

News from Houston N'Crowd



August 2010

THE ORDERBOARD



***When was the last time you checked out the progress on your Bayou City & Gulf?
Plan now for the August 18 membership meeting at Papa Ben's Train Place!***



"GREEN EYE" - CLEAR BLOCK

by Ted Davis, President

As promised last month, in this issue we have Tom and Amy Wayburn's review of their personal tour of Eddie Aycock's layout, and Steve Lancaster's pictorial of his reviewed layout.

Tom Marsh "the traveling man" tells us about his visit to the NMRA convention in Milwaukee. Note he saw a large "display" of assembled TrainCat Kits. Speaking of TrainCat brass, I have not received any news on a shipping date for our order.

Our order with Railgraphics for new Bayou City & Gulf decals has hit the derail. They have informed us that they have lost the file which contained the films. Also, they explained that the lost films had aged badly and now they require new art work. We are fortunate that Tom Marsh will be able to handle the new art work for us. The upside to this situation is it gives us the opportunity to update/modify the decal sheet.

I have restarted club eBay sales which were suspended prior to the NSC National N Scale Convention. The new listings are for the remaining BC&G items in addition to the Lone Star Region NMRA cars which we recently acquired. I failed to bring them to the monthly meeting but will bring some in to the club layout. If you are interested in purchasing some see me Saturdays or Wednesdays at the layout. Steve will also have access on the days he is working. Remember, member pricing is \$5 for the Micro-Trains Inland Timber Co. two-car set and \$3 for the Intermountain Waco, Austin & Bryan box car. We have sold a number of both cars already and are keeping one set for running on the BC&G. You can see photos on the Special Run Cars page on the N'Crowd website: www.houstonNcrowd.org.

This month, we took delivery of a shiny new HP 8240 laptop computer to run RailOps and other programs for use at the club layout. Currently the following software is installed: Atlas RTS, Digitrax Sound Loader, and JMRI Decoder Pro and Panel Pro. The new computer also has club files such as the membership roster.

At this time the problems we were experiencing on the layout seem to be ironed out. Oops! Did I speak too soon? Yes, the layout "crashed" again one recent Sunday, but Ray

Byer and Charlie Aselin sorted it out. It seems we now have a bad section in the PM42. We will be installing an "Operating Run Log" which we need everyone to fill out to help us discover what is causing the trouble.

The Digitrax components Hugh Boyd sent off for repair have come back and he has returned them to the club. There was only a three week turnaround. Hugh, thanks for helping!

Manners, Manners, Manners: I cannot stress them enough! There are two points I want to make here because when you are at the layout you represent "Your" club. First is our interaction with Papa Ben's shoppers. The public will not be impressed if they catch us using foul language. You should remember that often children are around. The second point I want to discuss is our interaction with the shop, our generous host. As I have said before, your shopping habits should remain private. It is not polite to broadcast the fact that you bought something on eBay or on the internet for a lower price. I do not believe you would go to the bookstore and announce the price you paid on Amazon. I know you have enough "cents" to realize these alternative suppliers do not have the same overhead expenses as a "brick and mortar" business like Papa Ben's. Also consider the fact that no other store provides us a meeting and layout location at no charge.

Since the last meeting Rick Farmer has renewed his membership; welcome back to the club, Rick. Finally we wish "Happy Birthday" to Eric Baughman, Dominic Valdez and Frank Wyatt



Next N'Crowd Meeting: 7 p.m. Wednesday, Aug. 18

Papa Ben's Train Place, 4007-E Bellaire Blvd.
Come and check out progress on the BC&G!

**Houston N'Crowd
Membership Meeting Report
July 21, 2010
Prepared by Rick Gonzalez, Secretary**

(Meeting notes taken by Kirk Poorman; transcribed by Rick Gonzalez, who takes blame for all errors.)

