



News from Houston N'Crowd



THE ORDERBOARD

January/February 2016



We ate, drank and were merry!

If you weren't able to join us for this year's holiday bash, you missed a good one! Thanks go out once again to the Walkers for hosting the

December party, and to everyone who made a contribution to the goodies served. Nobody left hungry! See you next year.

But wait, there's more...

2016 is shaping up to be a busy year for the N'Crowd, providing numerous opportunities to avoid the unavoidable: election-year politics and all that goes along with them!

See the calendar on the back page: In addition to our monthly membership meetings, we will have clinics and operating sessions on the BC&G, along with the opportunity to participate in the monthly clinics being held by the NMRA Lone Star Region Division 8. The Greater Houston Train Show takes

place at the Stafford Centre on Feb. 20 (volunteers to man our table needed!), and train shows in New Braunfels, San Antonio, Temple, the DFW area and even Oklahoma City provide a great reason for railfan road trips through the course of the year.

We are also planning a combination bus/Amtrak trip to the Louisiana Railroad Days Festival in DeQuincy on April 9, and a return to Zube Park and the Houston Area Live Steamers operation later in the year. So cast your vote with us!

"GREEN EYE" - CLEAR BLOCK

by Samuel Townsel II, President

Looking back, then ahead

My father's retirement was one of the best things that could have happened to me as a young man. Moving away from the Dallas-Fort Worth area back to our family farm in rural Arkansas in 1996 gave me an appreciation for hard work, the peacefulness of the country, developing relationships with people and TRAINS! Located about seven miles northeast of Texarkana, Ark., my family farm's western property line borders the double mainline of the Union Pacific Railroad for about a quarter of a mile. As the saying goes, "The rest is history", and since I have the time and space, I might as well tell you that history!

Originally from Michigan, I lived in several large cities where my love for high-rise buildings sparked my passion for architecture. Moving to Arkansas didn't dampen that passion, but watching 10 to 15 trains a day going to and from Texarkana piqued my curiosity as to how these large machines worked. What was in those railcars and where could they possibly be going? I found myself creating a small pathway from my front gate down to the roadbed to watch Union Pacific's SD9043MAC, C44-9W, SD70M and AC4400CW locomotives roll by. Amtrak's *Texas Eagle* blew by going at least 50 mph, and it always amazed me. If I couldn't make it to the tracks before the locomotives passed, I would just run to the property line and wave to the engineers and conductors as the trains rolled by.

One day as I was outside watching a train roll by, my father walked up and asked me why I was just standing there watching the train pass. I told him that I really didn't know. I just liked watching them and wondered where they were going and what was in those cars and how it all worked. He said he knew a friend down at Union Supply (a meat, feed and grocery supply store in downtown Texarkana) who knew someone that worked for Union Pacific, and he said we'd see if we could catch up with him.

On one of our routine Saturday drives a couple of weeks later, my father took me to Texarkana Union Station, where I met Mr. Williams, an engineer for Union Pacific. A few steps away was a fairly new EMD SD9043MAC. Thanks to Mr. Williams, I was able to tour inside and around the "Big Mac" as he called it.

Shortly after that, I bought my first HO scale train set, set up the track on a 4x8 plywood board and built my fictitious city named Samtown!

Unfortunately, a few months before my high school graduation, we suffered a house fire that destroyed everything but my fondness for trains. So it wasn't until after I completed college, married my beautiful wife Charleen and bought my second house that I knew I could plan, develop and build my permanent layout. Interested in getting more action in the available space, I decided to model in N scale and bought my first locomotive, a Kato AC4400CW, and six boxcars in March 2011. Shortly thereafter, as a Father's Day gift to myself and with a little persuasion from Gordon Bliss, I joined the N'Crowd. My membership has been a tremendous help to me in many ways beyond the world of modeling.

I have lived in the Houston area since 2000 and I attended Prairie View A&M University. After obtaining my Masters of Architecture, I married my wife and we now have four children. My first and second sons have been bitten by the train bug. Other than model railroading, I enjoy spending time with my family, railfanning, playing my saxophone and travelling. I take particular interest in model track planning. With my own layout, the "Ark-La-Tex Line", I model modern-era Union Pacific operations from Avondale, La., west to Houston and north to North Little Rock, Ark.

Now on my second Ark-La-Tex Line home layout, I am using everything that I have learned about how to plan and build a layout from members of the N'Crowd. The knowledge gleaned took something that appeared to be daunting and made it clear and achievable.

Stepping up from my previous role as vice president, I look forward as president to working with all of our club members not only to make other people's goals a reality but mine as well. A few things in particular I want to do is to attract young people and help them develop in the hobby, increase participation by all club members, and continue to have great operating sessions as well as informative clinics!

For now, Happy New Year, everyone, and Happy Railroading!

Samuel

A note from Past President Vincent Walker

I would like to thank all of you who participated in the club's activities while I was president, and I hope you think I represented the club well, along with your help, when I was in office. Big thanks go out to Ray Byer, Gordon Bliss, Allyn Pearlman and Tom Marsh; these guys made sure the tracks were aligned and I had a green light. Let's also remember those members who have left us and moved on to a better place, as they say, during my time as president.

