



News from Houston N'Crowd



May/June 2016

THE ORDERBOARD



Gordon Bliss conducted a clinic on locomotive maintenance at the N'Crowd's May meeting. Get busy with the N'Crowd this year: Check the calendar on the back page for upcoming meetings, activities and events!

"GREEN EYE" - CLEAR BLOCK

by Samuel Townsel II, President

The dog days of summer are approaching!

With Memorial Day behind us and the children out of school, summer is finally here!

For most adults, Memorial Day marks the countdown for summer vacations to the local beach or somewhere that you need to knock off your bucket list! For railfans, summer 2016 has some fantastic opportunities to get away and see some rail action outside of southeast Texas.

For N-scalers, the 24th National N Scale Convention is being held in Overland Park, Kansas, just outside of Kansas City on June 29 through July 3. During the convention, there will be a tour of the Union Pacific Railroad Museum in Council Bluffs, Iowa, home layout tours and dinner on the Kansas City Southern passenger train. Probably the best part is attendees will be at the center of the universe when it comes to Class I rail traffic in America. Union Pacific, BNSF, Norfolk Southern, Kansas City Southern and Canadian Pacific all have one or more yards in the Kansas City area. In my opinion, the main attraction is the triple overpass at Sante Fe Junction. A good friend informed me that if a train is not moving through the junction every three to five minutes, something is wrong in the country!

Also coming up this summer is The Denver Post Cheyenne Frontier Days Train, which will run on July 23. Tickets for this popular Union Pacific excursion train from Denver to Cheyenne are being sold by lottery due to high demand. As an extra cherry on top, Union Pacific recently announced that instead of the pair of E9 diesels that have usually powered the excursion train in recent years, 2016's point power will be none other than Union Pacific's recently-refurbished FEF class 4-8-4 No. 844! That in and of itself is enough to make you change your flight plans from Kansas City. If you are fortunate enough to get a ticket to board the excursion train, you will ride in style from Denver Union Station to Cheyenne and back. In addition, there is a barbecue lunch feast, a rodeo in

Cheyenne and a visit to the Old West Museum in Frontier Park. It almost wants to make me change my plans!

However, if you are unable to participate in either of these summer activities, I encourage you all to take a trip to Rosenberg or your favorite railfanning location. If you are as into modern power as I am, keep an eye out for brand new Tier 4 compliant locomotives on both BNSF and Union Pacific. The days are long so why not spend some time watching trains? Or maybe it's time to start or get some work done on your own model railroad.

Either way, happy railroading!

Samuel

Railfanning around Houston

by Gordon Bliss

My job has me driving around town, and sometimes this puts me near rail yards and other points of interest. Here are some of my most recent sightings.

On FM 521 (Almeda Rd.) just north of FM 2234 near the Akzo Nobel plant I found a wide vision caboose with no graffiti with reporting marks SRRX 98196 most likely being used as a shoving platform. In Humble on E. Main St. at the tracks I found a burro crane off loading some beams.

In Old Town Spring across the tracks from Puffabelly's Old Depot Restaurant is a sheet metal building with a chain link fence around it where Union Pacific stores its business car *Arden*. I was lucky to catch the shed doors open the day I drove by.

While meeting a friend at the Amtrak station I saw one of the new baggage cars featured in the January/February issue of *The Orderboard*.

These are just a few of the finds that I caught while driving around, so keep your eyes open; you never know what you're going to see!



N'Crowd Wednesday Membership Meetings:
May 18 / June 15 / July 20 / August 17 / September 21

BC&G Operating Sessions Even Months 1st Sunday:
June 5 / August 7 / October 2 / December 4

Most activities take place at Papa Ben's Train Place, 4007-E Bellaire Blvd. Our monthly membership meetings start at 7 p.m. Sunday Ops Sessions start at 5 p.m. Come early to join us for dinner!

