



News from Houston N'Crowd



July/August 2017

THE ORDERBOARD



Samuel Townsel II



Tom Marsh

Inside this month:
Ark-La-Tex Returns
***Sunset Limited* Special Consist**
Street Running Finale



Gordon Bliss

"GREEN EYE" - CLEAR BLOCK

by Samuel Townsel II, President

The Ark-La-Tex Line is back!

After purchasing my new home in the summer of 2013, I was excited about finally being able to construct my N scale layout. My wife negotiated that the media room would become the layout's new home. So within a year I had the layout up and running, ready to start scenery.

However, as we know, life happens. The birth of our son caused a shift in priority when it came to space, and I was out of the media room and into the garage. Now, this move had both pros and cons for me as a model railroader.

Let's start with the cons first. The obvious issue is the fact that I was in the garage, but fortunately, I had a few things going in my favor. First my home faces the north so there is no direct sunlight heating the garage. Second, three walls of the garage and the ceiling are insulated so the space does not get as hot as most garages. However, I need to find a way to cool the space to a comfortable temperature, which will not be easy. The fix here is to insulate the garage door and buy some fans and a portable air conditioner. Next is the lighting. I will have to completely design proper lighting for the space. Again, not an easy task, and it

will require an electrician. Fortunately, I know someone who will help me tackle that project.

Now for the pros. The best thing about this move is that I have room for a layout twice as large as the layout I had in the media room. A model railroader's dream right? With this extra space, I have been able to expand my mainline length by actually running from Lake Charles, La., into Houston and up to North Little Rock, Ark., as I initially designed. The move also allows longer open running routes, two staging yards, and space to model Houston's Settegast Yard and my "Heritage Steam Shops" in Texarkana.

I started on the Ark-La-Tex Line in November 2016 and I am pleased to announce that I have constructed the benchwork for both decks and started track and wiring just in time for the arrival of my new Athearn Union Pacific Big Boy No. 4014; see the photos on page 4. My goal is to have the mainline operational by this fall's home layout tours in October/November. Come and check it out!

As always, Happy Railroading!

Samuel

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N'Crowd Wednesday Membership Meetings:
July 19 / August 16 / September 20 / October 18

N'Crowd Operating Sessions: First Sunday of even-numbered months. Watch your email for information.

Most activities take place at Papa Ben's Train Place, 4007-E Bellaire Blvd. Our monthly membership meetings start at 7 p.m. and are open to all. Operating sessions take place at various locations.



N'Crowd President Samuel Townsell has made a lot of progress on his Ark-La-Tex Line since the railroad's relocation to a new, larger space in his garage. The work seen here has been completed since November 2016. Samuel's goal is to have the mainline operational in time for the San Jacinto Model Railroad Club's fall home layout tours. Photos by Samuel Townsel II



Amtrak dispatches special cars for Oklahoma-Kansas test train

by Tom Marsh

Amtrak regularly utilizes the New Orleans - Los Angeles *Sunset Limited* to deadhead equipment between the the train's endpoints and intermediate stations. On Wednesday, June 7, the westbound *Sunset* carried a Genesis locomotive in Phase III heritage paint and four special cars assigned to a route extension test train that ran from Oklahoma City to Kansas City on June 9.

The June 7 *Sunset* was running ahead of schedule when it entered Union Pacific's Englewood Yard, but then sat on the main in the yard for 30-plus minutes waiting for an eastbound double stack train to clear the crossovers east of Tower 26. The double stack train had come through downtown on the passenger main then stopped before entering Englewood Yard, blocking by about three car lengths the crossovers used by Amtrak to access the passenger main. No. 2 finally arrived at the station 22 minutes late at 6:40 p.m., then lost more time, departing for San Antonio 27 minutes late at 7:22 p.m.

The heritage-scheme locomotive and four cars assigned to the test train were transferred to Amtrak's *Texas Eagle* at San Antonio for the trip to Fort Worth, where the equipment was placed on the *Heartland Flyer* for movement to Oklahoma City. The test train from OKC to Kansas City departed June 9 at 7:45 a.m., stopping at Guthrie, Perry and Ponca City, Okla., and Arkansas City, Wichita, Newton, Emporia, and Topeka, Kansas.

The special train, which operated as BNSF A-952-09, arrived in Kansas City at 5:30 p.m.

The equipment assigned to the test train has a varied history. No. 822, the P40 assigned to power the special train, was built for Amtrak by GE in 1993. Staff sleeper *Pacific Bend* was built by the Budd Co. for Union Pacific in 1950.

