoshop (not a necessity, but really nice for certain features)
 - Helicon Focus for "stacking" images
- Lights type not as important, but I use "cool" bulbs
- Know how to use your gear: Luck is when opportunity meets preparation

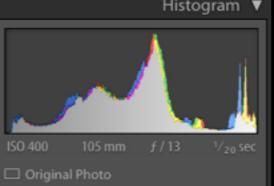
Working with images

- Image size
 - Unlearn notions of inches, unless you're going to get into book design, layout, and printing
 - Think in pixels
 - Most of the images I post to my blog are 2000 pixels wide for horizontal aspect images (in File Finder or Explorer you can see this using command-i)
- Color space
 - For images to be shared online or for digital presentations, use RGB or preferably sRGB
 - For print use CMYK



Taking photos

- I prefer indoor lighting with full, even coverage, using "cool" bulbs
- If outdoors, I try to use shade rather than direct sunlight. Sunlight creates harsh shadows and can render shadow detail fully black while washing out highlighted areas. It also desaturates color, taking away richness and saturation.
- If you do wish to use direct sunlight, it is advisable to make several exposures that expose for both the shadows and highlights and then using an HDR (high dynamic range) software tool to blend them.
- Exposure: If you have a DSLR, you can control exposure. I use the exposure compensation tool (usually a dial with the +1, +2, etc., in 1/3 increments) and overexpose by 1 to 2 stops. Use your histogram!



Using your smartphone to photograph models

- Smartphones can produce almost publish or print-ready images. They are excellent for "flat" subjects = minimal to zero depth of field, e.g. a broadside photo of a box car shot "straight on". The more oblique the angle of the model, the more they suffer.
- Because smartphones are equipped with generally wide angle lenses, depth of field is adequate to strong.
- Depth of field can be manipulated slightly by selecting the focus point (tap screen for focus point - yellow box at right). In general, focusing on a point 1/3 into your desired depth of field will produce acceptable results.
- Images can become "noisy" easily. The sensor in the phone is small and can render shadow detail poorly. Know this in advance!



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Why Lightroom?

Lightroom offers several key functions to serve the needs of those managing large numbers of images.

- A logical file management structure to quickly import and catalog files for ease of use in future
- The ability to easily find images based upon keyword searches or other criteria such as rating and flagging
- Robust, "non-destructive" develop tools that are more than adequate for most users, even professionals, including soft-proofing to emulate prints
- Industry-leading print driver that manages both printer and paper to produce optimal prints

Why Photoshop?

Photoshop was developed (over 25 years ago) for and evolved to serve the needs of graphic and/or print artists seeking a tool to allow manipulation of photos. It has industry-leading tools to achieve this aim. It was *not* created to serve the needs of photographers or other professionals seeking a tool to manage large quantities of photos. Photoshop does not incorporate file management so users must fall back on standard folder/file name "management"

Excellent for sophisticated clean-up work, e.g. cloning, healing, brushing, as well as using layers and masks

What is Focus Stacking?

While it is relatively easy to maintain focus across the entire foreground through background of a panoramic landscape, it is extremely difficult when photographing subjects at close distances. Depth of field decreases in direct relation to how close the lens (and focal plane) is to the subject.

Software as well as the maturation of digital photography (although stacking can be successfully performed by digitizing traditional photos created using the same techniques) has allowed multiple images that focus on different planes or layers across the entire subject to be stitched together to create depth of field across an entire subject. It's easier to understand through photos....







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The image after rendering through Helicon Focus

At right is the final image after rendering through Helicon Focus then "developing" in Lightroom.

One note is that rendering a large number of fullframe DSLR images (21 in this instance) can require computer processing horsepower

This is the cover image from *Prototype Railroad Modeling, Volume Four*, from Jim Dufour's exquisitely detailed Boston & Maine Cheshire Branch layout.