**Houston N'Crowd
Membership Meeting Report
April 20, 2016
Prepared by Tom Marsh - Editor**

President's Report: President Samuel Townsell II called the meeting to order at 7:11 p.m. and welcomed all members in attendance.

One door prize was presented; Steve Lancaster was the winner of the "Treasure Box", which was filled with unique and wonderful items that no model railroader should be without.

Vice President's Report: VP Harvey Stalarow had no report.

Treasurer's Report: Treasurer Eddie Aycock reported cash on hand is \$11,092; CD is at \$4,819. The treasury is ahead \$273 for the year after collection of dues and paying outstanding invoices.

Secretary's Report: Secretary James Senneff, Jr. not present; Tom Marsh substituting. Sixteen members in attendance: John Sweigart, Richard Bartlett, Randy Ollett, Harvey Stalarow, Gordon Bliss, Dejan Suskavcevic, Joseph Kingsberry, Amy Wayburn, Tom Wayburn, Eddie Aycock, Ray Byer, Tom Marsh, Steve Lancaster, Vincent Walker, Samuel Townsell II, Ted Davis.

New Business: NWX will hold a swap meet at Northwest Mall on Saturday, Aug. 13, 2016. People are invited to bring portable and/or modular railroads to set up and run in the mall. May swap meet at Gordon Bliss's house will not take place. Rail and road trip to Louisiana Railroad Days Festival was a success; everyone had a good time.

Upcoming Meetings and Events: Next meeting will be May

18 at Papa Ben's. Joe Kingsberry and Gordon Bliss will present a clinic on locomotive maintenance.

NMRA LSR Division 8 clinics are held the second Saturday of each month at Bayland Park on Bissonnet St. in southwest Houston. See *The Orderboard* for upcoming clinic topics.

Members present commended John Sweigart for all of the volunteer hours he has put in on weekends operating the layout for shop visitors.

Old Business: Code of Conduct is still awaiting board action. Members participating in the BC&G April 3 operating session had a good time, although there were some electrical problems in Austin. Ray Byer is troubleshooting. Members present discussed removal of long siding turnout embedded in street scenery. Ray Byer and Gordon Bliss will make a recommendation.

Bad order locomotives should be reported to Joe Kingsberry and/or Gordon Bliss. If bearings begin to squeal, bad order the unit by placing it in the locomotive servicing area and make a note on the bulletin board in the layout room. Joe has overhauled four locomotives this month.

An updated club roster will be posted on the bulletin board in the layout room. Meeting closed with a discussion of JMIRI WiFi smart phone throttles, which are coming into wider use.

Motion to adjourn made by Tom Marsh, seconded by Harvey Stalarow and passed without dissent. Meeting adjourned at 8:06 p.m.



N'Crowd member Gordon Bliss spotted these items of interest around the Houston area. See page 2 for more information.

Houston N'Crowd 2016 Officers and Volunteers

President Samuel Townsell II
Vice President Harvey Stalarow
Secretary James C. Senneff, Jr.
Treasurer Eddie Aycock

Board Member (2016) Al Hague
Board Member (2017) Richard Bartlett
Board Member (2018) Joe Kingsberry
Layout Master Al Hague
Editor & Webmaster Tom Marsh

Trains highball on the BC&G

by Gordon Bliss; photos by Tom Marsh

We had a good crew show up to run trains at our June 5 operating session. Randy, Samuel and Alan ran the yards and Fred, Dejan, Tom, John and I ran the road trains.

Both of the Bayou City & Gulf's crack passenger trains, *The Bluebonnet* and *The Texas*

Special, ran across the railroad to serve our local communities. We ran a reefer block and a coal train and several general merchandise trains. We even managed a three way meet at Austin!

A good time was had by all. You should join us for the next session on August 7!



