

News from Houston N'Crowd



THE ORDERBOARD

January/February 2010



No, it's not N, but does that matter? Photo by Steve Lancaster

*N'Crowd Vice President **Steve Lancaster** writes:*

When I was in basic training in 1986, our first trip to the rifle range began with a brief class on assembling and maintaining the M-16. At the head of the classroom was a 2:1 scale model of the weapon. It was eight feet long and two feet tall if it was an inch, and our first collective thought upon seeing it was "I certainly hope no one expects me to fire this monster!"

That's kind of how I felt when, a few weeks

before Thanksgiving, I was commissioned to build an HO switching layout for friend and customer Abraham Tolbert. He had found a fairly common track plan online that measured 1-ft by 6-ft, and wanted it adjusted for a 1-ft by 10-ft shelf in his office. The extra four feet allowed for a longer mainline, and one of the spurs was extended to create a second runaround and a junk yard scene. There was some trade-off in track capacity since the original plan called for No. 4 turn-

*See **SIZE** page 10*

"GREEN EYE" - CLEAR BLOCK

by Ted Davis, President

In this issue please see Eddie's open house reviews and Steve Lancaster's tale about his "lessons learned" from building an HO scale switching layout. In addition, we feature Tom Wayburn's layout. Thanks to all for your contributions.

It looks like my merger attempt at recovering some of the club's history has come up short. The people who showed some interest in helping have been unable to locate their old newsletters. Maybe when we are able to unpack the club library I might discover more old documents.

I am required to remind you that membership fees were due Jan. 1. I collected several at the January meeting. Most members in attendance took advantage of the convenience to renew. Please take time today to pay your dues. There is a renewal application on the club web site (www.houstonNcrowd.org) or you can pick up one at Papa Ben's. I will soon be giving N'Crowd Secretary Rick Gonzalez copies of the applications so he can update the membership roster.

On Feb. 20, we plan to attend the Greater Houston Train Show in Stafford. Look for our information booth and visit with your "mates" at the show. If you cannot go to the show, please consider manning the BC&G at Papa Ben's in our absence.

On Saturday, Jan. 23, several N'Crowd members traveled to the Rosenberg Railroad Museum for a visit. At the museum we had a guided tour inside and out of Tower 17. We toured the business car *Quebec* as well. Then we took a look at the model train layouts.

Next on the agenda was to get some beans. We went to Schulze's BBQ where we feasted on their excellent lunch menu. After lunch we had the pleasure of visiting Steve Redd's

nearby home layout. There we ran trains and tried out his computer programs used to run and program trains. The plan is to visit another member's layout in the near future.

Welcome to our two new members La'Chande Chandler and John Fitch. Finally, if your birthday is in January or February, we wish you a happy birthday!

BC&G Jobs List

Members are encouraged to join in the construction of the new Bayou City & Gulf at Papa Ben's. Here are some suggested, fun activities!

Take out the trash and vacuum the floor
Put up tools and organize loose supplies

Build trees

Install benchwork trim

Install risers for sub-roadbed

Install sub-roadbed

Lay cork roadbed and track

Install bus and feeder wires

Propose, get approval for and build a structure for future installation

When in doubt or if you have any questions or suggestions:

Call Charlie at 832-578-4900

or Ted at 713-721-8960

Houston N'Crowd 2009 Officers and Volunteers

President	Ted Davis	tedjr1@swbell.net
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Board Member	Gordon Bliss	gtbliss@aol.com
Board Member	Eddie Aycock	efaycock@aol.com
Layout Master	Charlie Aselin	caace@hal-pc.org



Next N'Crowd Meeting: 7 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 17

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

Houston N'Crowd Membership Meeting Report January 20, 2010 Prepared by Rick Gonzalez, Secretary, from notes by Kirk Poorman

17 members in attendance.

Anybody interested in writing an article for The Orderboard? Please feel free to submit any and all ideas!

The Greater Houston Train Show is February 20 in Stafford.

The Missing Member phone call was made to Rick Gonzalez. He was expecting it but forgot to not answer the phone!