Now we have a new president coming in, so let's give him all our support and help; as a young family man, his schedule may not be as flexible as mine was.

We always need folks to step up and volunteer to run trains at Papa Ben's on Saturdays, so please think about this and take the opportunity at any upcoming meeting to commit to a few hours each month.

As for me, my tracks are aligned for the round-house and not the scrap track. It's been fun and I will see you at club meetings, operating sessions and Saturday runs on the BC&G!

Happy Railroading,

Vincent

Planning underway for April excursion to Louisiana Railroad Days Festival

We are in the early planning stages for an N'Crowd trip to the Louisiana Railroad Days Festival at the DeQuincy Railroad Museum on April 9, 2016. We are partnering with Gulf Coast Chapter - NRHS to organize the excursion. The festival takes place annually on the grounds of the museum, which is housed in a beautifully-restored former KCS passenger station.

We will travel by chartered bus to Louisiana, returning on Amtrak's *Sunset Limited*. Pricing has not been determined yet, but we expect the trip will cost approximately \$55 to \$75 per person, exclusive of food and beverages.

The tentative schedule appears below; we will have more information in the near future.

Dp. Houston 7:15 a.m.

Ar. DeQuincy 9:30 a.m.

Via Motorcoach

9:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

Tour DeQuincy Railroad Museum and Festival

Dp. DeQuincy 12:45 p.m.

Ar. Lake Charles 1:30 p.m.

Via Motorcoach

Dp. Lake Charles 1:55 p.m.

Ar. Houston 6:18 p.m.

Via Amtrak Train No. 1 Sunset Limited

Houston N'Crowd 2016 Officers and Volunteers

President Samuel Townsel 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



N'Crowd Wednesday Membership Meetings:
January 20 / February 17 / March 16 / April 20

BC&G Operating Sessions Even Months 1st Sunday:
February 7 / April 3 / June 5 / August 7 / October 2

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!

End of the line for Heritage Fleet baggage cars

by Tom Marsh



With the light catching the letterboard just right, Amtrak baggage car No. 1257's heritage becomes evident. The car was built as Santa Fe No. 3662 by ACF in 1955. Retired since this photo was taken in September 2013, this was one of the last ACF cars on the Amtrak roster.

New Viewliner II baggage cars have been spotted coming through Houston on Amtrak's *Sunset Limited*, and this probably means the end is near on the Sunset Route for the heritage and conversion cars that have been the mainstays of Amtrak's baggage car fleet over the past 45 years. New baggage cars have been in service on some eastern trains since March, and were spotted late last year on Amtrak's *Texas Eagle*.

As reported in the July/August 2014 issue of *The Orderboard*, Amtrak's new baggage cars are part of a \$298 million order for 130 single-level, long-distance passenger cars. Originally, Amtrak ordered 25 diners, 25 sleepers, 25 baggage-dormitory cars and 55 baggage cars; the passenger carrier since has adjusted the order

to include 70 baggage cars and only 10 baggage-dormitory cars. The cars are being built by CAF USA of Elmira, N.Y., an affiliate of Spain's Construcciones y Auxiliar de Ferrocarriles.

The Viewliner II baggage cars will displace Amtrak's aged fleet of heritage and conversion baggage cars, some of which are more than 65 years old. According to several sources, the Heritage baggage cars still in service are ex-Santa Fe cars built by Budd, with one exception, a car built by ACF. The conversion baggage cars were mostly rebuilt from retired Budd coaches also dating back to the 1950s and originally owned by Santa Fe, SP and UP. Amtrak's Beech Grove shops undertook the conversions during the 1990s.

Heritage Fleet dining cars, including some cars built for Southern Pacific's 1950 streamlined *Sunset Limited*, remain in service on eastern trains, including the *Crescent* out of New Orleans and the *Lake Shore Limited* out of Chicago. Some of the dining cars are older than the oldest Heritage baggage car. But get your photos and rides soon: Delivery of the new Viewliner II dining cars will see the 20 remaining older cars retired, effectively ending the Heritage era on Amtrak. Only a few specialty cars such as a single ex-Great Northern Budd Great Dome and the ex-Santa Fe Hi-Level *El Capitan* lounge cars (now branded Pacific Parlour for use on the *Coast Starlight*) will remain in Amtrak service.

Top, a new Amtrak Viewliner II baggage car is tucked in behind the locomotives leading the Sunset Limited out of Houston on Jan. 5, 2015. The Viewliner cross-section has been described as "wide-hipped". No models of the new cars are yet available.

Right middle two, contrast the cross-section of Viewliner No. 61054 with the slab sides of Heritage Fleet baggage car No. 1257, both being loaded at Houston's Amtrak station with luggage for points west. An Amtrak employee in Houston noted that the new baggage cars require a higher lift by staff to load luggage. In addition, the threshold plates are not flush with the floor, and during unloading luggage has to be lifted over the plate rather than slid over as with the older cars. Note also that Viewliner baggage doors swing inward rather than sliding out of the way of loading activities as they do on the older Heritage Fleet cars.