Floods hit 24 Hours @ Saginaw train count

by Tom Marsh

The 11th annual 24 Hours @ Saginaw train-watching event attracted over 100 people despite wet weather early in the event and a depressed level of rail traffic through the normally busy junction. The North Texas Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society organizes the event on Memorial Day weekends with the assistance of the Saginaw Chamber of Commerce. The chamber maintains offices in a restored Southern Pacific station that has been relocated to a spacious site at the junction.

The official count of rail moves through the Saginaw Interlocking topped out at 33, the lowest number in the event's 11-year history. The count is taken from 7 p.m. Friday to 7 p.m. Saturday. Flooding and washouts along lines to the south affected rail traffic in the Fort Worth area, and this year only five moves through the interlocking took place over the event's first 12 hours. The pace picked up around mid-morning on Saturday, and the day wrapped up with a 6:55 p.m.

BNSF light engine move through the interlocking.

24 Hours @ Saginaw attracts railfans of all ages, and at times this year almost as many pre-teens and teens were wielding cameras as were veteran photographers. In addition, a number of families pitched small tents on the grounds during the event.

Despite the low train count, North Texas Chapter provided plenty of other entertainment, including a police dog demonstration conducted by a BNSF Railway K-9 team and a hands-on (and loud) demonstration that outlined the development of railroad locomotive air horns. Around a dozen photographers and speakers presented traditional and digital slide shows covering a wide range of Texas and other rail subjects. One of these was an informative presentation on how doctors and surgeons employed by the railroads changed industrial health care practices in the U.S.

The 2017 24 Hours @ Saginaw train-watching event will take place May 26/27.



24 Hours @ Saginaw takes place in Saginaw, Texas, a community with a population of just over 20,000 located about 11 miles from downtown Fort Worth. Founded in 1833, the town became an important transportation and grain storage/transfer center with the coming of three railroads in the late 1880s. These were the Chicago, Rock Island & Gulf (now Union Pacific); the Gulf, Colorado & Santa Fe (now BNSF); and the Fort Worth & Denver City (also now BNSF). Saginaw is one of the busiest junctions in Texas.



Air horn collector and BNSF photographer Ken Fitzgerald demonstrates the sounds generated by various locomotive horns. Ken's demonstration includes information about the development of locomotive horns and the companies that manufacture them.



The Saginaw Chamber of Commerce welcomes railfans to 24 Hours @ Saginaw with these signs. The North Texas Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society organizes the event with assistance from the chamber of commerce. All three lines controlled by the Saginaw Interlocking are usually busy during the train-watching event. This UP train, with a pair of EMD SD70M locomotives leading three lease units, is moving through the interlocking on former Rock Island trackage.

Six Kansas City Southern GE ES44AC locomotives (two are out of sight) at the head of a grain train make an impressive sight, and an even more impressive sound. The KCS is not a regular visitor to Saginaw, but flooding in other parts of the state in recent weeks has altered the usual traffic patterns as railroads attempt to keep trains moving around trouble spots.





The Union Pacific engineer at the controls of this trio of SD40N locomotives hustles his train through the junction at speed, giving the gathered crowd some friendly blasts on the horn in the process. The locomotives are recent rebuilds of EMD SD40-2 units. The lead unit, No. 1758, was originally delivered by EMD in 1980. The UP's modernization program includes installation of remanufactured or reconditioned prime movers and other major components, along with electrical upgrades and refurbished cabs.

The clouds and drizzle cleared Saturday afternoon, bringing out the best in a dusty pair of bright orange BNSF GE ES44C4 locomotives rumbling through the junction. Younger photographers at the event favored video cameras over the still models used by many of the older fans.





Amtrak's northbound Heartland Flyer glides through the Saginaw Interlocking on its evening journey to Oklahoma City. The train departs Fort Worth daily at 5:25 p.m. The consist for this May 28 is NPCU "Cabbage" 90222, Superliner I coach 34016, Superliner I snack/coach 35008, Superliner I coach 34010 and GE P42DC 44, operating in push mode. The Oklahoma Department of Transportation, working with its Texas counterpart, recently issued a "request for qualifications" from providers interested in operating the train, although this does not necessarily mean Amtrak will be replaced.