Steve Lancaster reported that he worked on his layout for the first time in three months, but he may not work on it again for another three months.

Does anybody have any completed cars with BC&G decals?

Membership renewals for 2010 and new member approved.

Treasurer Tom Marsh reported that the Club's certificate of deposit will soon mature. Do we want to renew it, or do we want to transfer it to a money market account? The treasurer will look into our options.

On April 3 there will be a swap meet in Flatonia in conjunction with the annual spring railfan event at the Flatonia Junction Photo Pavilion. Please check with Ray Byer for details.

Layout Master Charlie Aselin reports that construction on the club's layout continues. Risers have been installed along the yard. Charlie says that we need to install better quality cabinet board that will not be subject to warping. Charlie's motion for better quality construction supplies was passed. He also states that he needs more people to help work on the layout. On the job training provided!

We would like to be at a certain stage of completion in time for the National N Scale Collector's convention in June. There will be many visitors from out of town. Contact Tom Marsh if you would like to volunteer to help with the convention.

The Houston Railroad Museum will be having a train show on October 16-17 at the George R. Brown Convention Center. There are opportunities for the club to participate and to be compensated.

Houston N'Crowd Membership Meeting Report December 16, 2009 Prepared by Rick Gonzalez, Secretary

Meeting called to order 7:12 p.m.

- A drawing was held for the door prize. Charlie Aselin won a Comanche & Indian Gap car.

President's Report

- Ted reported \$69.54 in eBay sales.
- The Christmas Party was a success. Next year we may do a potluck dinner.
- The Club's 2003 convention cars are still selling. Ted reports that we still have a Xerox box full of them- however many that is. He'll get an exact count for next meeting.
- Ted asked whether the membership is enjoying the

newsletter. Those present agreed that they did. Ted said the newsletter will continue.

- Any suggestions for the newsletter? Let Ted know!
- Expect an update to the Club's website sometime in January.
- Ted expressed an interest in setting up a viewing of one of the member's layouts. He has a few members in mind, but will gladly accept any volunteers. He will set something up and get back to us.

Vice President's Report

- Steve was showing the club's layout to a customer earlier this week. The train kept stalling. He gave the track a cleaning and it solved the problem. He suggests cleaning the track at the end of Saturday's work session so it doesn't have to be done while he's on duty as an employee of Papa Ben's.
- Leslie Eaton has volunteered to give a clinic on weathering to the club.

Treasurer's Report

Our checking account balance at the end of November was \$14,362.30, up \$21.79 for the month. Treasurer Tom Marsh didn't have the Certificate of Deposit amount, but it's about the same as last month.

Secretary's Report

- 11 members present for today's meeting.
- Rick asked about renewing our memberships for 2010. He will email the club's roster to Tom Marsh so he can send out notices.

New Business

- The club's 2010 calendar was passed out to the members present.
- The San Jacinto Club's show is in February. We discussed getting a table for the club for sales and recruiting purposes. We may present a clinic on T-Trak.
- The N Scale Collectors Convention - are we volunteering? We are still waiting on a jobs list.

- The Big Texas Train Show will be October 16-17 at the George R. Brown Convention Center. The club expects to participate in this show. Hopefully it will become a yearly event.
- Kirk Poorman brought in extra foam if anybody wanted some for their layouts. He also had old plastic campaign signs for those interested. Kirk managed to find some large BC&G letters for use in the clubroom. Kirk handed out some N scale airplanes as gifts to the club members. Thank you!
- We discussed a project to make the door to the layout room resemble an old ticket window, complete with bars.
- Gordon Bliss took a behind the scenes tour of Disney World's steam train program. Apparently they haul more passengers each year than Amtrak! He gave a nice presentation with lots of pictures he took.

Layout Master's Report

The return loop was put in before our open house early in December. They are still tweaking it.

Work sessions continue on Wednesdays and Saturdays. More volunteers are always welcome.

Motion to adjourn meeting was passed unanimously at 8:55pm.

