



News from Houston N'Crowd



March/April 2013

# THE ORDERBOARD



Houston N'Crowd once again supported the Greater Houston Train Show, providing DC test tracks and snappy patter. Above, President Gordon Bliss and member Dejan Suskavcevic man the N'Crowd table at the Feb. 16 show. Thanks and congratulations again to San Jacinto Model Railroad Club for a show well done!



# "GREEN EYE" - CLEAR BLOCK

*by Gordon Bliss, President*

## Howdy, N'Crowd!

Well, the rodeo is in town but things are moving forward at the club layout. We have created a layout diagram with all locations labeled, and this will be used for identifying maintenance needs on the layout. Please use this diagram to list any problems so they can be fixed quickly.

I hope you were able to attend some of the many train shows lately, since two of them were here in Houston. We have photos and show reports elsewhere in the newsletter.

Remember, we are still looking for members to put on clinics before the meeting, nothing fancy necessary. And, as noted at the last meeting, March 15 marks the Houston N'Crowd's 35th year. For our March meeting, Harvey will pick up a cake and there may be a few surprises. So show up at the next meeting!

### Houston N'Crowd 2013 Officers and Volunteers

President ..... Gordon Bliss  
 Vice President ..... Richard Bartlett  
 Secretary ..... Harvey Stalarow  
 Treasurer ..... Eddie Aycok  
 Board Member (2013) ..... Joe Kingsberry  
 Board Member (2014) ..... Ray Byer  
 Board Member (2015) ..... Justin Corder  
 Editor & Webmaster ..... Tom Marsh

## Join us for a ride on the Texas State Railroad

To celebrate the club's 35th anniversary, N'Crowd Vice President Richard Bartlett is organizing a trip for N'Crowd members and friends on the historic Texas State Railroad. The proposed date is April 13, and the dogwoods should still be in bloom!

If we have a group of 20 or more, tickets will be discounted 10 percent (regular adult tickets are \$32) and TSRR will host a tour of the shops at Rusk and Palestine. We will start from Palestine, tour the Rusk locomotive and car shop during the scheduled lunch break, and return on the afternoon run to Palestine. The day's run from Palestine is tentatively scheduled to be powered by No. 400, TSRR's former Tremont & Gulf Mikado, which is returning to service after an overhaul. The train departs Palestine at 11 a.m.

Richard will help organize car pools, or you can make your own way to Palestine. Richard can also suggest lodging for people who want to stay overnight.

If you are interested in joining the fun, contact Richard by email at [generepair2@yahoo.com](mailto:generepair2@yahoo.com). He will update everyone at the March 20 membership meeting.



**N'Crowd Wednesday Membership Meetings:**  
 March 20 / April 17 / May 15

**BC&G Operating Sessions:**  
 Wednesday, April 3 / Saturday, May 4

Most activities take place at Papa Ben's Train Place, 4007-E Bellaire Blvd. Membership meetings start at 7 p.m. Saturday operating sessions start at 5 p.m. Wednesday operating sessions start at 7 p.m.



# N'Crowd marks 35 years!

Your Houston N'Crowd celebrated its 35th anniversary on Friday, March 15, and the next day several members showed up at the club layout for a great run day!

Club Vice President Richard Bartlett and President Gordon Bliss supplied most of the trains and, running the recently-completed full show loop, at one point had four trains running with a total of 145 cars. It was really something to watch two 43-car trains pass on the two mainlines behind Bayou City Yard!

Cake and drinks were provided and Gordon supplied pictures of every N'Crowd special run car, as well as pictures of past convention items.

Several members stopped by, including Eddie Aycock, Tom Wayburn, Barry Miles and Dan Gutierrez. Steve Lancaster and Harvey Stalworth were manning the store and popped in to check out the action from time to time.

N'Crowd member and SP super-detailer Joseph Kingsberry worked on putting decoders in some new locomotives. In addition, the BC&G turntable at the Hardy Street shops is working.

Other things have been going on with the N'Crowd and even more are planned in this 35th anniversary year. Richard hosted a great hands-on building clinic at Papa Ben's in late February. Joseph Kingsberry, James Seneff and Gordon Bliss attended and all three built buildings with Richard's assistance and the materials he supplied. James was working on a larger building and took it home to finish. Richard donated one-half of the \$10 clinic charge to the club.

