



News from Houston N'Crowd



THE ORDERBOARD

January/February 2017

A-OK and then some

OK coverage starts on page 3



"GREEN EYE" - CLEAR BLOCK

by Samuel Townsel II, President

New year, new opportunities

Happy New Year everyone!

It is good to see another new year! Starting a new year brings renewed excitement and new opportunities in our lives. Without getting too deep in your own New Year's resolutions, did you set a goal in your world of model railroading?

Some of us still need that nudge to get started on our personal layouts. Some have a layout but haven't done any major work on it all 2016. Others are looking at getting into the hobby and for whatever reason, just haven't made that leap. Don't let another year pass you by without getting more into the hobby by making real progress starting or working on your layout.

Toward the end of 2016, I was introduced to some wonderful old-timers who welcomed me into their homes and showed me some new things about model railroading. Thanks to that budding relationship, I was able to meet a couple more guys that are willing and able to educate me on a whole host of things about the hobby, as well as arranging some operating sessions. What I realized is that there are model railroaders outside of the ones I know that can add to my knowledge of the hobby.

So what's my new year, new opportunity?

Expanding my knowledge of model railroading by cultivating new relationships with people no matter their gauge or geographic location.

As I said at the outset, 2017 is a new year. Take the opportunity to get started doing something that you have been putting off. I encourage you to get active with model railroading, establish new relationships and see what you can do this year. Let 2017 be that breakout year for you: Trust me, you won't regret it!

Samuel

Dues time!

N'Crowd 2017 new member/renewal applications are available in the layout room at Papa Ben's or from the N'Crowd website: www.houstonNcrowd.org

Houston N'Crowd 2017 Officers and Volunteers

President Samuel Townsel II
Vice President Richard Bartlett
Secretary James C. Senneff, Jr.
Treasurer Eddie Aycock
Board Member (2017) Scott Gordon

Board Member (2018) Joe Kingsberry
Board Member (2019) Allan Melton
Layout Master Al Hague
Editor & Webmaster Tom Marsh



N'Crowd Wednesday Membership Meetings:

January 18 / February 15 / March 15 / April 19 / May 17

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.

OKC 40th show was A-OK *by Tom Marsh*

The 40th Annual Oklahoma City Train Show took place Dec. 3-4, 2016, and this granddaddy of regional train shows did not disappoint. The OKC show, held annually at the Oklahoma State Fairgrounds, attracts modular layout owners from multiple states, major model railroad manufacturers and a host of vendors. This is an all-scale show,

and N-scale is well-represented in all areas. The N-Trak layout has been the largest in the show for many years.

The 2017 show will be held Dec. 2-3, although issues related to costs associated with new exhibition facilities being built by the state may result in a change of venue.



Above, the Oklahoma City Train Show is one of the largest regional model railroad shows in the US. The show attracts modular and single-owner portable layouts in every scale. Clubs and individuals band together to assemble a large N-Trak layout every year.

Right, a Chicago & North Western streamliner passes through a river scene on the N-Trak layout.

Below, ScaleTrains.com had production samples of their first N-scale locomotive, the massive Union Pacific GTEL 8,500-hp "Big Blow" turbine. One of these made an impressive site and sound on the show's N-Trak layout. The locomotive is available in multiple road numbers with unit-specific details.





Above, Russell Straw travels to the OKC show regularly with his superbly detailed 1950s-era Sugar Land modules. It's a little sweet taste of Texas for the Sooner State.

Right, the T-Trak modelers always show a lot of imagination; here, a Lego layout shares the scene with a rampaging Godzilla.



Right, model railroad manufacturers routinely show new products at the OKC show. Here are early production samples of InterMountain Railway Company's new N-scale EMD SD40-2 with ESU LokSound. Featuring all-new tooling, the new models started arriving at hobby shops this month.





Above: North American Rail Car Corp. showed these finely-detailed samples of their N-scale National Steel Car 4257 cu. ft. 3-bay hopper.

Right: Kato USA displayed several recent N-scale releases, including their new SDP40F locomotives as modified for freight service by Santa Fe. Kato also still offers the original Amtrak version in two paint schemes.



The most accurate boxcar model ever?

Literature sitting unobtrusive and unremarked in the North American Railcar Corp. booth at the OKC Train Show appears to foreshadow an ambitious project to produce one of the most accurate boxcar models ever. NARC's show representatives were coy about the project, but a diligent online search turned up some information on the Canadian-based firm's website at this address: www.pacific-western-rail.com/view_product.php?ProductID=253560

According to information on the site, Pullman Standard built more than 4,000 boxcars to this basic design between 1972 and 1979. NARC apparently plans to offer almost all of the variations in both N and HO scale. These variations include three different ends, three door types, four different side sills, three handbrakes, two brake lever systems, and cushioned or rigid underframes. Five additional doors will be produced to replicate modifications and repairs made to some of the cars over time.