Members in attendance:

1. Rick Gonzalez
2. Ted Davis
3. Kirk Poorman
4. Steven Lancaster
5. Eddie Aycock
6. Vern Burnett
7. James Senneff Jr.
8. Robert Moore
9. Gordon Bliss
10. Charlie Aselin
11. Tom Marsh



GREATER HOUSTON TRAIN SHOW

SATURDAY, February 20, 2010 * 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

In the Beautiful Spacious *

Stafford Centre

10505 Cash Road @ Murphy Rd.

Easy Directions:

*Exit US-59 south at Wilcrest Dr.
(later becomes Murphy Road)
go 1.8 miles south to Cash Rd.
on southeast corner.*

Admission:

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Children 12 to 18 - \$1

**Children Under 12 Free,
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Big business in the business car Quebec at the Rosenberg Railroad Museum. Photo by Tom Marsh

N'Crowd at the Rosenberg Railroad Museum!

N'Crowd members visited the Rosenberg Railroad Museum on Jan. 23, and had a fine time. Numerous trains paraded past the museum on the busy UP and BNSF mainlines, and we were treated to guided tours of the museum's Tower 17 and business car *Quebec*. A BBQ lunch kept everyone in fine fettle for the afternoon and a visit to member Steve Redd's multi-level layout in progress (*at right*), which features computerized control systems, effective lighting and fine benchwork.





Clockwise from top left, the Rosenberg Railroad Museum has tinplate and HO scale model railroads in operation; member Charlie Aselin runs a train on Steve Redd's layout. Three photos by Ted Davis. The view inside and outside Tower 17 at the museum. Photos by Tom Marsh

Page 6, bottom, Steve Redd explains how a PC controls multiple trains on his layout. The system will keep trains spaced apart, indicate block occupancy, align switches, etc. Steve also uses the computer for DCC programming. Photo by Tom Marsh

At left below, your editor's ride to Rosenberg, where two British car clubs met for breakfast before the N'Crowd's museum tour; at right, your editor's ride home. For the full story, see <http://www.kingswayrc.com/txt/polar09.html>. Photos by Tom Marsh



The Rock Springs & Sweetwater County Railroad

by Tom Wayburn

I was raised in a home with no tools. For that reason and perhaps for other reasons, for the first 30 years my interest in model railroads was confined to the “armchair”.

Now that I have begun modeling, I rarely look at a book, which is unfortunate because I am far behind the current technology in model railroading. Despite all that, I began building what has become the Rock Springs and Sweetwater County Railroad about ten years ago in a desultory sort of way without any help. It was based upon John Armstrong’s modification of Atlas N-107. I added mountains to hide the small-radius turns and added two straight tracks at the highest elevation that were supposed to meet NTRAK standards. Also, I added two very short narrow-gauge pieces that may be a little difficult to find. I purchased only one Nn3 freight car. The layout had to be free standing and portable.

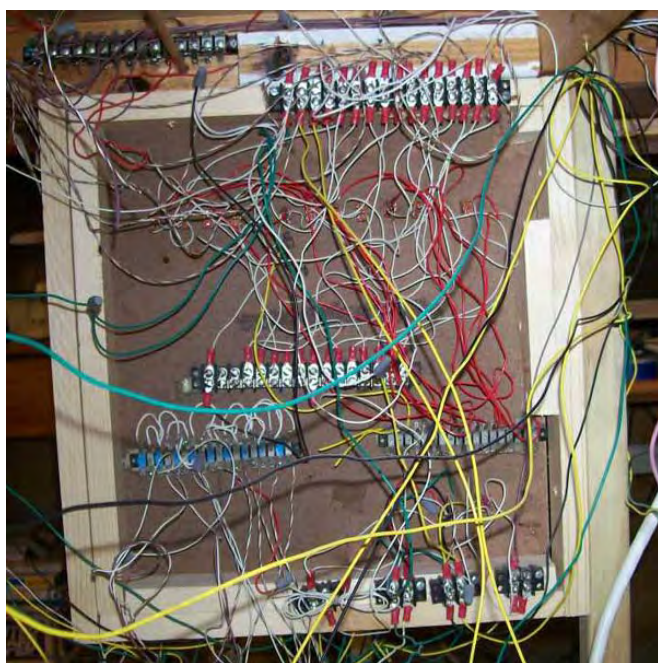
About two years ago, I sent some photos to Loren Neufeld that I described as representing good conception and bad execution. I knew Loren because of earlier involvement with the N Crowd. He noticed the bad colors immediately. He suggested that I find someone in the current N Crowd at Papa Ben’s who was not color blind and get some help.