Viewliner sleeper *New River* was built for Amtrak by Amerail in 1996; the car's original name was *Palisades View*. Many of the original Viewliner I sleeping cars lost their original names during refurbishment over the years, but now are

Amtrak Train No. 1 *Sunset Limited* At Houston June 7, 2017

822 GE P40 Phase III heritage
13 GE P42DC
138 GE P42DC
61019 Viewliner baggage
39021 Superliner transition sleeper/dorm
32082 Superliner sleeper
38004 Superliner diner
33033 Superliner Sightseer lounge
31016 Superliner coach baggage
34064 Superliner coach
10020 *Pacific Bend* Budd heritage sleeper
62043 *New River* Viewliner sleeper
10031 *Ocean View* dome lounge
10004 *American View* Viewliner inspection/sleeper



This view of Amtrak's westbound *Sunset Limited* departing Houston June 7 offers a comparison of car cross-sections. Bringing up the rear is Amtrak's "new" inspection car *American View*.

receiving new “River” names to align them with new Viewliner II sleepers being built by CAF in New York.

Ocean View is a former “Great Dome” built by Budd in 1955 for Great Northern’s premier *Empire Builder* streamliner. As originally operated by GN, the dome section of this car was open only to sleeping car passengers, although the lower level lounge was open to all. Coach passengers had

access to dome seats in the *Empire Builder*’s multiple dome coaches.

Carrying the rear markers on the *Sunset* and the test special was Viewliner inspection/sleeper *American View*. This car was built in 1988 as No. 2301, the second of two prototype Viewliner sleeping cars. For a time it carried the name *Eastern View*, but was renamed *American View* after being rebuilt for inspection train service in 2014.



Arrival and departure: Above, Amtrak Train No. 1 heads through the Tower 26 interlocking on its way to Houston’s Amtrak station. In the consist are four cars assigned to an Oklahoma City to Kanas City test run on BNSF. Below, No. 1 heads west out of Houston on Wednesday, June 7.



*An industry you can model***Houston street-running finale***by Tom Marsh*

The last revenue train backs its way down the Commerce St. street trackage on June 3, 2017. The 128-year-old line most likely will be abandoned by current owner Union Pacific.

On Saturday, June 3, 2017, the last true street-running freight line in Houston saw what was probably its final revenue run after 128 years in service. On that day, a train powered by a vintage EMD switcher moved a pair of cars, one a revenue car and one not, from the former San Antonio & Aransas Pass (later Southern Pacific) yard at Buffalo Bayou to the Union Pacific interchange at Congress Yard.

Along the way, the train moved down the middle of Commerce St. on an alignment originally built by the Houston Belt & Magnolia Park Railway in 1889. The original six-mile line had been chartered to connect a location named Brady at Constitution Bend (now the Turning Basin) on Buffalo Bayou, with Houston at Fannin St. Brady was named for John Thomas Brady, a Houston lawyer and promoter who had been one of the organizers of the HB&MP.

The railroad, like many others of its day, was not financially successful despite initial capitalization of \$150,000 and the company went into receivership in late 1891. It was subsequently sold for \$190.50 in April 1893. The company changed hands several more times, finally being acquired by Missouri Pacific predecessor International & Great Northern in 1904.

Over the past 128 years, various industries sprang up along the line and then disappeared. Track alignments on portions of the line at either end of the Commerce Street

trackage were changed to facilitate operations. The construction of a modern tilt-wall warehouse park in the early 1980s saw the former SA&AP yard at Buffalo Bayou filled with plastics hoppers. But traffic declined and the SA&AP bridge across Buffalo Bayou was removed, leaving the Commerce St. line as the only connection to the remaining industries. By the late 2000s, the rail-served industries on the line had moved or closed, the area around Commerce St. was shifting from business and industrial use to multi-family apartments and condominiums, and abandonment of the old railroad seemed likely.

However, a new company came on the scene in 2009. Genesis Worldwide Logistics LLC set up a multimodal logistics operation in one of the modern warehouse buildings. Genesis provided a range of services, including warehousing, distribution, freight consolidation, transloading, bagging, cotton certification and storage, food-grade cargo handling, lumber reloading, and frac sand and chemical transloading. The yard could accommodate 75 cars; Genesis' portion of the warehouse had 13 trackside doors and 39 truck dock doors for working containers and trailers. On any given day, refrigerator cars, tank cars, covered hoppers, gondolas, centerbeam cars and boxcars could be seen in the Genesis yard or at the interchange track at UP's Congress Yard, while dozens of truck-hauled containers moved in and out of the facility every business day.