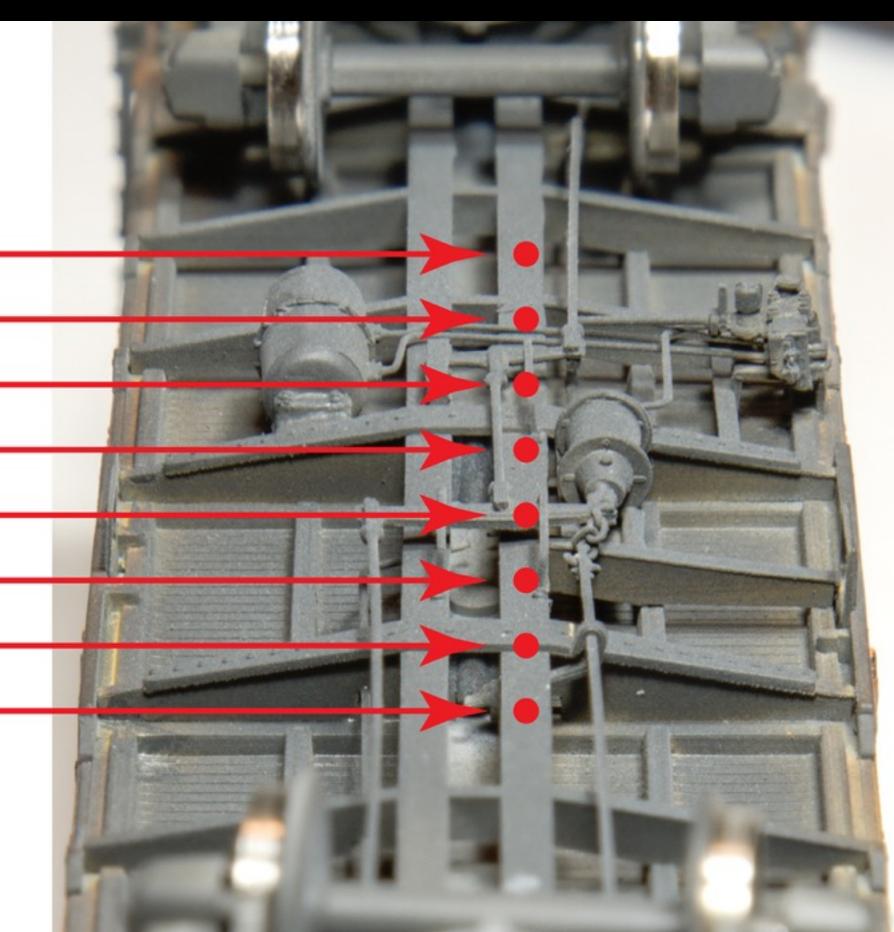


How to capture the images for Focus Stacking

- Tripod and electronic shutter release ("cable release")
- Use magnification for focusing and "live view" (not looking through the viewfinder, but using the display). My Sony a7r magnifies up to 14X so I can focus on a pinpointed area.
- Start in front of the first area you want to be in focus then work point to point "through" the subject or scene, recording images until you are past the farthest area that needs to be in focus.
- Use aperture priority or fully manual mode, *including* manual focus. I shoot at f13, which will provide sufficient overlap of in focus areas across images
- Record all images in one session. If there is some screwup (you bang the tripod, accidentally zoom instead of focus, etc., you must start recording the images again. Helicon looks for continuity in rendering

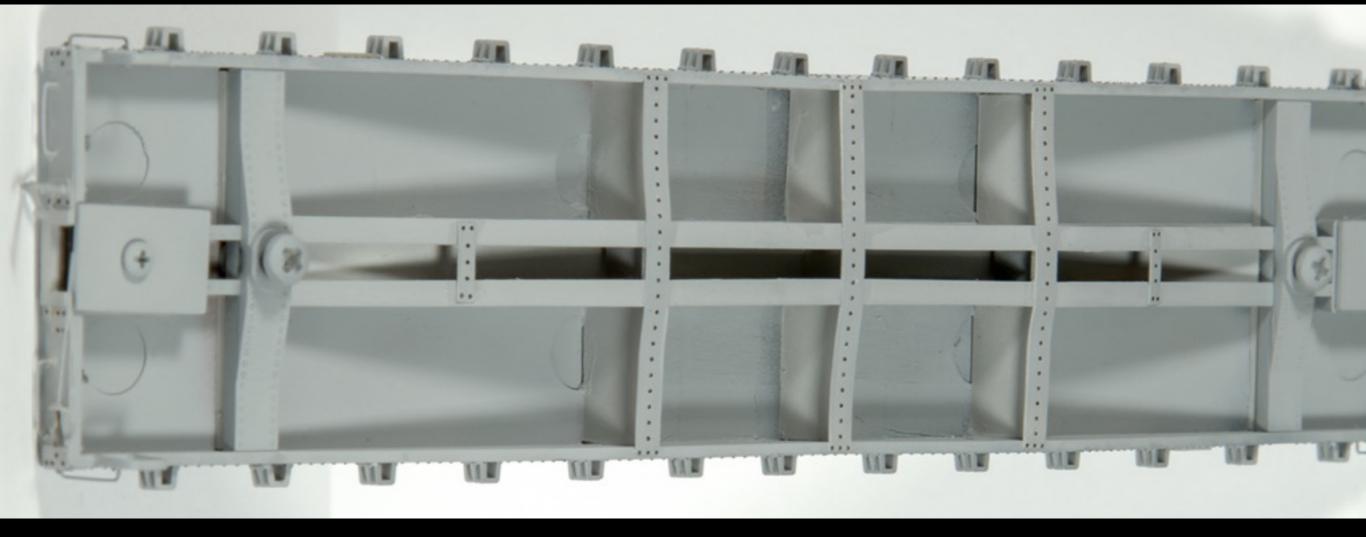
Capturing several images to use for rendering final image

Focus point for photo 8 – Focus point for photo 7 – Focus point for photo 6 – Focus point for photo 5 – Focus point for photo 4 – Focus point for photo 3 – Focus point for photo 2 – Focus point for photo 1 –



Examples of images rendered using focus stacking

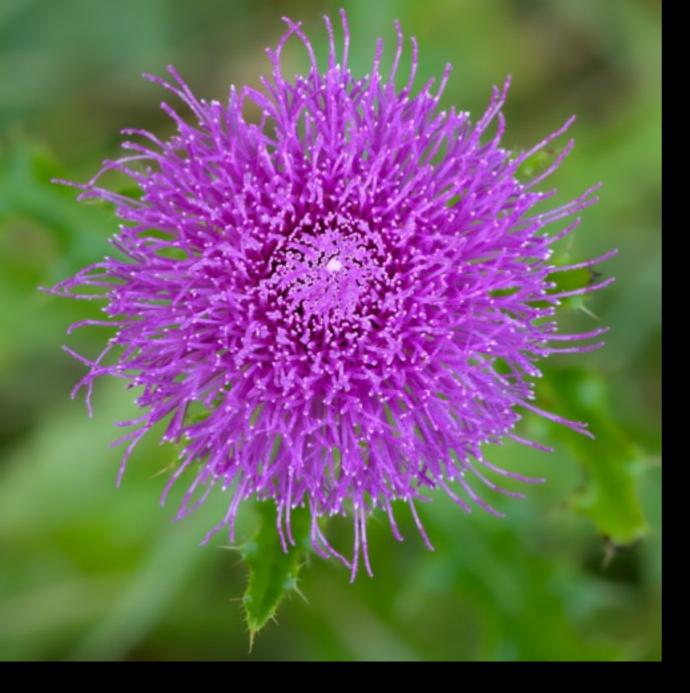






It's not just for models...