On the day I visited the old layout on South Blvd., Steve Lancaster was working on the scenery all by himself, a fairly typical circumstance in those days. Steve agreed to help with my railroad, and the two of us painted out all the old scenery and began again.

During the new construction, I built a few of the smaller DPM buildings. I added Walther’s Cornerstone roof details and window dressing from the internet. I modeled asphalt streets with vinyl spackle and added road markings using my computer’s printer and Chart Pak tape. Ted Davis thinks that Chart Pak tape looks too three dimensional, so I am considering printing all of my roads and parking lots using the method of trial and error to get the size and shape right with inverted color to save ink. The next time I will let the printings determine the widths and directions of the streets.

Early on I determined that I would not dwell upon any item of the construction that did not appear on the table top. The result is ragged carpentry and bad wiring. Despite my admiration of Steve Redd’s construction and Hugh Boyd’s control panels, I have persisted in my slipshod methods since I possess neither the skill nor the money to produce anything that I don’t find at least a little embarrassing. But, we’re among friends here. Right?

Sometime in July of 2008, a woman from Texas Children’s Hospital (TCH) called Papa Ben’s and asked Steve Lancaster, who answered the phone, to provide a small portable layout that could be moved from room to room for the benefit of children who could not visit the big layout on the ground floor. Steve suggested that we collaborate. After Hurricane Ike struck and Papa Ben’s moved, we could not find the



woman who spoke to Steve and no one at the hospital had ever heard of the project. It occurred to me that I might build a transition module and connect the Rock Springs to the TCH layout. I wanted a nearly square compact layout with the modules connected side to side rather than end to end, but I found minor differences in the relative heights of the three modules each time I bolted them together, which made it difficult to join the track and blend the scenery.

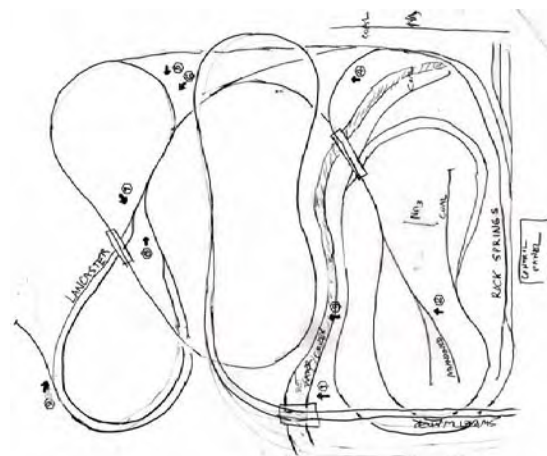
The metal bolts were enlarging the holes in the wood sides of the modules. I partially solved that problem with metal mending plates through which

holes were drilled with a Unibit. These holes do not change diameter, but a better tool would have made better holes. Since the layout room is only slightly larger than the layout, it was necessary to put all three modules on casters and play a game of movable squares to work on them. My casters don't have ball bearings, but I have plenty of WD-40.

Unfortunately, I forgot what I had done to color the water on the Rock Springs. Beavers bailed me out in one place and a sand bar in another.

Photos can be an important part of the fun. These photos were taken with a Kodak Easy Share, which is the digital equivalent of the old Kodak Brownie. It makes nice photos so long as you don't ask it to do something it can't do. If you want to see some more photos, see the ones with captions on my Houston Chronicle blog at <http://www.chron.com/commons/persona.html?newspaperUserId=TomWayburn>. Additional photos can be found on the N' Crowd Web site and on Facebook with many repetitions. Photos of the TCH layout can be found at <http://tomwayburn.net/texaschildrenshospital.htm>. A few photos of the first combined layout with the transition, which was never completed, are at <http://tomwayburn.net/rr1.htm>. Photos of the new combined layout with the new track plan upon which construction has just begun are at <http://tomwayburn.net/zrr2.htm>.

