



News from Houston N'Crowd



May/June 2017

THE ORDERBOARD



Coal train action on the BC&G

A 100+ car coal train snakes its way around the BC&G. The caboose is at lower left, the lead units are at upper right moving through the BC&G's main yard. See more on this train from N'Crowd member Randy Ollet on page 3.

"GREEN EYE" - CLEAR BLOCK

by Samuel Townsel II, President

Check out the history and the action

How much do you know about the history of railroading in the Houston area?

I for one thought I knew enough but as it turns out, Houston has a rich railroading history and much of it is in plain sight. Summer is quickly approaching and now would be a great time to check out some of the most popular and some not so obvious places to see trains and the mark railroads have made on Houston.

Starting downtown, did you know that our own Minute Maid Park, home of the Astros, incorporates historic Houston Union Station? Much of the ball park sits where Union Station's tracks were, while the station building itself serves as a grand entry point and houses the official Team Store and team offices.

If you travel east of the ballpark, you will run into plenty of active and retired rail lines. In fact, BNSF still operates a turntable in east Houston at the former Houston Belt & Terminal locomotive shops!

Just north and east of downtown, there is a hotbed of activity at Tower 26, while a little further east is Tower 87, where the leads to Englewood and Settegast Yards interlock.

If you live in west Houston or the Katy area, check out the

old Katy station and also one of my favorite places, the area around the Rosenberg Railroad Museum. At Rosenberg, you can watch Union Pacific, BNSF and KCS operate through the extended junction once controlled by Tower 17, which has been restored on the museum grounds.

If being outside in 100 degree weather is not your thing, come on down to Papa Ben's Train Place and get started on your own railroad empire (or work on ours!) and be sure to check us out at our monthly meeting. We would love to see you there.

As always, Happy Railroading!

Samuel



Action at Tower 26 near downtown Houston. Photo by Tom Marsh



N'Crowd Wednesday Membership Meetings:
May 17 / June 21 / July 19 / August 16 / September 20

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.

BC&G handles 100+ car coal train

by Randy Ollett

The BC&G has handled another long coal train. Four SD70MACs dragged 101 coal cars around the railroad at least twice without incident. The train consisted of 93 Micro-Trains 33-ft. cars and eight longer Atlas 90-ton hoppers. (I ran out of 33-ft. cars, but Harvey Stalarow wanted to have at least 100 in the train.)

The train was long enough that the engineer in the lead unit was able to speak briefly to his conductor in the caboose as they passed near Union Station's yard throat.



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‘New’ power for ASTA

by Tom Marsh

Austin Steam Train Association is up and running again after a short period earlier this year when a lack of motive power forced the group to cancel excursion operations for several weeks. ASTA has leased a locomotive from Horizon Rail of Euclid, Ohio, and restarted operations in late March.

According to various online sources, the bright blue locomotive is an EMD GP40 built in 1968 for Penn Central as No. 3118. It subsequently worked on Conrail (No. 3118), Rio Grande (No. 3134), Southwestern Railroad (No. 3134) and possibly as a plant switcher for a chemical company. No. 3134 is no stranger to excursion service, having recently operated on the Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad in Ohio.

The locomotive has a (somewhat tenuous) Houston-area connection as well. In September 2016, the general email account for the Texas Railroad Heritage Museum at Tomball received a solicitation offering No. 3143 and another unit for lease.

The email describes No. 3143 as a GP40-3. Horizon’s email said, “This locomotive has been

overhauled at our Cleveland, Ohio, shop. The locomotive received extensive work from top to bottom. Among many of the features, options and accessories added, no important details were overlooked. New liners/wear plates, synthetic lubrication, brake rigging with pins/bushings, MU valves and handles to name a few items and such were applied.” Horizon also noted the locomotive “has been operationally tested for 30 days hauling trains at speed!”

Upgrades included a new control system that boosted tractive effort by 25 percent; new cab interior, seals and seats; all electrical components new or rebuilt; locomotive rewired with new wire and cable; toilet with retention tank; new digital event recorder; and tight-lock couplers “perfect for hazmat or passenger related operations” among other items.

According to Kalmbach’s *Second Diesel Spotters Guide*, over 1,200 GP40s were built between November 1965 and December 1971. The model was replaced in the EMD catalog by the GP40-2 in 1972.