More Lightroom

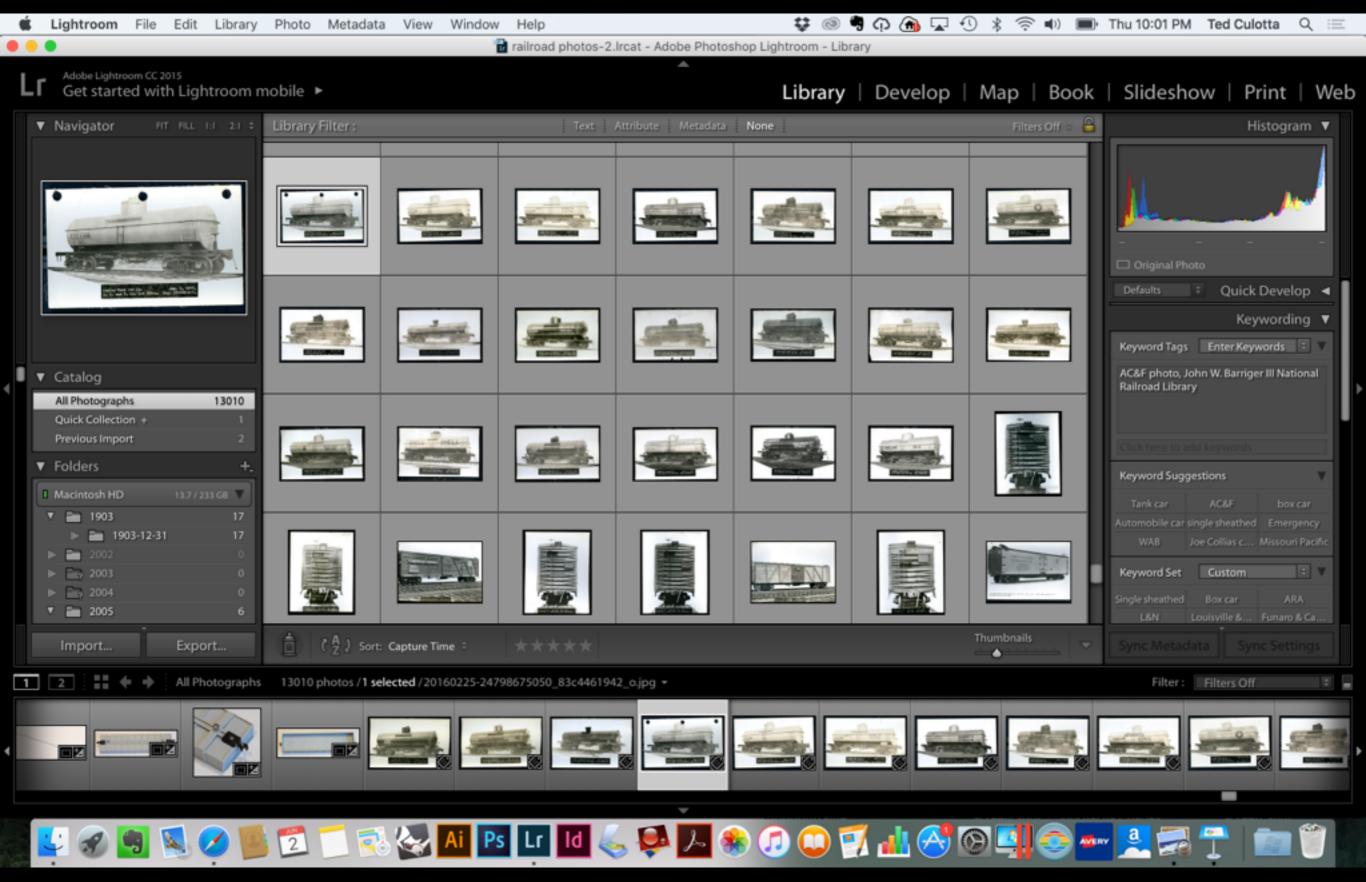
The following pages have been pulled from a Lightroom-only discussion. While we do not have time to cover them here, they have been included for reference. Should you have specific questions, please write to me at speedwitchmedia@gmail.com

Library View

Lightroom offers several key functions to serve the needs of those managing large numbers of images.

- Import (direct from camera or browse)
- Keywords
- Rating or flagging
- File Mangement
- Light box or image views
- Search (light box view)
- Rotate