- Meeting called to order around 7 p.m; 14 members in attendance. Gordon Bliss absent - working in Montana; Steven Redd also absent - wedding/honeymoon extended?; Rick Gonzalez absent - working late.
- Bob Folser gets the missing member call.
- Tom Marsh won the door prize, an N scale '66 Ford Galaxie 500 hand painted by Steve Lancaster.
- Review of the May and June 1989 issues of Model Railroader featuring articles on the NMRA Astrorail convention and Ben Pearlman, with highlights of the N'Crowd Union Station and the giant Texas shaped layout.
- TrainCat kits ordered through the store still haven't arrived.
- The company that is doing our BC&G custom decals is missing the original artwork. The old files are no longer useful. New artwork needs to be produced.
- RailOps, the operating software for our layout, has been purchased. We also have the computer now. Sounds like we're in business!
- Hugh Boyd has returned the items that he sent to Digitrax to be repaired for the Club. It only took three weeks, which was a very good turnaround time. Hugh said that it was a "good return on his trains - rolling smoothly without hesitation!"
- The Budweiser brewery on the BC&G layout will be getting new sets of limited edition reefers thanks to Ted Davis, who found them for half price at the N Scale Collector's convention. Motion to pay Ted \$105 for the set of six reefers passed unanimously.
- Steve Lancaster has spent time running trains on the layout and reports that all sidings and turnouts are operating smoothly.
- Tom Marsh reported good sales of the Club cars at the NSC convention. Our PayPal account is also growing from eBay sales. Our Treasurer also reports that our CD, which has a balance of \$4,790.06 and is growing at the rate of 0.2% a year, matures October 31.
- The excess cars we bought from the Lone Star Region cost the club \$269.

- Tours of members' layouts continue, with Al Hague and Jason Smith up next, sometime in the next two weeks, depending on availability.
- A handlaying track clinic will be presented by Ray Byer this weekend, July 24, at the Houston Railroad Museum.
- Charlie Aselin reports that the yard's track plan has been marked out on the board, soon to be followed by roadbed installation. Scenicizing continues, and detailing by members is most welcome.
- The new layout computer is now in place and working, and more programming and training sessions are planned.
- Districting Committee proposed: Their duties will include handling remaining sections of the layout that need district designations for circuit blocks. Charlie Aselin, Ray Byer, Eddie Aycock and Steve Redd were nominated. Motion carried.
- Tom Marsh received an email that the Houston Endowment has granted the Galveston Railroad Museum \$250,000 to help rebuild from Hurricane Ike.
- The N Scale Collectors Convention was a success, although not as well attended as hoped. Visitors from out of town especially enjoyed the home layout tours.
- Motion to adjourn meeting passed.

Members in attendance:

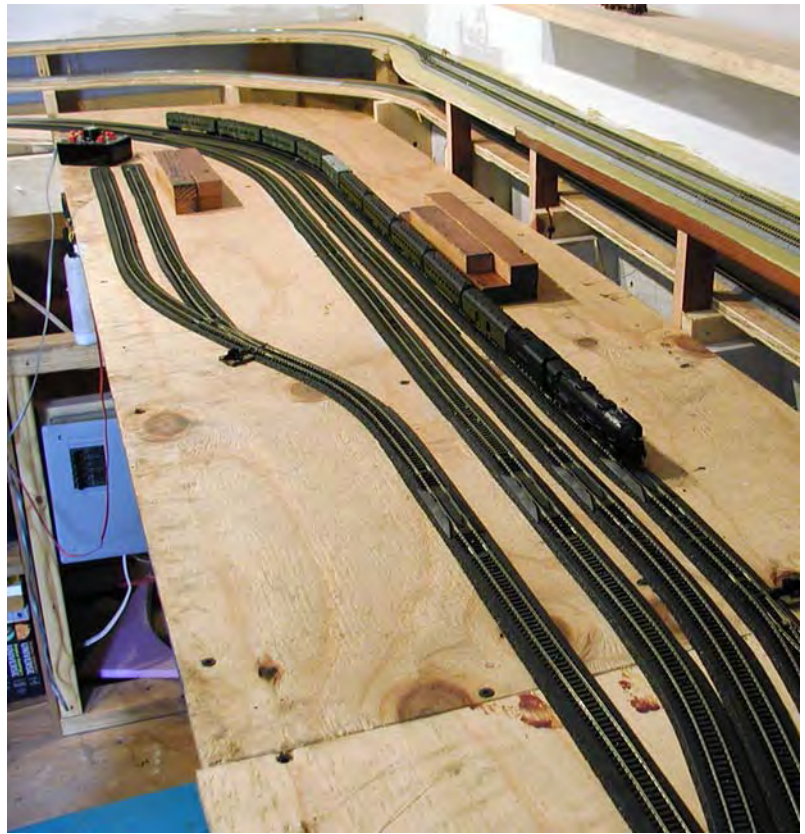
1. Richard Bartlett
2. Ted Davis
3. Hugh Boyd
4. Tom Wayburn
5. Charlie Aselin
6. Dan Gutierrez
7. Eddie Aycock
8. James Senneff
9. Robert Moore
10. Ray Byer
11. Steven Lancaster
12. Kirk Poorman
13. LaChaudre Chandler
14. Tom Marsh