Genesis acquired a Trackmobile and began its own switching in March 2010. In November 2012, the company acquired an EMD SW1200 switcher built as Missouri Pacific No. 1144 in 1966, according to one online source. Carrying reporting marks SARX and numbered 1202, the 51-year-old unit proved to be a reliable workhorse.

In December 2013, UP delivered 14 cars and three locomotives owned by Gulf Coast Chapter - NRHS to the Genesis interchange at Congress Yard. The Genesis switcher then moved the cars down Commerce St. to temporary storage alongside one of the warehouse buildings near the former SA&AP yard. These and subsequent moves of the chapter's equipment were undertaken at no charge by Genesis. However, around the same time UP notified Genesis that the track lease agreement would most likely not be renewed beyond 2016/2017 and Genesis officials and Gulf Coast Chapter NRHS officers began looking for new locations for business and car storage, respectively.

In early 2017, Genesis was notified by the warehouse owner that Harris County had increased taxes on the

property significantly, and the increase would be passed on to Genesis and the building's other tenant. In addition, UP changed its operating pattern for the local that serviced the Genesis interchange and began charging demurrage on cars awaiting interchange to the company. The combination of these two significant cost increases made the business unviable, and Genesis shut down in early June when the last hopper car left the SA&AP yard. Revenue service on the 128-year-old line thus came to an end.

The final railroad activity on the line likely will be the movement of the Gulf Coast Chapter - NRHS cars to the UP interchange, and then common-carrier railroad street running in Houston will disappear. However, the line may soldier on: The East End Management District is considering operation of a historic trolley along Commerce St. as part of the area's redevelopment.

Sources: *Texas State Historical Association Handbook of Texas*; Zlatkovich, Charles P., *Texas Railroads - A Record of Construction and Abandonment*; *Genesis Worldwide Logistics*

A composite Bing Bird's Eye View of the area around the former SP/SA&AP yard used by Genesis Worldwide Logistics. The location of the railroad's Buffalo Bayou crossing can be seen at the upper right, while the connection to the former I-GN/ Houston Belt & Magnolia Park Railway is at the lower left. The track diverging to the right at Commerce St. is former I-GN.



Modern operations with a vintage loco on the Commerce St. Line



The former SA&AP yard on Houston's east side used by Genesis Worldwide Logistics LLC is seen above in March 2013. Car types typically seen at Genesis included boxcars, reefers, tank cars, covered hoppers of multiple types for plastics and minerals, lumber cars and gondolas. Different car types were spotted at specific yard locations or warehouse doors for unloading.

As noted previously, the wide range of services provided by Genesis Worldwide Logistics from their warehouse base east of downtown Houston on Navigation St. brought a variety of railroad car types to the old SA&AP yard, as illustrated here.

Because of limited space and lack of run-around capability at the Congress Yard interchange with UP, careful coordination with UP operations was necessary. Outgoing and incoming cars generally could not be handled in the same move unless prior arrangement was made with the UP.

The resulting typical operating pattern would see Genesis move outgoing cars along the Commerce St. trackage on a Friday, Saturday or Sunday, with incoming cars accepted on weekdays. With no runaround track at the interchange, the locomotive pushed outgoing cars from the SA&AP yard to the interchange. The locomotive would lead incoming cars to the yard, which retained a tail at its Buffalo Bayou end for runaround moves. This tail had been the SA&AP mainline, which crossed the bayou on a steel through truss bridge. The bridge at one time was moveable to allow vessel traffic to pass.

Yard work at the Navigation warehouse consisted of setting incoming cars at the various loading and unloading spots in the yard and alongside the warehouse, and making up groups of outgoing cars for delivery to the Congress Yard interchange.

As the Bird's Eye View on page 7



shows, the yard was reduced to four tracks sometime within the last 20 years; a fifth track services the warehouse loading doors.

With selective compression, all of the characteristics of the Genesis operation - a variety of rail cars,

interchange with a major railroad, street running alongside modern apartments and condominiums, yard and warehouse switching operations and a vintage locomotive - can be captured in a reasonable amount of space, particularly in N-scale.

Loads in, empties out

Genesis primarily was a “loads in, empties out” operation. Unloading equipment was basic, making modeling easy.

Aggregate hoppers carrying a special product for mixing with frac sand were unloaded by conveyor into bulk pneumatic trailers. Gondolas with oilfield pipe and spine cars with lumber were unloaded with large forklifts suited to movement on uneven terrain. Tank cars were unloaded via hoses directly to liquid tank trailers.

Refrigerator cars (primarily carrying potatoes) and boxcars were spotted at the warehouse doors and unloaded with smaller forklifts. Plastics hoppers were unloaded with vacuum equipment installed for an earlier warehouse tenant.