Library - "Lightbox" View



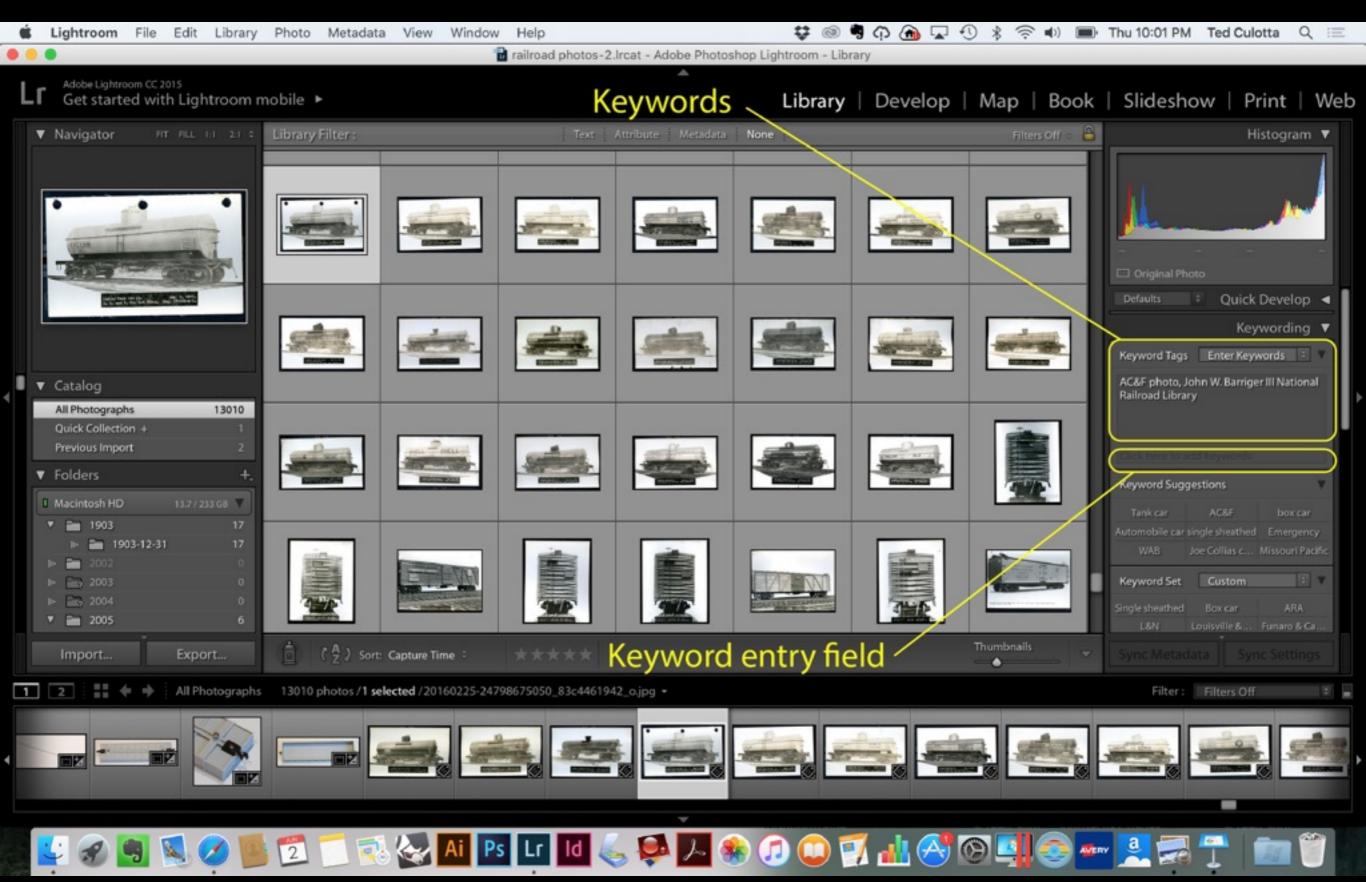
Library - "Image" View



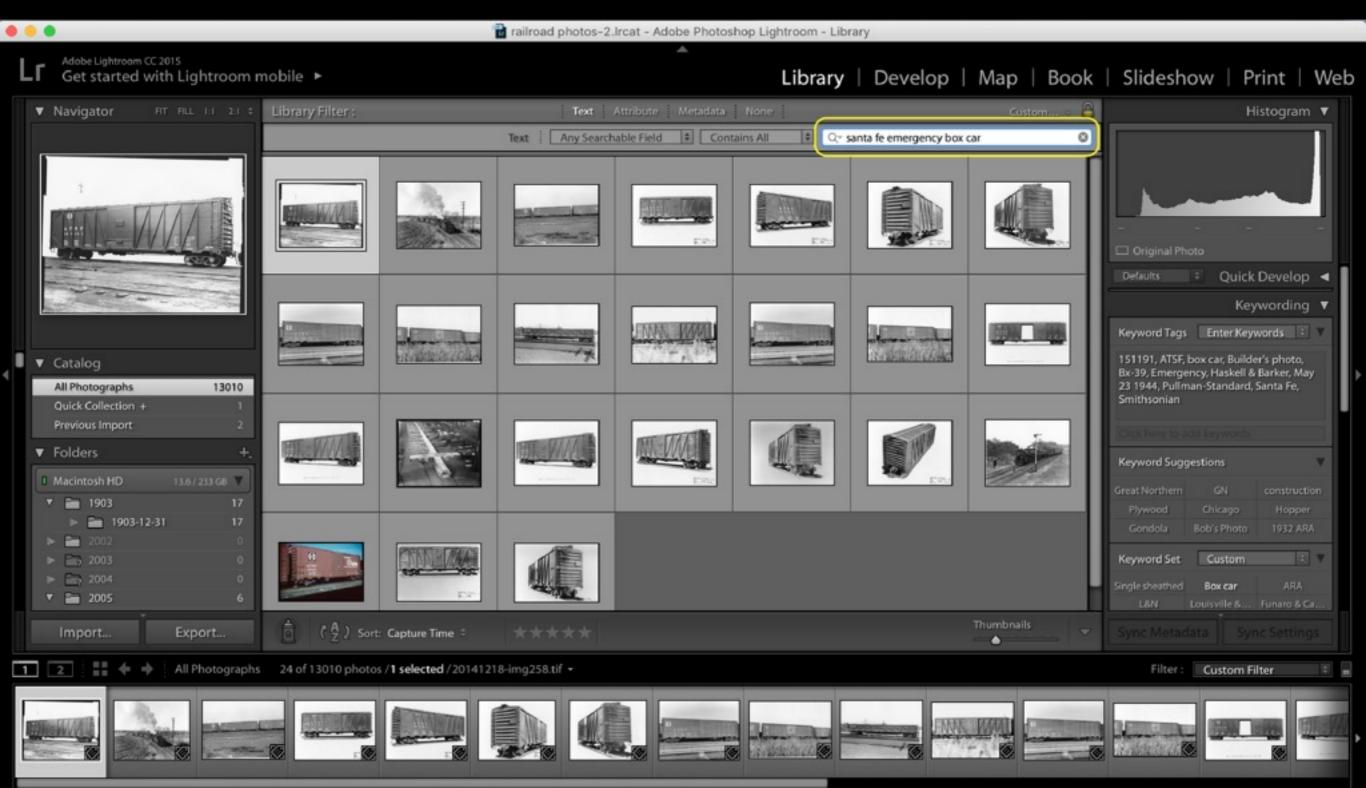
Library - Search

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Library - Keywords



Library - Keyword Search



Library - Folders

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Library - Folders

VERY IMPORTANT!

All file moves and management should occur within LR or if done outside LR, you should *immediately* go into LR to "point" LR to the new file location(s). One of the strengths of LR is its ability to provide file management; moving files "outside" of LR can lead to lost links to files, rendering the file management capabilities useless.