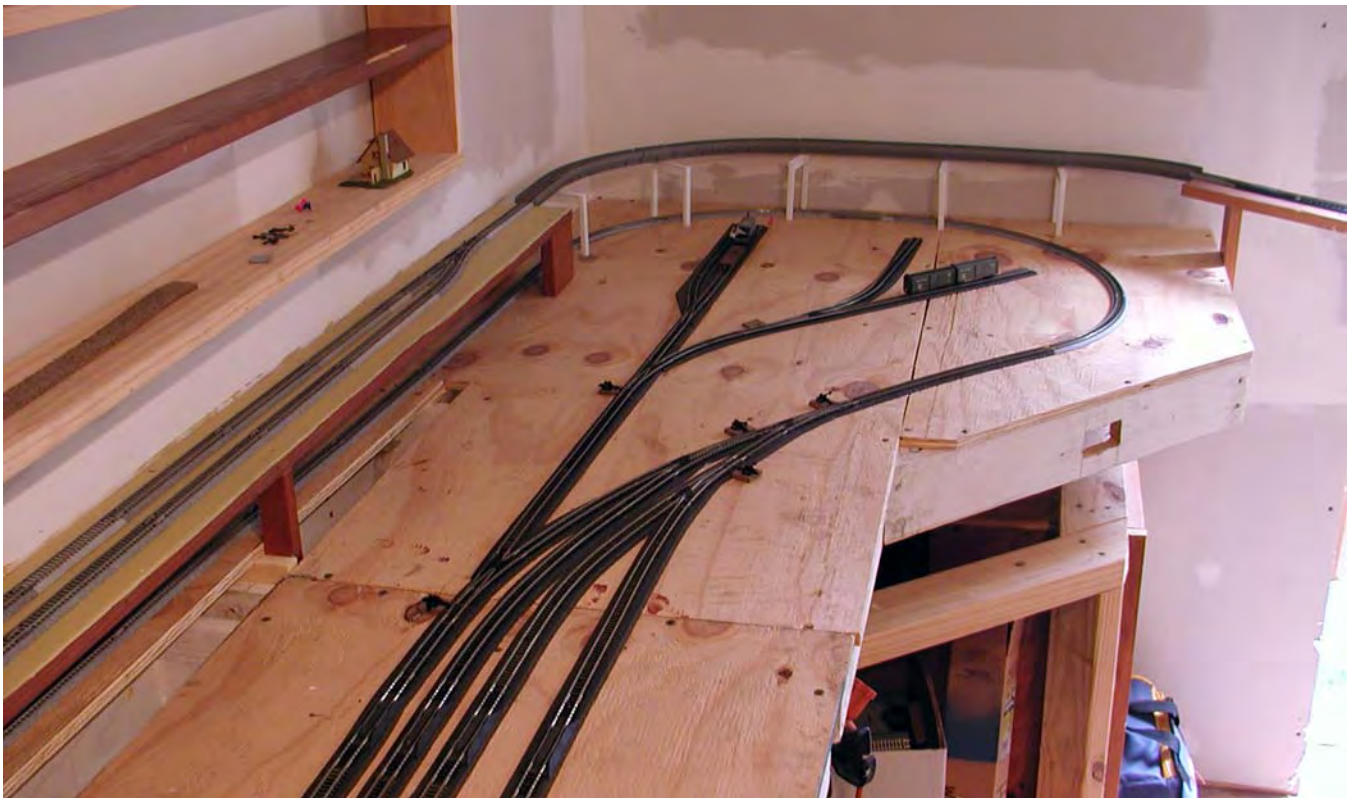
Progress on the SP in Appalachia

by Steve Lancaster

The track gangs are packing up after a grueling five-month slog through the Appalachian hills near Alvin, Texas. The mainline is complete, although the great doorway bridge is currently a temporary 1-in. by 3-in. board screwed in place, which is extremely inconvenient to the massive vessel trying to traverse beneath it. The permanent bridge will be built off-site and trucked in, and will be of the removable variety.

Completion of the mining branch has been suspended due to a faulty Kato turnout, but local crews will finish the run soon enough for harvest. The mine in question will produce gold, we expect at a rate of four to six gondolas a day. The idea of extending this branch towards some unused real estate by the door has been studied, but no firm plans have been made.





The main town, as yet unnamed, has trackage for a large freight house as well as a privately-owned railcar maintenance facility. The plant will handle local engine maintenance for the host road. Contracts are forthcoming. Bad order cars have already begun to arrive, even though it could be months before the facility is complete.

All of the completed track work has been wired to a single circuit. The layout will be controlled from a single Digitrax Zephyr which will be quartered in the yard tower at the main town. Main line turnouts will be controlled at a panel in the same tower, however the yard and maintenance facility turnouts are ground throws.