Last move: Just five minutes before the 7 p.m. end of the 2016 24 Hours @ Saginaw, a BNSF NRE 3GS21B GenSet locomotive leads a rebuilt GP39-3 on a light engine move through the interlocking. The pair is headed to tie up at BNSF's North Yard.



High water damages UP Brazos River bridge

by Tom Marsh

Union Pacific's Sunset Route is shut down at the rain-swollen Brazos River crossing in Richmond, Texas, as scouring of the eastern-most bridge pier and the river's east bank resulted in the pier shifting and settling. The river crested at a record 54.8 feet at Richmond on June 2.

The bridge had been under close observation by the railroad due to the record water level and traffic over it was halted June 3. Amtrak had already started bussing *Sunset Limited* passengers east of San Antonio on May 31 due to widespread flooding in the region.

Traffic that normally would use the former SP line, including Amtrak's *Sunset Limited*, is being re-routed through the Houston area via BNSF to bypass the UP's Brazos River crossing. Several miles downstream of the UP bridge, the BNSF bridge over the Brazos sustained no damage in the recent deluge. Amtrak service over the detour route began June 10.

Inspection and repair of the UP bridge began shortly after the river crested. Repairs are expected to take until at least June 23. These photos were taken June 11.



LCL

Less than Car Load: a few notes from your editor

Some things remain the same: In 1908, English journalist G. K. Chesterton had this to say about hanging about and watching trains.

“[M]ost of the inconveniences that make men swear or women cry are really sentimental or imaginative inconveniences - things altogether of the mind. For instance, we often hear grown-up people complaining of having to hang about a railway station and wait for a train. Did you ever hear a small boy complain of having to hang about a railway station and wait for a train? No; for him to be inside a railway station is to be inside a cavern of wonder and a palace of poetical pleasures. Because to him the red light and the green light on the signal are like a new sun and a new moon. Because to him when the wooden arm of the signal falls down suddenly, it is as if a great king had thrown down his staff as a signal and started a shrieking tournament of trains. I myself am of little boys’ habits in this matter. They also

serve who only stand and wait for the two fifteen. Their meditations may be full of rich and fruitful things... An inconvenience is only an adventure wrongly considered.”

Need rocks? N’Crowd member Don Papesh has found a product he likes and wanted to let us know about it. Don has used quite a few of the “Rubber Rocks” from Cripplebush Valley Models. According to the company’s website, Rubber Rocks are not molds, but rather textured, natural rubber castings that are ready to paint and install.

In addition to being lighter in weight than plaster castings, Rubber Rocks are flexible, feature more detail and can be easily trimmed to size with scissors. They are available in a range of sizes simulating various rock types for different applications, including canyon and quarry walls, sheer cliffs, stream beds and more. One product is called “Santa Fe Canyon”. For additional information, go to www.cripplebush.net.

HOUSTON N’CROWD 2016 TIME TABLE - SUBJECT TO CHANGE

May 18

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

June 5

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

June 11

NMRA LSR Div 8 Clinic, Bayland Park, Houston: Preparing NMRA contest entries

June 15

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

June 29 - July 3

NSE 2016 National N Scale Convention, Kansas City

July 9

NMRA LSR Div 8 Clinic, Bayland Park, Houston: Installing DCC Decoders (bring your loco and decoder)

July 20

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

July 30-31

14th Annual San Antonio Model Railroad Association Family Summer Train Show, Austin Hwy Event Center

August 7

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

August 13

Northwest Crossing Operating Model Railroad Club Great Swap-O-Rama and Train Layout Show, Northwest Mall

NMRA LSR Div 8 Clinic, Bayland Park, Houston: LEDs for Model Railroading

August 17

N’Crowd Membership Meeting at Papa Ben’s Train Place, 7 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

Copyright © 2016 N’Crowd Model Railroad Society, Inc.