Develop View

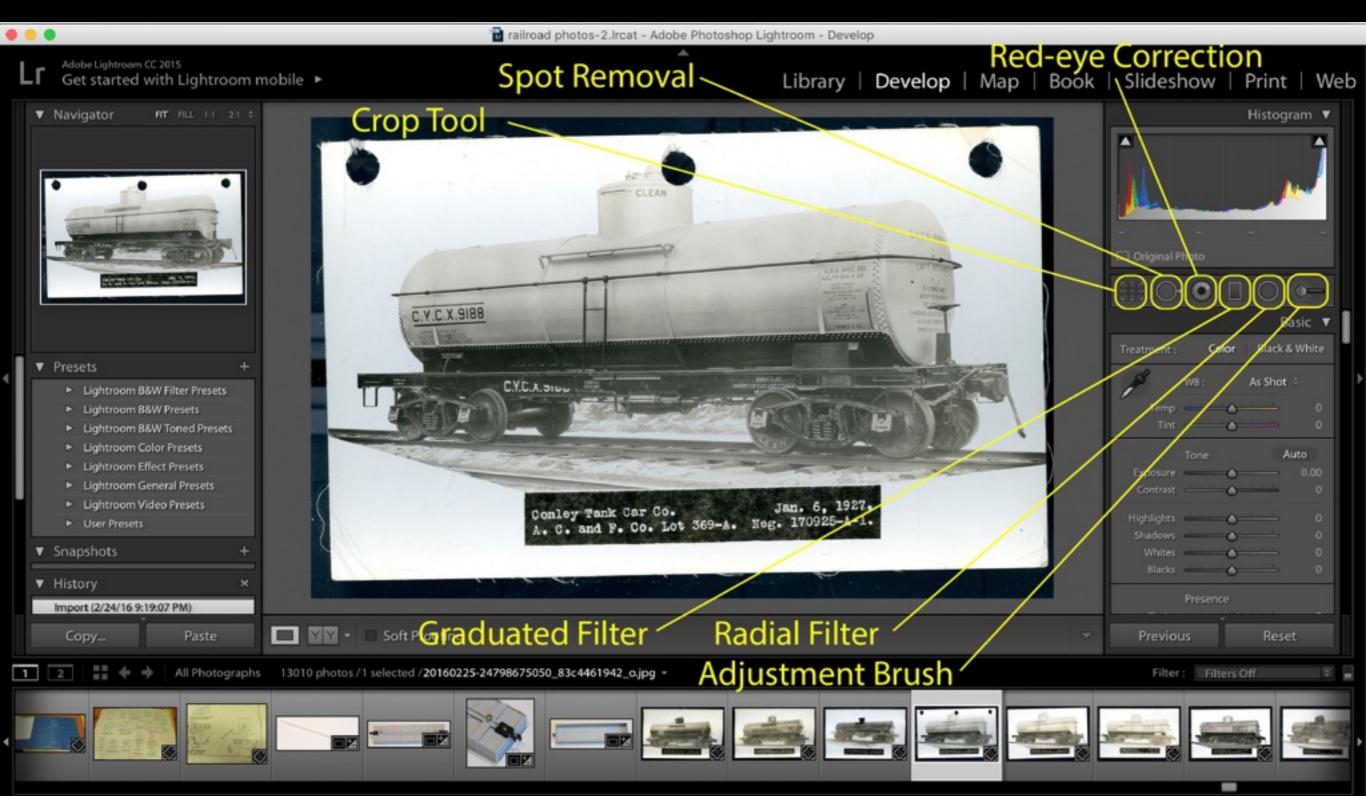
Lightroom uses *non-destructive* developing tools. Nondestructive means that the underlying file is not modified; only the view of the file is modified, akin to filters. This is a major difference from Photoshop and makes multiple developments, changes, etc., easy. It is difficult to stress how important it is that the underlying file is not adjusted during the process!

Additionally, the developing tools are essentially filters over the underlying file. A file can be "developed" multiple ways by using the "Create Virtual Copy" tool. There is still only a single underlying file, saving significant disk storage space.