Tom Wayburn also stopped by the store to see about the LED strip lighting for building interiors that Richard has been developing.

More clinics are planned throughout the year, and Richard is organizing a Texas State Railroad tour as well (see page 2). Be sure to come to the next N'Crowd meeting on March 20, check out the progress on the BC&G and find out what's happening next!



*At right top, N'Crowd members celebrate the club's 35th anniversary. Second from top, Richard's building clinic resulted in new structures for several members' layouts and a donation to the club. Two lower, Gordon's realignment of the track between Bayou City Yard and the lead to Union Station has opened up a longer run for the show loop, and allowed operation of multiple long trains at the 35th anniversary gathering. Photos by Gordon Bliss*





*Turnouts and slip switches may not be as hard to hand lay as you think. Photo by Dejan Suskavcevic*

## Building handlaid turnouts

*by Dejan Suskavcevic*

Handlaid turnouts are not easy to do in any scale, and downright difficult in N. It's not surprising that very few modelers choose to build their own. There are just too many critical pieces, tight clearances, mechanical and electrical considerations, and soldering is involved. There is also the issue of costly special tools and jigs, though most are not actually needed at all.

With some practice and patience, the benefits can be multiple. Properly built handlaid turnouts will look better and run smoother than most commercial turnouts - no oversized flangeways or wheels dropping through frogs. Building turnouts allows more flexibility in layout design as there is no need to conform to what is commercially available. Diverging track angles can be chosen to fit a specific need; several turnouts can be strung closely together to form tighter yard throats and ladders, as the points of one turnout can be placed right after the frog of another. Curved turnouts allow more

effective use of space and at the same time avoid S-curves. The cost is also a major benefit: Once the special tools, if any, are amortized, the cost per turnout comes down to just a couple of bucks. This, of course, doesn't include the time to build them, though I've read about modelers spending as much time tweaking commercial turnouts as it takes to hand lay one.

Best of all is the fun of doing it, and the satisfaction of seeing cars roll through them as smoothly as through straight track.

When I first started building turnouts, I only knew about Fast Tracks tools and jigs, so that's what I used. Later I learned about Proto:87, which specializes in more prototypical looking trackwork. Unlike Fast Tracks, they offer preformed frogs and point rails, which makes assembly literally a snap. This may be an excellent option for those who consider a full custom build too much of a challenge. A lot of information is



available on the Proto:87 ([www.proto87.com](http://www.proto87.com)) and Fast Tracks ([www.handlaidtrack.com](http://www.handlaidtrack.com)) websites. For additional assistance, many online forum posts and blog entries exist that discuss these and other techniques.

I started with a jig for #8 turnouts, a filing tool for frogs and points, and a bunch of PC-board ties. Later I added a stock rail tool for filing the base off stock rails where the point rails meet them. I don't do this anymore, but the tool is an excellent weight. FastTracks offers detailed instructions and videos on all phases of their build process, so I won't go into details here. In a nutshell, pieces of rail are filed and then soldered to PC-board ties. The top copper layer of the PC-board ties must be gapped to prevent electrical contact between opposite rails, and the frog must be electrically insulated from the rest of the turnout by cutting gaps in the rails. Other techniques using PC-board ties are quite similar. The tools and jigs make filing the rails and holding them in place for soldering easier.

Modelers that don't use jigs use printable templates available at the FastTracks site instead, then attach PC-board ties to the template with rubber cement or double sided tape. This is what I did for my first non-jig turnouts, but now I prefer to build my turnout in place, right on the layout. I've also altered the technique in several other ways: I don't use PC-board ties anymore except for throwbars, and I'm looking for an alternative there as well. The only soldering required now is to form the frog and attach the throwbar. Instead of PC-board ties I reuse the plastic ties from flex track. I place rails in existing channels where available, and I superglue the frog, the guard rails, and one closure rail to the ties. I remove the spike heads where point rails meet stock rails, but I don't file the base off the stock rail.

So far, this is a great simplification over the Fast Tracks process. Where it gets more complicated is forming the point rails, as I have to compensate for not removing the stock rail base. This requires filing a part of the point rail base so it can sit on top of the stock base, and yet leave enough to connect to the throwbar. To make the rail connection smooth, I also file the inside of the point rail head, so that it fits under the stock rail head, like on the prototype. When completed, it works great, but I'm still looking for a quick and easy point forming technique that produces consistent, repeatable results.