If I had this to do over again, I would be much more careful with the roadbed to make the levels level and the grades uniform except in the transitions to level ground. Finally, I would do whatever was necessary to increase the minimum radius of the curves. As much as I like the look of SD-40s, I should confine my motive power to locomotives with four axles.



SIZE from page 1

outs, and Abraham wanted No. 6, but we still came out way ahead.

As you can see in the photos, a single mainline runs the length of the shelf, terminating in a small yard at one end. One of the yard tracks is only accessible by switchback. There are four dedicated “industrial spurs”, but shuffling a few structures or simply relabeling the tracks could produce as many as ten different destinations for cars.

This was my first experience with powered switches and a diagramed control panel in many years, and my first ever in HO. Like that gigantic M-16 in '86, this oversized layout proved an adequate training device. One might say it was a real eye-opening experience. (Get it? Less squinting!)

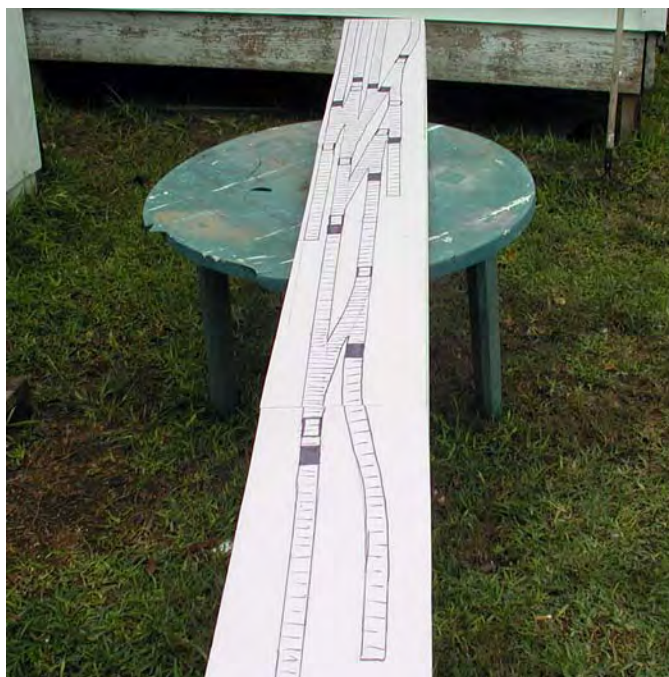
I used Peco machines with Atlas turnouts, requiring a sprung adapter plate. That was a \$10 lesson learned the hard way. Anybody want to buy some unsprung adapter plates? Four of the machines were Rix, which were just crowding up my storage space, so I threw them in just to get rid of them and save Abraham a few bucks.

I mounted the track directly on the foam base, and carved the roadbed into the foam by shaving down all of the adjacent real estate about a quarter inch. This may seem like an unnecessarily complicated way of laying a roadbed (because it is) when \$10 worth of cork would have made the job much simpler, but it's just something I wanted to try. And since it worked, I'm glad I did.

Uncoupling magnets were installed according to the plan, and two more were added to the additional tracks. I used the large Kadees that mount in the roadbed beneath the tracks, but Abraham has reported that they work too well: They tend to uncouple trains being pulled over them. Perhaps the between the rails magnets would have been better. Never having used magnets myself, I have no idea, but I certainly know to look out for this flaw in the future.

I've always said that anything bigger than N scale is cheating, and having worked in HO only confirmed this belief. However, like that monster gun from years past, it helped me better visualize the construction process while learning new skills and techniques.

I've since had several more offers to work in HO, and one in O gauge, and I look forward to each of these projects. As for myself, do I have any plans to change scales? Of course not. I'm no cheater.