Right, Amtrak conversion baggage car No. 1705, seen here on the Sunset Limited in July 2015, is representative of the cars Amtrak converted for baggage and express service. Note the vestibule and single center baggage door. This car was built by Budd as Santa Fe coach No. 2851 in 1953.



An industry you can (mostly) model

by Tom Marsh

Here's an industry that lends itself well to modeling, although one aspect of operations may be a challenge to reproduce.

The ACG Materials rail facility in Cyril, Okla., was one of the prototype tour destinations during the 2015 Southern Plains N-Scale Convention, which is held each December in conjunction with the Oklahoma

City Train Show. The facility handles gypsum in various sizes and grades that is transferred from three nearby open-pit mines by bottom dump tractor-trailer rigs. Depending on the aggregate's characteristics, the product is loaded into either open or covered hoppers.

Cyril is on a former Frisco line now operated by shortline Stillwater Central Railroad.



Above and right top, operations at the Cyril facility are straightforward. Short cuts of hopper cars (six to eight on the day of our tour) are moved from a storage track to the loading track. Bottom-dump tractor-trailers drive up a ramp to a covered dump grating and drop their loads onto the conveyor, which carries the aggregate to the track and drops it into the hopper cars. During the loading operation, the railroad cars are moved slowly under the conveyor loading chute by a winch and cable car puller.

Right bottom, this may be the most challenging part of the operation to model. Once the cars in the cut are loaded, they are moved to a holding track where the cars are subsequently picked up by Stillwater Central. The car mover is a front-end loader shoving on a car side. This is also how cars are moved onto the loading track from the staging tracks on the other side of the facility. Both moves require the cut of cars to cross public roads, and the move is flagged by blocking the road with a pickup truck until the cars are on the crossing. The pickup driver then drives ahead of the moving cut, hops out of his truck and climbs onto a car, bringing the string to a halt by setting the hand brake. Now that's railroading action!



LCL *Less than Car Load: a few notes from your editor*

Volunteers needed for Greater Houston Train Show: Houston N'Crowd will participate in the 2016 San Jacinto Model Railroad Club's Greater Houston Train Show, which takes place Saturday, Feb. 20, at the Stafford Centre off Murphy Rd. The show is open to the public from 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

N'Crowd will have two tables again this year, one for our multi-gauge test track and the other for club literature. We'll be signing up volunteers at the January and February membership meetings to help set up, staff and tear down our display. We only need an hour or so of your time, so please offer to lend a hand!

Available exclusively from Eagle Lake Depot Museum, Inc.

Galveston, Harrisburg & San Antonio Refrigerator Cars

Limited Edition from Atlas O in 2-Rail or 3-Rail versions

For a minimum donation of \$75 (cash or check only), you can add this unique, limited-run O scale car to your collection. It will look great on your layout or, if you are not an O scale modeler, on your display shelf or mantle. The bright yellow GH&SA paint scheme is based on a photo in the archives of the Eagle Lake Depot Museum.



The best way to obtain your GH&SA reefer is to visit the Eagle Lake Depot Museum, which is open from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on the second and fourth Saturdays of each month. Contact the museum by email at kstavino@texas.net if you would like to arrange delivery; additional shipping charges will apply.

Eagle Lake Depot Museum, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization and donations to the museum may be tax deductible. Proceeds from the sale of the GH&SA refrigerator cars will be used to preserve and maintain the museum, and to educate visitors about the rich history of railroading in Eagle Lake and the surrounding area. For more information, go to: <http://eaglelakedepot.org>

Eagle Lake Depot Museum

**Museum: 322 East Main St.
Eagle Lake, Texas 77434**

**Mail: P.O. Box 596
Eagle Lake, Texas 77434**

HOUSTON N'CROWD 2016 TIME TABLE - SUBJECT TO CHANGE**January 20**

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

January 30-31

40th Annual San Antonio Model Railroad Association Jamboree & Train Show, Austin Highway Event Center

February 7

First BC&G Sunday Operating Session of 2016. Operating sessions start at 5 p.m.

February 13

NMRA LSR Div 8 Clinic, Bayland Park, Houston: Building the Gold Creek Timber Co. Layout

February 17

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

February 20

San Jacinto Model Railroad Club Greater Houston Train Show, Stafford Centre; volunteers needed to man the N'Crowd table.

February 20-21

World's Greatest Hobby on Tour, Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center, San Antonio

March 12

NMRA LSR Div 8 Clinic, Bayland Park, Houston: Graffiti on Railroad Cars (hands-on)

March 16

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

April 3

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

April 9

Trip to Louisiana Railroad Days Festival, DeQuincy, La.; bus out, Amtrak return

April 9

NMRA LSR Div 8 Clinic, Bayland Park, Houston: Make a Tree Flocking Machine

April 9-10

28th Annual New Braunfels Train Show Jamboree, New Braunfels Civic Center

April 20

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

May 14

NMRA LSR Div 8 Clinic, Bayland Park, Houston

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.

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 Highway Event Center

August 7

BC&G Sunday 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

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