Austin Steam Train Association’s “new” locomotive, seen here in the company of the Gulf Coast Chapter - NRHS’s ex-MKT Texas Special chair car New Braunfels at Cedar Park on March 27, 2017.

Redevelopment of former SP shop property underway

by Tom Marsh

What a difference 38 years makes! The two photos on page 7 were taken from approximately the same location north of downtown Houston looking across the Southern Pacific (now Union Pacific) mainline towards SP's Hardy Street Shops. At one time, the facility was one of the state's largest industrial employers.

The earlier photo was taken in May 1979, when the facility was still one of SP's major locomotive maintenance and repair shops. The later photo was taken in February 2017, and shows the first redevelopment activity on the former SP property. The building under construction is part of a new affordable housing project being developed in cooperation between the City of Houston, the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development and developer Zieben Group participating as "Residences at Hardy Yards".

The 350 new residential units are in close walking distance to the Burnett Transit Center/Casa de Amigos stop on METRORail's Red Line. The overall

redevelopment project is known as "Hardy Yards" and has been described in city documents as a "comprehensive, mixed-use redevelopment of the Hardy Rail Yard site".

Union Pacific acquired SP in 1996. A number of structures at Hardy Street dated to the 1870s, including the wheel shop, which is believed to have been in operation continuously from the late 1870s until operations at the facility wound down in late 1998/early 1999. Union Pacific knocked a large hole in one side of the building to remove the shop machinery.

Your editor made an inquiry to the Texas Historical Commission when UP began demolition work at Hardy Street to determine if THC had made any record of the various structures at the facility. THC responded that UP had reported to the agency that no historic structures were on the property, and therefore, THC had not reviewed whether or not any of the buildings were of historic significance. All of the former railroad structures were demolished.

Below, new signage and landscaping under the METRORail Red Line viaduct just north of downtown; the project's name recognizes the area's railroad heritage. The original Hardy Street Shops dated to the 1870s.





Above, a typical late 1970s day at Southern Pacific's Hardy Street Shops. Identifiable in the picture are an SP GE U30C, several EMD SD40T-2 tunnel motors, an IC EMD SD40, a high-nose SP EMD Geep and several other SP EMD units.

Below, on time Amtrak Train No. 2, the Sunset Limited, glides past the Hardy Street location on February 21, 2017. The condition of the mainline track is much better than it was in 1979, but the view arguably is not.



LCL

Less than Car Load: a few notes from your editor

Mystery solved: The cover of the September/October 2015 *Orderboard* featured a beautiful Nn3 module on display at the 35th Annual National Narrow Gauge Convention, which took place that year in Houston. No one around the display could tell me who built it, but the March 2017 issue of NMRA Magazine has cleared up the mystery. The module, shown below, was built by Bill Banta for display in a museum in Rico, Colo.



Thanks to this month's contributors: Thanks to Hugh Boyd and Randy Ollett for contributing to this issue of *The Orderboard*. The deadline for the July/August issue is July 8. As always, YOUR contributions are welcome!

Good job in Austin: The Cen-Tex Division of the NMRA Lone Star Region pulled off a successful show in a brand new venue over the weekend of May 6-7. The Austin Area Train Show featured operating model railroads, vendors, several local model railroad manufacturers, clinics and a self-guided tour of 14 area home layouts. Our friends from the N-scale division of Northwest Crossing Model Railroad Club participated in the N-Trak layout. The venue was the new Williamson County Expo Center in Taylor, which is an easy 150-mile drive from Houston. Might be a good show for the N'Crowd to visit in 2018!

HOUSTON N'CROWD 2017 TIME TABLE - SUBJECT TO CHANGE

May 6-7

Austin Area Train Show, Taylor

May 13

NMRA LSR Division 8 Clinic Series: Tuning Freight Cars; go to www.texasgulfddivision.org for info.

May 17

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

May 26-27

24 Hours@Saginaw Train Watching Event

June 4

N'Crowd Operating Session

June 7-10

NMRA Lone Star Region Convention, Houston

June 21

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

July 8

NMRA LSR Division 8 Clinic Series: Scratchbuilding Structures Part 1; go to www.texasgulfddivision.org for info.

July 19

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

August 6

N'Crowd Operating Session

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

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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