A Canadian variation for pulp and paper service with raised roofs and vents will also be produced. N-scale models will be equipped with Micro-Trains couplers and NARC's low-friction trucks with metal wheelsets. A production timetable for the models was not included in the online information.



Top, "pre-release" materials at the North American Railcar Corp. booth at the OKC show quietly point to an effort to build an extremely accurate model of Pullman Standard's 5077 Cu. Ft. single-door car. At right, an early Railbox car photographed at an unknown location in May 1996.



A-OK and then some

by Tom Marsh

Knowing that we were headed as usual to the Southern Plains N-Scale Convention and the Oklahoma City Train Show in late November/early December, a friend and I set a goal of photographing all four of the Arkansas-Oklahoma Railroad's Electro-Motive (EMD) GP30 locomotives. The quartet was originally built for the Santa Fe Railway in the early 1960s, and they survive today thanks to a major rebuilding program undertaken by Santa Fe in the mid-1980s.

The GP30s attract railfan interest not only because of their age, but also due to a distinctive cab shape not shared with any other EMD product. The Arkansas-Oklahoma Railroad, also known as the A-OK Railroad, is interesting in its own right: The family-owned shortline operates approximately 118 total track miles in two locations in southeastern Oklahoma. Most of the railroad's locomotives, including the GP30s, are painted in a bright red and yellow scheme reminiscent of the

old Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railroad. The railroad's logo also echoes the Rock Island's. The Rock at one time operated an extensive network of rail lines across Oklahoma and the A-OK operates on some of this track.

The A-OK is not the only attraction for railfans in southeastern Oklahoma, hence the title of this report "A-OK and then some". Several other shortlines operate in the region, and the Kansas City Southern traverses the mountainous far eastern reaches of the state as well. This all results in a mix of colorful, modern railroading that I have tried to capture here.



We bagged the first of our A-OK quarry at McAlester on Monday, Nov. 28. EMD built GP30 No. 2442 for Santa Fe in 1963. EMD built over 900 GP30s; Santa Fe rostered 85. The other unit is a fairly rare General Electric B23 Super 7.

We hoped to catch one or more of the GP30s working at some point, and Tuesday morning we found that No. 2442 was on the road, leaving the Super 7 alone at the yard office. We spotted the GP30 idling with a few cars in hand in an inaccessible siding off in the distance. No action photo at McAlester today! The A-OK's modern yard office at McAlester would be a relatively easy scratchbuilding project using styrene.



GP30 number two was caught later the same day at Howe, where the A-OK interchanges with the KCS. This unit also was delivered to Santa Fe in 1963. The other unit at Howe appears on the cover of this issue. No. 4098 is a GE B23 Super 7 built in the early 1990s using components of a model U23B locomotive originally built for Western Pacific in 1972.



You never know what you're going to find! Here's a Baltimore & Ohio wagon-top boxcar sitting in Heavener. The car sports the work of a famous graffiti artist. "Palm Tree Herby" is attributed to railroad worker Herbert Meyer, who is believed to have drawn Herby on tens of thousands of railroad cars.

We caught only one KCS train during an afternoon exploration along the KCS mainline. The right-of-way has been cleared in places, opening photo opportunities not possible for years.





This was the scene on Wednesday at the Kiamichi Railroad yard in Hugo. KRR is a Genesee & Wyoming property operating over 231 track miles in eastern Oklahoma, western Arkansas and northeast Texas. The wagon-top boxcar was not the only B&O survivor we found in Oklahoma. EMD GP40-2 No. 4031 was built for B&O in 1971.

The pair of EMD SD40-2s working the Hugo yard have a combined 89 years of service under their hoods. No. 4097 was built for Penn Central in 1971, while No. 3376 was built for Canadian Pacific in 1972.



Later the same day, gleaming fresh KRR SD40-2 No. 3381 sits west of Hugo with an aggregate train. The locomotive was built in 1969 for the Louisville & Nashville Railroad.



We took a break from the GP30 search on Thursday to take part in the Southern Plains N-Scale Convention prototype tour (see page 10). On Friday, Dec. 2, we caught the remaining two A-OK GP30s at Shawnee. No. 2411 was built for Santa Fe in 1962.

A-OK GP30 No. 2402, also built in 1962, sports a slightly different paint scheme from the others with no black trim on the long hood. Mission accomplished: With this picture we have photographed all of the A-OK GP30s, although none in action.

General Electric B40-8W, also at Shawnee, was built for Santa Fe in 1992. A-OK officials reportedly prefer the older EMDs over the GE's due to higher repair costs incurred with the GE units.

Our ultimate destination Friday was Oklahoma City. There we found WAMX EMD SD40-2 No. 4123 working the Stillwater Central yard near downtown. The unit is lettered for the South Kansas & Oklahoma Railroad; both the SLWC and SKOL are Watco properties.

We also came across some stored BNSF locomotives in Oklahoma City awaiting their fate. Included in the long line of dead engines were a number of old EMDs decked out in Santa Fe's Warbonnet scheme. These SD751 locomotives were built in 1997; they probably will not enjoy the longevity of the GP30s, or the SD40s for that matter.