Develop View



Develop Tools



Develop Tools



Develop Tool Functions

- Crop tool remove unwanted portions of an image and make adjustments like rotation
- Spot removal to clean up unwanted blemishes such as dust, dead pixels, scratches, etc. (this is an area where Photoshop has clearly superior tools where complex adjustments are necessary using the Clone and Healing tools).
- Red eye correction
- Graduated filter, e.g. graduated neutral density (ND) filter
- Radial filter
- Adjustment brush allows for complex selection and dodging and burning
- Level, hue, saturation, luminance, sharpening, lens adjustments tools

Develop Tool Functions

Two other important tools (from this user's perspective!) are:

- Soft-Proofing, which is the ability to develop an image for a specific printer and paper combination, almost entirely eliminating the "develop and pray" scenario when one hits the print button
- Virtual copy you can create as many "views" of an image as you like, allowing you to develop the same image for different purposes without creating multiple "real" and different files.

Develop Tools

Virtual Copy - right click on image and click from pop-up menu



Develop Tools Soft Proofing - click the box





File Export

Lightroom allows the user to select one or many images to export with multiple settings, including file naming, location, settings, sizing, sharpening, watermarking, etc.

An exported image is an *entirely new* file, *outside* of Lightroom, that *contains all of the changes* made in Lightroom.

File Export

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File Export

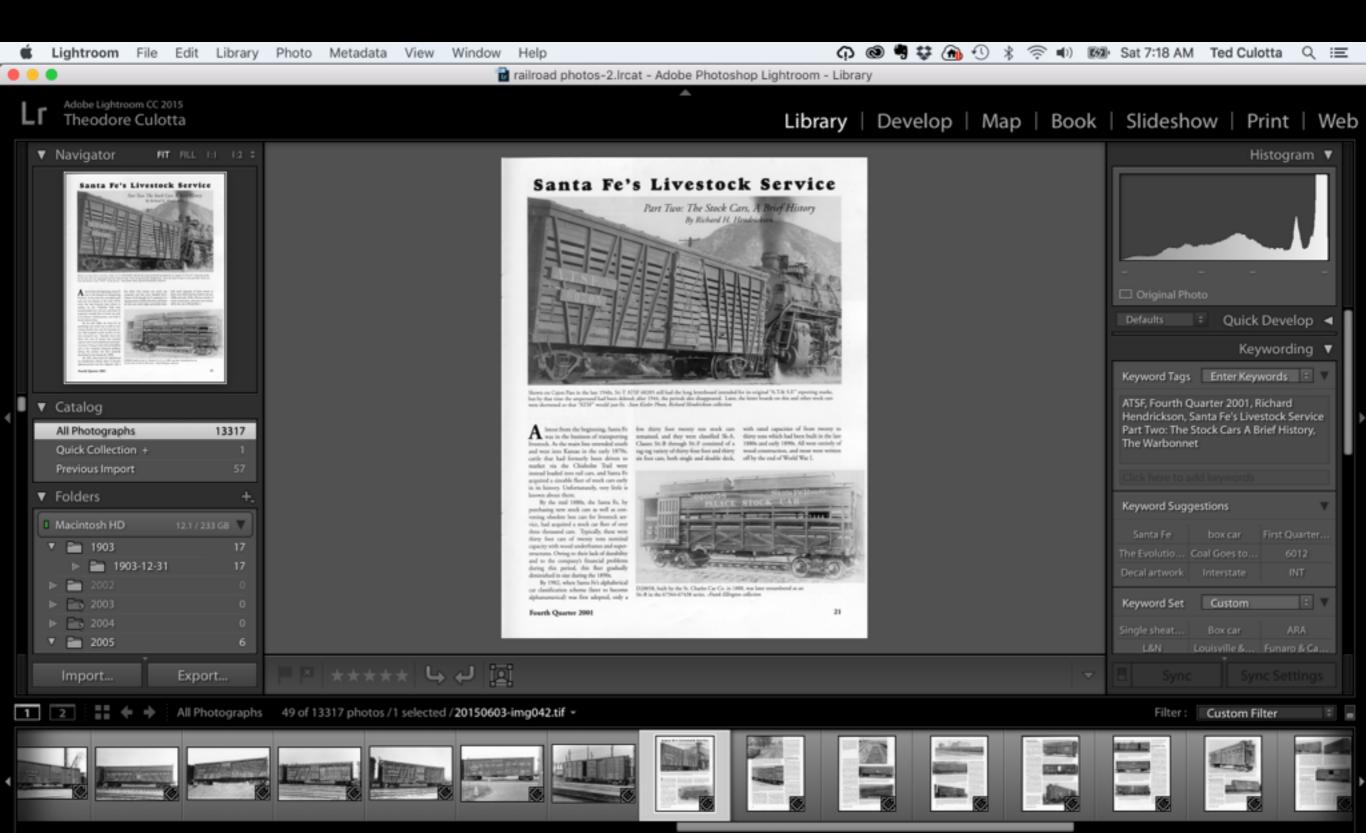
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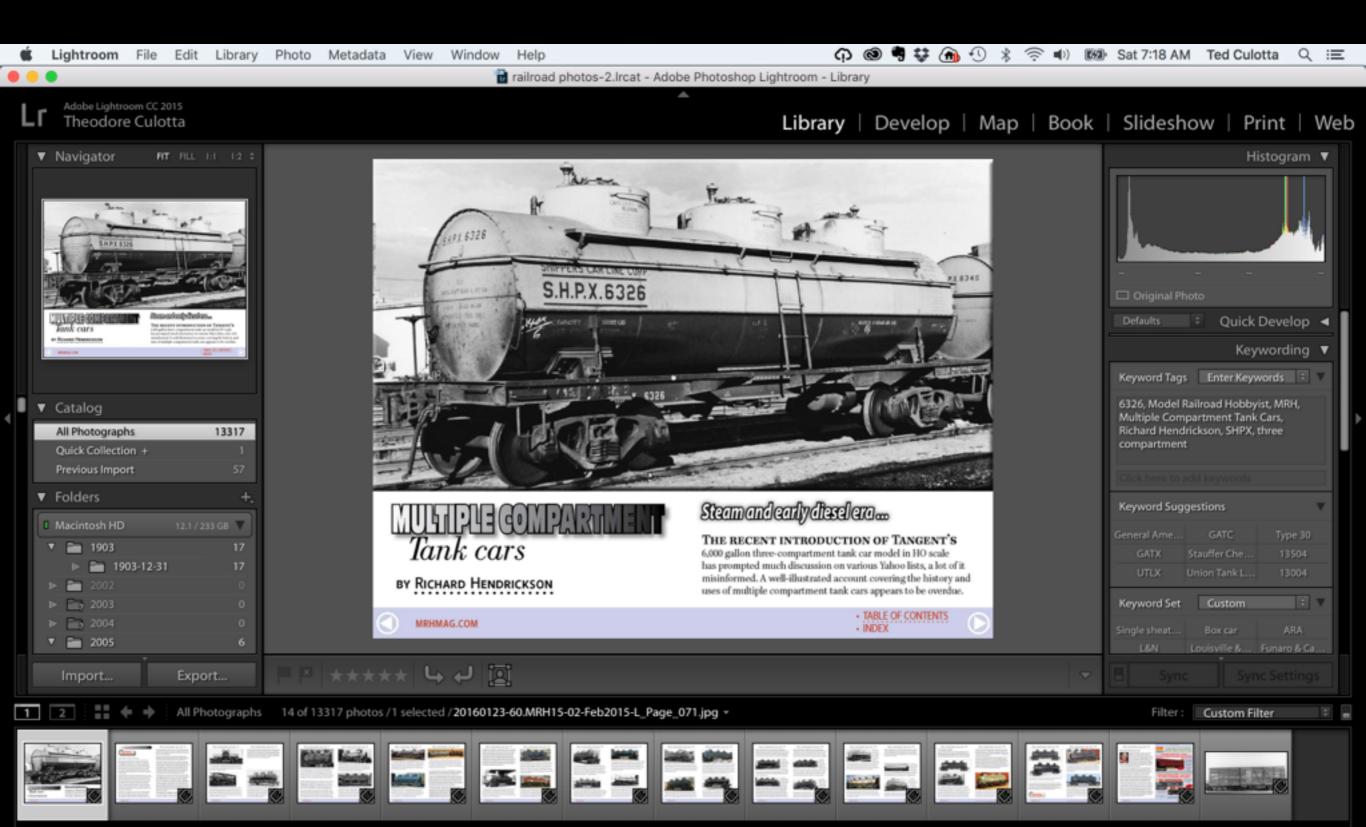
Print View