With the mainline completed, scenery supplies have begun to arrive by the trainload, being stockpiled for the next phase of construction. The fun part, as I like to call it. Of course, the oppressive heat, budget issues, prior commitments and the threat of wayward hurricanes are all conspiring to delay the project. But isn't that prototypical, too?



A visit to Eddie Aycock's layout

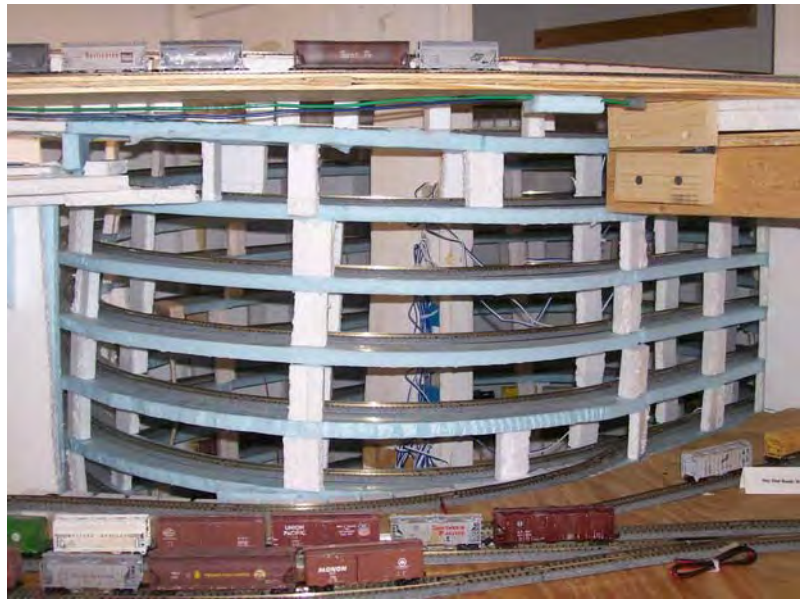
by Amy & Tom Wayburn

On the last Sunday in June, Amy and I visited Eddie Aycock's layout on Town Creek Drive (not Towncreek Drive as listed in the club roster; this doesn't matter unless you are trying to find it with Google Earth! Operation is the name of the game as far as Eddie is concerned, which explains why he is so anxious to finish the upper track on the club layout. His layout is a point-to-point run from Houston to Dallas with reverse loops at each end. According to the large printed signs identifying each town, trains leaving Houston pass through Spring, Magnolia, Navasota, Hearne with its large freight yard, Mexia, Corsicana, Rice and Ennis on their way to Dallas.

Although none of the scenery is finished on this fine open benchwork layout, industries are identified by printed signs. Some of the cars in the Houston yard have been the object of Eddie's special attention with respect to weathering and appropriate loads. Notice the flatcar loads in particular.