Forklifts were used for unloading steel pipe from gondolas and lumber from spine cars. After business hours, this forklift has had its forks pinned by a warehouse door to discourage theft. The warehouse is of basic tilt-wall construction and would be easy to model as a flat along a wall.

Tank car unloading was as basic as could be with simple hose connections between the railroad cars and liquid tank trailers.



Hoppers carrying minerals were unloaded with this conveyor. The large forklift has been used to position the hopper bays over the drop pit. ACFX 27877 was the last revenue car unloaded at Genesis.

Commerce St. action



Above, on a November evening in 2011, SARX No. 1202 makes its way down Commerce St. to pick up a cut of cars at the Congress Yard interchange. New multi-family housing will spring up soon on the empty land at right. Today's delivery from UP includes a covered hopper, four reefers and two lumber cars. Below, three years later, and there goes the neighborhood.



With essentially half of all moves involving shoving, the Genesis crews racked up a fair amount of miles riding freight cars and the occasional museum piece as well.



End of the road for Genesis, end of the line for street trackage



On Saturday, June 3, 2017, Genesis Worldwide Logistics' one-man crew assembled the train for the company's final revenue run. Powering the train was SARX No. 1202, an EMD SW1200 built in 1966. The train was made up of one revenue car, covered hopper ACFX 27877 and one non-revenue car, ex-Santa Fe Pullman *Verde Valley*, recently donated by Gulf Coast Chapter - NRHS to the Arizona Railway Museum.

In this sequence of photos, the train is assembled in the ex-SA&AP yard. The locomotive runs around the train and shoves it down Commerce St. to the Congress Yard interchange. With car brakes set, the locomotive runs light back to the now empty yard and ties up. Business is ended.





Here's what happens when a gondola loaded with steel pipe derails on asphalt. The reefer is derailed as well. The date is Aug. 12, 2013.

The “derailment business”

One aspect of the modern Commerce St. operation that many model railroaders will have no trouble duplicating were the not uncommon minor derailments that took place. The Commerce St. line has been a “maintain as needed” property for long enough that as the shutdown approached, one person involved in the Genesis operations said, “I will be glad to get out of the derailment business.”



Big hook to the rescue! The train was pushing up Commerce St. when the cars derailed. This heavy-duty wrecker was called in to rerail the cars and drag them out of the way so the track could be repaired. Commerce St. was blocked off and on for about two hours as the contract rerail crew maneuvered the wrecker and the cars.