Above, the track plan takes shape. Two below, control panel and scenery: The roadbed was carved into the foam base. Photos by Steve Lancaster



2009 fall layout tour review *by Eddie Aycock*

I tried to visit most of the “first time on the tour” layouts in the home layout tour guide put together for fall 2009 by San Jacinto Model Railroad Club. I usually hit the other layouts every three or four years to see what changes have taken place.

The first layout I visited was Bruce Sommer’s in Kingwood. His layout is HO scale in a 10-foot by 22-foot room with a duck-under to enter the room. His layout is in the beginning stages with Digitrax control. Buildings have been placed on the layout but no scenery. The neat thing on the layout was the two-color LEDs placed between the ties at each turnout to show the direction of the turnout.

Next was Steve Barkley’s HO layout in Beaumont. Steve is an electronics crazy man. He has over 200 turnouts on his layout that are all electronically controlled. He also has train detection on all of the mainline. He has the layout diagram on computer and controls the turnouts from the computer. He also has working semaphore signaling installed on the complete layout. The layout has steam and diesel locomotives running. The layout room is 17 feet by 24 feet with full scenery. This layout is definitely worth a visit if you have a chance.

The next layout visited was David Muloch’s HO layout in Sour Lake. He has a 20-foot by 30-foot outside building that houses the three deck layout. His scenery looks great, with a complete passenger station scene with a downtown area with full lighting. You can see many night scenes with the room lights turned out, including a building on fire with fire trucks fighting the fire in the downtown area. Definitely worth a visit.

The next layout was Ed Malish’s in Liberty. He has a 12-foot by 28-foot HO layout with fantastic scenery. He models the LaPorte area with towns East and West. The port scene, the mine scene and all the buildings on the layout were excellent. Ed is a railroad modeler instead of a model railroader.

Ed has full lighting on his layout that looks great with the lights turned out. Any visitor can learn some new modeling techniques from this fine layout.

Mark Vandedriessche’s HO layout was next on my tour. His layout is in a small outdoor building that is 12 feet by 16 feet and features multiple elevations for the mainline. The layout has a lot of scratchbuilt buildings and great scenery. He has some really nice backdrop scenery that makes his layout look bigger than it is. The layout has complete lighting in all locations that makes for a great night scene.

The next visit was to Harry Daniel’s N scale layout, which is in a room above a two car garage. It features three decks with full scenery in a desert setting. He has scratchbuilt buildings, trestles and scenery throughout the layout. There are two dormers in the room, and Harry has used one for a helix from the first level to the second level and the other for a helix from the second level to the third level. The layout is all-diesel with a lot of rolling stock. He has used Fox Valley metal wheels on all of the cars and cabooses that make the rolling stock look very authentic. This layout is definitely worth a visit.

Next up was Kevin Kohl’s HO/HOn3 scale layout that features authentic logging locations and scenes. Great track work and buildings on the layout are set off with very authentic scenery. This layout has Shay locomotives running with the logging equipment. It is in a 12-foot by 18-foot room with multiple elevations for operations.

I could expand on the visits to these layouts but could never equal a personal visit. Many modeling techniques and ideas can be learned from visiting the home layouts. The Houston area has a lot of good model railroaders that can inspire someone just starting in the hobby.

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Directions: 7390 Mesa Road. Exit the North Loop (IH 610) at McCarty Road
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mile on the right. Phone 713-631-6612

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TIME TABLE

February 17

N'Crowd Membership Meeting
Papa Ben's Train Place

February 20

Greater Houston Train Show,
Stafford Centre

February 20-21

World's Greatest Hobby on Tour,
Denver, Colorado

March 17

N'Crowd Membership Meeting
Papa Ben's Train Place

April 3

Flatonia Railroad Pavilion Party

April 10

Houston Railroad Museum Blue-
grass by the Tracks Railfair

April 21

N'Crowd Membership Meeting
Papa Ben's Train Place

May 19

N'Crowd Membership Meeting
Papa Ben's Train Place

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

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