Also A-OK: the Southern Plains tour

In conjunction with the OKC Train Show, the Oklahoma N-Rail group, an N-Trak club, sponsors a mini-convention dubbed the Southern Plains N-Scale Convention. The event, which has been held annually for the past 21 years, features a swap meet, a Saturday banquet, plenty of N-Trak running, and of most interest some very good prototype tours.

The 2016 tour took our group to the Ditch Witch manufacturing facility in Perry, Okla. (no photography allowed). Every piece of Ditch Witch equipment sold worldwide is manufactured in Perry at this efficient plant. Also on the tour was a visit to the former Santa Fe station at Perry, now used primarily by the BNSF signal department.

Perry had been on the route of Santa Fe's *Texas Chief* (later Amtrak's *Lone Star*), but passenger service to Perry ended when Amtrak discontinued the *Lone Star* in 1979.

The black & white photos show the waiting room a few years before the *Lone Star* was discontinued; this photo and others can be downloaded from <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=34347062>



End of the line for Ringling Brothers trains *by Tom Marsh*

Everybody has probably heard by now that the Greatest Show on Earth, the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus, will fold its tent for the last time in May. Kenneth Feld, chairman and CEO of Feld Entertainment, the Ringling Bros. producer, cited declining ticket sales and high operating costs as the primary reasons for closing the show. Feld noted that the recent transitioning of the famed elephants off the road resulted in “an even more dramatic drop” in ticket sales.

Of course, the circus train with the elephants will live on on many model railroads. I bet sales of circus train models increase in the immediate aftermath of Ringling’s closing.

The news sent me to my slide files to try to find pictures I took of the circus train loading along Westpark Dr. as the final performances of that particular Houston run took place at the Summit. I remember being amazed at one point, not so much by the logistics of tearing down and loading the extensive cargo of people, animals and things needed to run the circus, but by something else.

At one point, a loud rattling and clattering attracted my

attention; it was a string of animal cages coming down the Edloe St. overpass from the Summit. The cages each held a big cat, mostly tigers as I recall. The cages were towed to the side of Westpark alongside the train, the towing vehicle was unhooked and headed back to the Summit. The cage floors sat about three feet off the ground and the cage sides were made from steel bars, bars far enough apart that the tigers could extend their paws well outside the cage, which they did.

Not a single member of the circus staff was in sight. People could walk right up to the cages and prod the beasts if they so desired, and some folks got a lot closer than I thought was wise.

I could not find my photos from that day, but I did come across this picture of an old Ringling Bros. car headed on its final journey and thought it would be fitting for the story. The processing date stamped on the slide is December 1991. I think I took the photo in St. Louis, but I don’t remember. However, I will remember that day years ago when the tigers were leaving town.



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

First things first: Have a happy and safe New Year!

Party planners deserve hearty thanks: Thanks to the Aycocks for hosting the annual December bash and combat gift exchange. Despite how it sounds, no one was seriously injured and everyone had a good time!

More thanks: Thanks also to everyone who submitted articles and photos to *The Orderboard* in 2016. Keep up the good work, O ye few.

You probably know what’s coming next: We need YOU to submit articles, photos and the like for *The Orderboard* in 2017. Your support is important!

Looking for a bargain vacation?: The NMRA Lone Star Region convention will be held in Houston this year at the Westchase Hilton on Westheimer Rd. from June 7 to June

11. Here are the highlights; go to <http://bayoucitylimited.org> for details and to register. You can pay by credit card, check or money order.

While you have to be an NMRA member, you can join now through the convention website’s registration page for six months for only \$9.95. Convention registration is only \$80, and that includes three days of informative clinics; Thursday evening barbeque and train watching at the Rosenberg Railroad Museum; and admission to the Saturday banquet featuring career railroader, photographer and author Joe McMillan. Two extra-fare prototype tours via luxurious motor coach are available as well, one to the METRO Rail Operations Center and one to the GBW Railcar Services Greensport facility. Each tour costs \$30.

LSR conventions are fun and educational, and this one is in your neighborhood. Sign up today!

Party time!

Members of the N'Crowd family gathered at the Aycock home on Dec. 17 for the annual holiday bash. Credit Allan Melton for these photos of the fun.

We'll have more good times in 2017!

We're considering events for the coming year. How about a ride on Austin's *Hill Country Flyer* or the Texas State Railroad or both? A tour of Union Station/Minute Maid Park? Let us know your thoughts!



HOUSTON N'CROWD 2017 TIME TABLE - SUBJECT TO CHANGE

January 18

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

January 21-22

Dallas Area Train Show, Plano Centre

January 28-29

SAMRA 41st Annual Jamboree & Train Show, Austin Highway Event Center, San Antonio

February 5

N'Crowd Operating Session

February 11

Rosenberg Railroad Museum WinterFest

February 15

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

February 18

Greater Houston Train Show, Stafford Centre

March 15

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:

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

Visit our Web site:

www.houstonNcrowd.org

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