When I first started building turnouts, I wanted to try to do more complex trackwork as a challenge. As you can imagine, building crossings and slip switches is substantially harder than regular turnouts, with many more pieces that have to be precisely formed and placed. Any small misalignment can make the entire turnout inoperable. I built two double slip switches but I had so much trouble assembling the pieces to my satisfaction that I had to unsolder them all and start over.

Attaching throwbars also turned out to be a major problem. Even though these two slips are now on the layout, functional and quite reliable, I wasn't planning to repeat the experience. However, with the improved building techniques, I decided to give slip switches another try on a passenger terminal throat module that includes a crossing surrounded by three double slip switches, which I showed at our February meeting. Although this is still a work in progress, the current results are promising, and I'm planning an update once it's more complete.

*Here's a track job for someone to tackle in N Scale - Dejan will no doubt offer moral support! Photo by Tom Marsh*



# Dallas Area Train Show: worth the trip!

by James Senneff Jr./photos by Tom Marsh

Happy railroading, N'Crowders! N'Crowd President Gordon Bliss asked me to write an article about the Dallas Area Train Show, which took place in late January in Plano. This is my first article so please don't shoot the messenger.

I want to start off by saying that having teenage boys playing sports, I have not been able to go to any train shows in the last two years. This show was fun and I hope that I will be able to go to more of them in the coming year. For instance, the Temple Model Train Show will be held this September.

Well, I digress; sorry about that, back to the matter at hand. I drove to Gordon's house from Cypress and we piled into the Ford F-150. We picked up Justin Coder on the way at about 6:30 a.m. and continued our four-plus hour drive to Plano. It was a little cold and a little foggy. We were all hoping the sky would clear, and it did, turning into a nice sunny day for traveling.

We did a little railfanning on the way up. Gordon pointed out a caboose, passenger car and little depot on the hill to the right of us as we traveled north on I-45 around the Trumbull Rd. exit a little south of Ferris. They were not in the best of condition, but it was nice to see them anyway. A while later we in Plano and headed to the Plano Centre.

When you come into the convention center there is a wide hallway that goes around the main room. Numerous vendors had tables set up with their wares in the hallway. Off of the hallway, little conference rooms

also had vendors. All kinds of stuff was for sale: memorabilia, train sets, individual cars, engines, books, etc., in all scales and with a lot of different railroad names. I was able to pick up some cars to help build up my roster. Justin found a Rio Grande engine after a little bargaining and a few other items. Gordon "Mr. Santa Fe" found his 2013 Santa Fe calendar. He also picked up some nice John Winfield Santa Fe prints; I was a little jealous (just kidding).

The Plano Centre has a food court inside and outside in a courtyard they had a little kiddie train ferrying kids around. What memories that brought back for some of us. N'Crowd members Ted Davis and Tom Marsh were also roaming the halls.

We ventured into the main room, where we saw fellow model railroaders Mike Businger and Mike Bedford. We saw some neat N scale layouts built by various clubs. There was also more shopping to be done in the main room. We had a lot of fun going through the main room. For others, there were several clinics.

At one point, Gordon had a circle of people around him talking trains and layouts. He was talking to John McBee, Steve Marquez and two other gentlemen. It was as if I went back in time and there was Gordon, like King Arthur, with the Knights of the Round Table. After King Gordon was done we were all hungry and having accomplished what we wanted to at the show, we left and went in search of food.

As we were driving we saw a ray of sunshine for

*The Dallas Area Train Show is sponsored annually in January by the North Texas Council of Railroad Clubs. The show has been held for over 30 years; the current venue is the Plano Centre.*







*Left above, a scene on a modular narrow gauge layout on display at the 2013 Dallas Area Train Show. At right, one of the railroads on the layout tour held during the show was this superb recreation of the Spokane, Portland and Seattle in N scale. Below, the Dallas area offers many railfanning opportunities; this busy scene is at Dallas Union Terminal.*



lunch: In-N-Out Burger, in Texas, how could it be? We had lunch. In-N-Out Burger reminded me of my time spent in California before kids.

We went to Discount Model Trains in Addison north of Dallas and picked up a few things, then it was time for some more railfanning. We went to Fair Park, location of the Age of Steam museum near the Cotton Bowl. We saw two steam engines, a UP Big Boy and a Frisco Northern. The steamers looked to have been repainted but were still without road numbers or railroad markings. The Big Boy looked to have some parts taken off to prepare it to be moved to the museum's new location in Frisco.