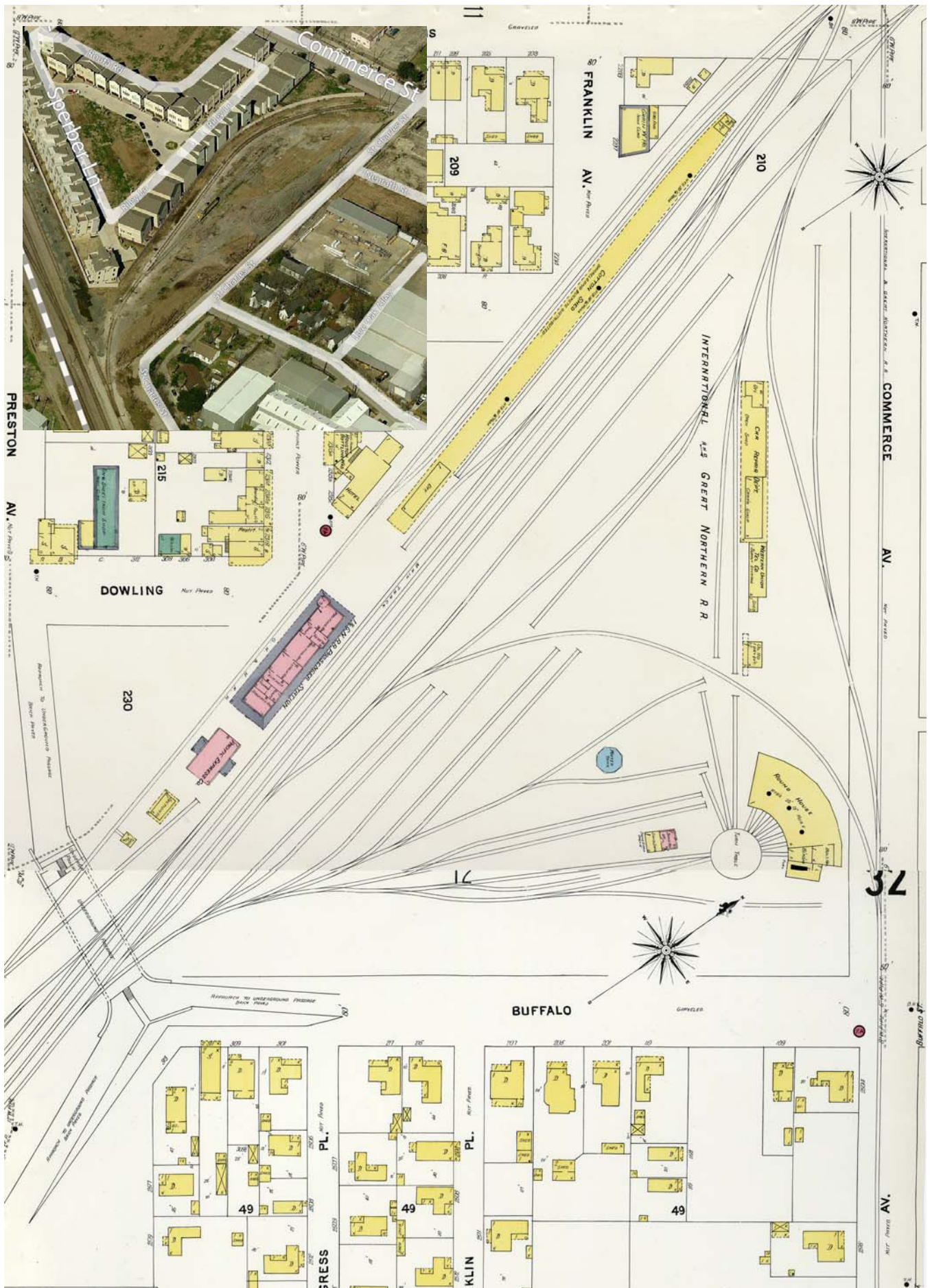


A little bit of history

The area around the Congress Yard interchange was the location of the I&GN's Houston roundhouse and other facilities 100 years ago, as illustrated by the composite 1907 Sanborn map on page 13 prepared for this article. The inset Bird's Eye View from Bing maps shows what the area looks like today. Buffalo St. is now named St. Charles St.

The photo at right was taken in December 1997 and shows the former SA&AP yard between Navigation Blvd. and Buffalo Bayou overflowing with plastics hoppers. More yard tracks are in place than was the case when Genesis started operations at the yard in 2009.





LCL

Less than Car Load: a few notes from your editor

Texas State Railroad trip planning continues: Our proposed visit to the Texas State Railroad is taking shape. The favored timeframe is the second weekend in September, which is a scheduled steam running day. N'Crowd Vice President Richard Bartlett is working with other interested groups on the event plans; we will send out additional information in the near future.

San Antonio train show derailed: After a 28-year run, San Antonio's Alamo Model Railroad Engineers (AMRE) have canceled their annual fall show. According to AMRE webmaster Hugh Hemphill, "Times have changed. The event lost increasingly large amounts of money for the last three years." San Antonio's other train show producer, the San Antonio Model Railroad Association (SAMRA), will hold its 42nd Annual Jamboree and Train Show on Feb. 24-25, 2018.

Do's and Don'ts at Papa Ben's: All N'Crowd members must be acquainted with the club's Code of Conduct, and to that end a copy of the recently-updated code is attached with this issue of *The Orderboard*. We occupy our space at Papa Ben's due to the generosity of owner Allyn Pearlman and in return we are committed to running trains on the layout each Saturday and on an extended schedule between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day. But this is only one of our commitments. **It is extremely important for every member to remember that we are not representatives of the store and we should not engage Papa Ben's customers in any discussion related to the business of the store.** Questions about product availability, pricing, other hobby sources in town or online and all other commercial matters should be referred to Papa Ben's capable paid staff.

HOUSTON N'CROWD 2017 TIME TABLE - SUBJECT TO CHANGE

July 8

NMRA LSR Division 8 Clinic Series: Laser cut structures hands-on part 1; for info, see www.texasgulfdivision.org.

July 19

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

August 6

N'Crowd Operating Session

August 12

NMRA LSR Division 8 Clinic Series: Laser cut structures hands-on part 2; for info, see www.texasgulfdivision.org.

August 16

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

September 9

NMRA LSR Division 8 Clinic Series: Structure lighting with LEDs; go to www.texasgulfdivision.org for info.

September 16-17

35th Annual Temple Model Train Show, Mayborn Civic and Convention Center

September 20

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

September 30

NMRA LSR Division 8 Annual Meeting, Zube Park

September 30 - October 1

3rd Annual Fall Plano Train Show, Plano Centre

THE ORDERBOARD *from Houston N'Crowd*

Tom Marsh, Editor

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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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