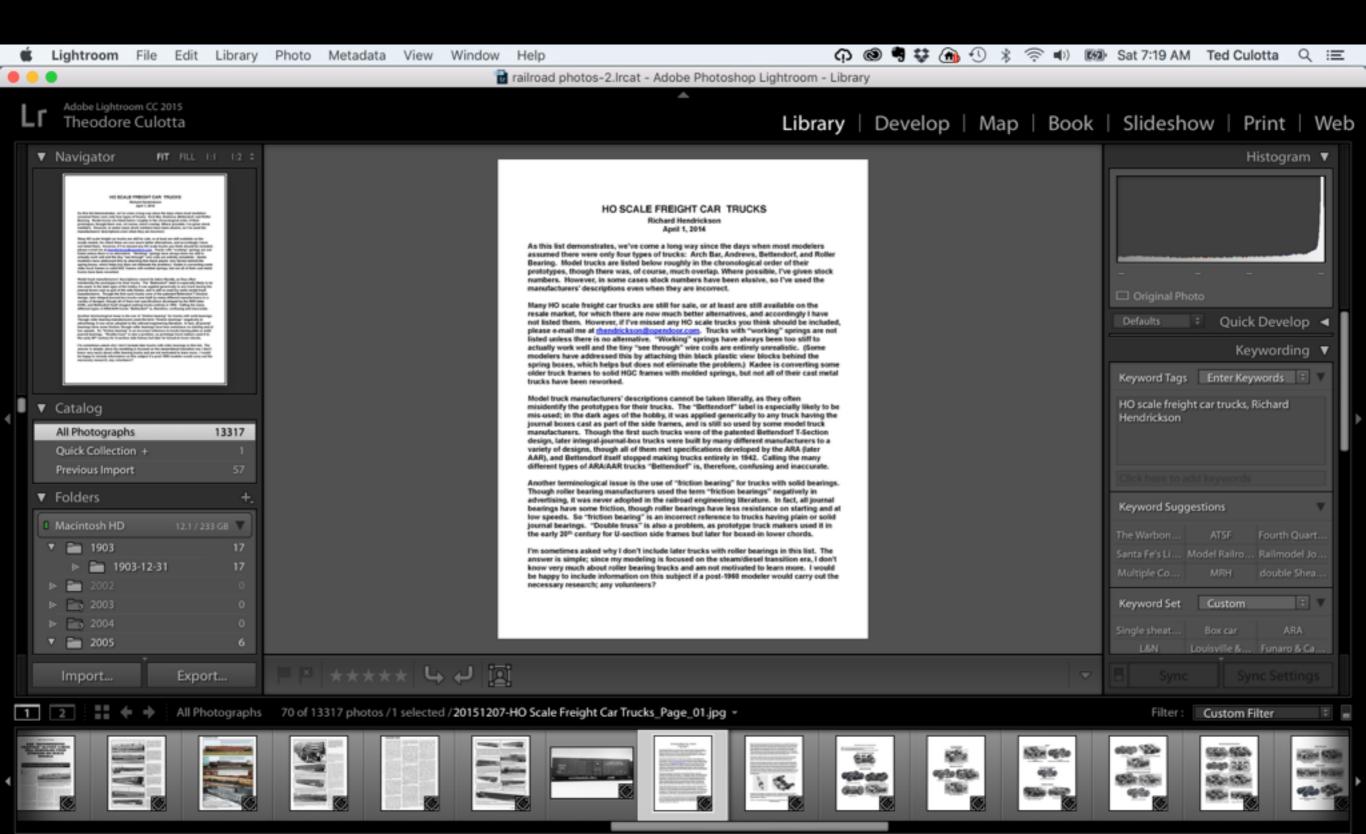
Ever wonder why the prints from your home printer aren't quite what you expected? The printer and computer aren't optimizing the output based upon printer and paper used. Each printer deposits ink differently and each paper absorbs ink differently. Lightroom allows you to manage these combinations so your prints look as good as the printer is capable of producing.