The two finely detailed Caterpillar machines that Eddie purchased at the recent NSC National N Scale Convention in Sugar Land make an especially interesting flatcar load.

At first sight, the most remarkable feature of Eddie's layout is the helix

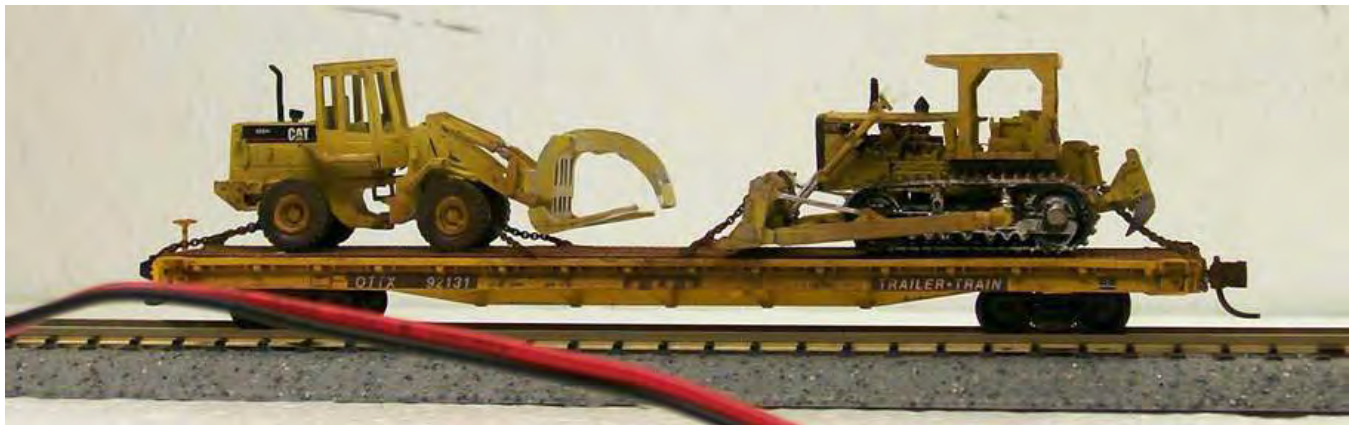


made from structural foam at a very low cost. Eddie has used foam throughout the layout and is a great believer in its usefulness. If I am not mistaken, the foam risers in the helix come from Woodland Scenics.

The well-known computer program Rail Ops is used at operating sessions. The small blue plastic pieces lying on the outer edge of the Hearne yard platform are used to identify which cars are to be moved in the next freight consist made up by the yard crew during operating sessions.

The track is exclusively by Kato, which has the very attractive feature of automatic switch machines concealed in the base of each turnout. Anyone who has experienced as much trouble as I have with Peco switch machines will appreciate the convenience and the boon to operations provided by Kato. The trackwork covers two levels in each of two rooms, with staging tracks below the lower level.

Eddie is planning scenery for everything but the staging tracks.



Milwaukee hosts NMRA 75th anniversary convention and the National Train Show

by Tom Marsh

The National Model Railroad Association (NMRA) held its 75th anniversary convention in Milwaukee from July 11-18. The event included the unveiling of the new NMRA logo, along with a full slate of layout and prototype tours, clinics on modeling and prototype subjects, superb contest entries, a huge silent auction and more. A wide range of vendors and manufacturers participated in the associated National Train Show, and thanks to one manufacturer, attendees had a chance to ride two historic Milwaukee Road *Hiawatha* passenger cars between Milwaukee, Chicago and the Twin Cities.

If you have never attended an NMRA national convention, why not? They're fun, you learn, you can find bargains at the auction and the National Train Show, and you can visit some of the nation's finest model railroads. The 2011 NMRA convention takes place July 3-9 in Sacramento, Calif., home of the fantastic California State Railroad Museum and gateway to numerous railfanning opportunities in scenic northern California. Point your browser to <http://www.x2011west.org/> for more information about the 2011 event.



Above, a lot is going on in this N-scale module! The upper tracks are connected to the main layout, while trains on the lower tracks are operating independently.