We also saw a Pennsylvania Railroad GG-1 and an F9-A in Santa Fe warbonnet paint scheme. In the fenced area we saw a Baldwin VO1000, tank car, Railway Express Truck, a small building, three passenger cars and some signals. Slightly south of Fair Park we saw a private train collection with four Amtrak passenger cars, an open platform business car painted

in the Chicago & North Western scheme, some sort of crane and two small switchers with white cabs and purple bodies. Gordon told us a story about a time in the past when he saw this collection and helped remove graffiti off some of the Amtrak cars. He was able to ride the car the next trip. Some guys just have all the luck.

It was starting to get late so we headed for home, with more chances for railfanning. South of Dallas on the west side of I-45 there is a UP intermodal yard. We were only able to see the truck storage yard from the freeway and even that is huge. For those Santa Fe fans, a Santa Fe caboose sits on the west side of the road in Corsicana.

I want to thank Gordon and Justin for having me along; going to the Plano train show with fellow model railroaders and friends was fun. It was a great chance to have interesting conversations and good times with fellow model railroaders discussing layouts, experiences and model railroading. Try it - you never know what fun things might happen on the way!

**Houston N'Crowd  
Membership Meeting Report  
Feb. 20, 2013  
Prepared by Harvey Stalarow - Secretary**

**Meeting called to order at 7:01 p.m.:**

One guest - Farrell Pitts - and 15 members present.

An operations clinic was presented by Gordon Bliss and Eddie Aycock. Dejan Suskavcevic conducted a show and tell about his hand built turnouts. Vice President Richard Bartlett plans to hold his building clinic on Saturday, Feb. 23, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Treasurer Eddie Aycock reported that the treasury had \$11,699.07 in cash on hand. The CD is held at \$4,804.08.

**Old Business:**

Four N'Crowd members went to the Plano Train show. A report was made on the Zube Park operations day. Three N'Crowd members went to the Reliant Train show.

The prize drawing was held. Tom Wayburn and Joe Kingsbury won a pick up tool provided by Richard Bartlett.

**New Business:**

President Gordon Bliss announced that Tom Wayburn printed the club's track diagram with the names of the towns. This will be used for op sessions. The diagram can also be used for maintenance by noting problems on the diagram. The diagram will be on the back of the layout room door. Al Hague is looking for members to tackle areas on the layout needing work. This work includes scenery, electrical and track work.

Gordon announced that he found more old BC&G decals.

Al presented BC&G brown and blue hoppers that he offered to sell to the club. Mike Bodak made a motion to purchase the hoppers for \$5.00 each. Motion seconded and passed.

Steve Lancaster announced that Editor Tom Marsh needed articles or there would be no new *Orderboard*.

Gordon announced that the 35th anniversary is approaching. Al talked about past anniversaries. Harvey will get a cake from Moeller's Bakery.

The next operating session will be the first Saturday in March.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:07 p.m.



## TIME TABLE 2013

**March 20**

N'Crowd Membership Meeting at Papa Ben's Train Place, 7 p.m.

**April 3**

Wednesday BC&G Operating Session, 7 p.m.

**April 17**

N'Crowd Membership Meeting at Papa Ben's Train Place, 7 p.m.

**May 4**

Saturday BC&G Operating Session, 5 p.m.

**May 11**

National Train DAY

**May 15**

N'Crowd Membership Meeting at Papa Ben's Train Place, 7 p.m.

**June 5**

Wednesday BC&G Operating Session, 7 p.m.

**June 19**

N'Crowd Membership Meeting at Papa Ben's Train Place, 7 p.m.

**June 26-30**

N-Scale Enthusiast National Convention, Milwaukee

**July 6**

Saturday BC&G Operating Session, 5 p.m.

# THE ORDERBOARD *from Houston N'Crowd*

**Tom Marsh, Editor**

Published fairly regularly for members and friends of N'Crowd Model Railroad Society, Inc., Houston, Texas.

Send newsletter contributions to:

tom@houstonNcrowd.org.

Please note: We reserve the right to edit submissions for clarity and length.

**Visit our Web site:**

**[www.houstonNcrowd.org](http://www.houstonNcrowd.org)**

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