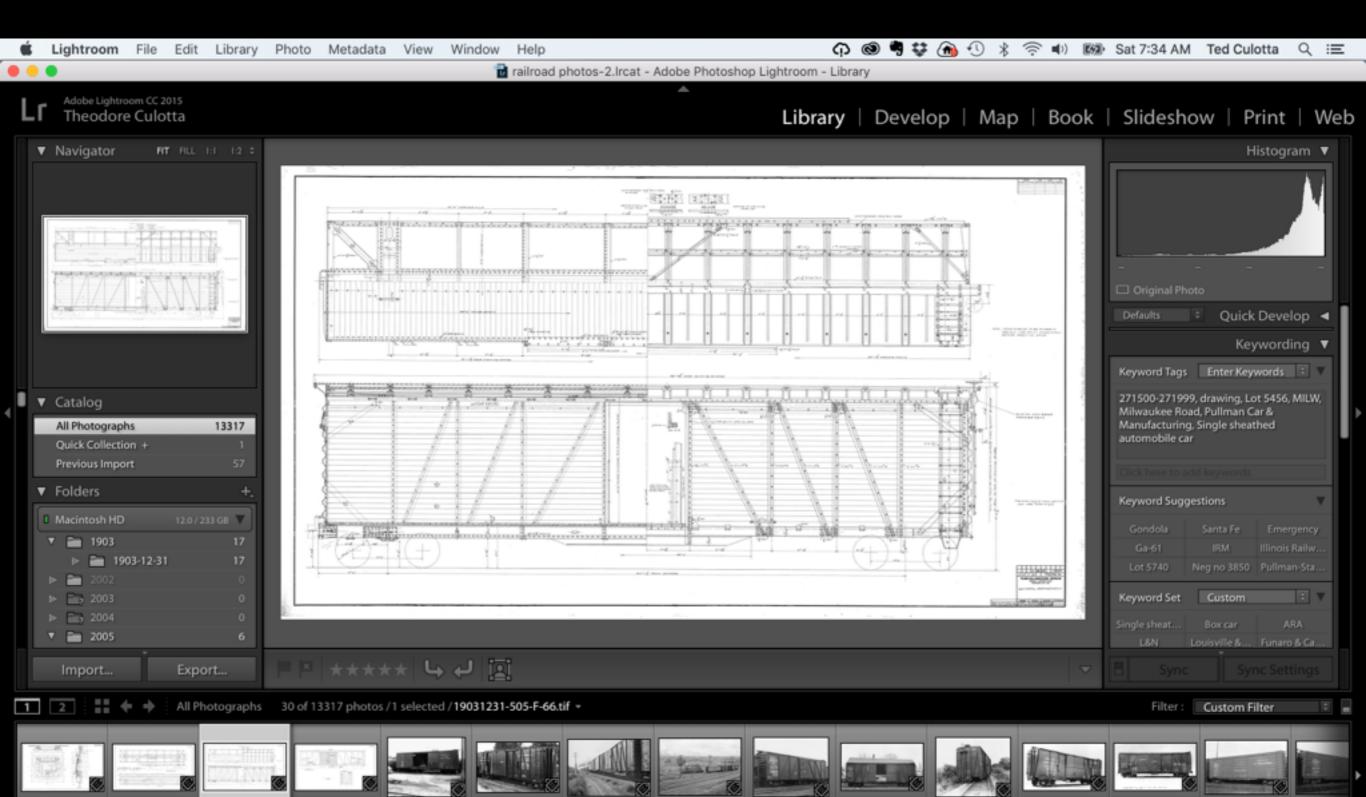
This is achieved by loading ICC profiles for each printer/paper combination and then accessing them as you develop and print images.

- What about those .pdf files you have on your hard drive?
- How do you know what you have and where to find it?
- What about all those magazines you have under the benchwork and everywhere else (how much material is there really worth saving?)









Not just for model railroading stuff...

- How about your other photos shot with your phone or digital camera?
- Receipts?
- Recipes?
- You can create multiple catalogs

Please note that if you are viewing this file separate from the live presentation at Prototype Rails, there are some companion "ridealong" demonstrations demonstrating things that are absent from this file. Without that, some material presented herein may not be entirely clear or may seem too simplistic. Please consider attending a future RPM to see the "Full Monty".