Below, this large snow scene module on the N-Trak layout at the National Train Show attracted a lot of attention.





Above, layout tours at the NMRA convention included scales from N to “get on board.” The High Oaks Railroad was named for the trees that populate the property on which the large-scale railroad runs. No steam was running due to the heat on the day of the tour, although it did not seem super hot to those of us from Texas!



Right center, Bachmann showed pre-production samples of its new EMD GP-7 and Baldwin Ten-Wheeler. Both the Geep and the 4-6-0 will come with DCC. The diesel will come in six roadnames and retail for \$99, while the steamer will list for \$150 and will be available in four roadnames and two undecorated versions.

Bottom right, a huge staging yard on the N-Trak layout at the NMRA convention.





Above, this superb model of the Great Northern station at Whitefish, Montana, was one of the few N-scale models in the NMRA convention contest. The prototype of the Tudor Revival station was recently restored. It is owned by the city and is a busy Amtrak stop on the Empire Builder route.



At left, Intermountain showed pre-production samples of its new R-70-20 refrigerator cars as modernized with Carrier refrigeration units. The cars will be available in three roadnames, including NRDX blue "Cold Train" lettering. "Cold Train" cars can be spotted regularly in Union Pacific's Englewood Yard in Houston.

At left below, no explanation is necessary or possible - it is what it is. Beam me up, Scotty!





Above, a new N-scale motorized track cleaning car from MNP Products. At right top, Con-Cor showed upgraded versions of its GE U50 and turbines. At right, Wheels of Time had their new baggage cars on hand in pre-production form. Several roof variations will be offered. The cars feature extensive underbody detail, right down to the seam in the fabricated centersills.



Above and below, the Friends of the 261 brought their former Milwaukee Road Hiawatha Super Dome and Skytop parlor car Cedar Rapids to Milwaukee during the NMRA convention to serve as the venue for a private reception for model railroad manufacturer Athearn. The cars made several public trips behind Amtrak's Hiawatha Service and Empire Builder as well; your editor was fortunate to ride one of the Chicago to Milwaukee trips in the restored cars. The Friends of the 261 also own former Milwaukee Road Northern No. 261. The big 4-8-4 is expected to return to mainline service within two years.





New NMRA logo unveiled: The National Model Railroad Association used the occasion of its 75th anniversary convention in Milwaukee to roll out a new “steel wheel on steel rail” logo and a new website. According to NMRA officials, the new logo “represents the oldest of the NMRA’s objectives: interoperability.”

The NMRA says further of the new logo that it also represents the future: “It’s a symbol of our willingness to keep pace with the changes all around us. Changes in our world, in our lives, in our hobby. While it honors the achievements of the past 75 years, it commits us to the continuation of those achievements in the next 75.”

Along with the new logo, the NMRA has renamed its redesigned monthly magazine from *Scale Rails* to *NMRA Magazine*, and will expand content on its website and make the information in its extensive library easier to access.

NMRA officials say the organization is at a “critical juncture” and the rebranding with a logo that is not era-specific is part of an effort to keep the NMRA relevant to today’s model railroaders.



TIME TABLE

August 18

N'Crowd Membership Meeting
Papa Ben's Train Place

September 15

N'Crowd Membership Meeting
Papa Ben's Train Place

October 16-17

Big Texas Train Show, George R.
Brown Convention Center, Houston

October 20

N'Crowd Membership Meeting
Papa Ben's Train Place

November 17

N'Crowd Membership Meeting
Papa Ben's Train Place

December 15

N'Crowd Membership Meeting
Papa Ben's Train Place

2011

June 9-12

LSR NMRA 60th Annual Convention, Lubbock

July 3-9

NMRA National Convention,
Sacramento, California

THE ORDERBOARD *from Houston N'Crowd*

Published as close to monthly (but no promises!) as possible for members and friends of N'Crowd Model Railroad Society, Inc., Houston, Texas.

Tom Marsh, Editor

Send newsletter contributions to: tom@houstonNcrowd.org. We reserve the right to edit submissions for clarity and length.

Visit our Web site:

www.houstonNcrowd.org

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