

News from Houston N'Crowd



March/April 2019

# THE ORDERBOARD



*Photo by Hugh Boyd*

## Tracking the Transcon with Hugh Boyd: Part 1

# "GREEN EYE" - CLEAR BLOCK

by Tom Marsh, President

## The things we do

**Greater Houston Train Show:** First, thanks to everyone who helped out at the Greater Houston Train Show in February. The annual San Jacinto Model Railroad Club show was one of the best attended ever with over 1,800 visitors and around 200 vendors and exhibitors. The crowd was so large the registration desk ran out of the visitor raffle stickers! Show organizers attributed the good turnout to an increased publicity effort.

As many of you know, N'Crowd participated with our locomotive test tracks at our lobby booth. The DC test tracks were complemented this year with a new DCC test setup for HO and N scale decoder-equipped locomotives. In addition, in the main hall we offered estate items that we were asked to help sell. In appreciation of our efforts, the club received a \$535 donation.



Above, Charlie Aselin and Mauricio Varon man the N'Crowd test track tables at the Greater Houston Train Show. Below, Mauricio's daughter Magnolia is a young model railroader in training. Photos by Melissa Varon



### Rosenberg Railroad Museum Railfest invitation:

We've been offered space at Rosenberg Railroad Museum's 2019 Railfest on April 6. In addition to promoting the N'Crowd, we'll be able to sell model railroad items, so if you've been doing some spring cleaning and have a few things that you want to try to convert to cash, this is your chance. Charlie Aselin is coordinating our participation, email [caace@hal-pc.org](mailto:caace@hal-pc.org) if you are interested. We'll send out a reminder email closer to the event.

**April operating session:** Gordon Bliss will host our April 7 operating session on his Santa Fe - All the Way. Watch for an email with details.

**April swap meet to keep Gordon busy:** Gordon will also host a swap meet at his home on Sunday, April 28, from noon to 5 p.m. We'll have burgers, dogs and soft drinks, most likely with a side of bull session. Bring a chair with you if you want to sit for a time. Gordon has several tables, but if you have a lot to trade or sell, please consider bringing your own table and chair. Plan to stop by even if you don't have anything to sell or trade - it'll be fun! Email Gordon at [gtbliss@aol.com](mailto:gtbliss@aol.com) if you think you'll be there so we will have enough food.

**But wait, there's more:** More information will be coming your way soon about our June 9 Railfan Houston Carpool; our August 25 Members' Layouts Tour; and our October 26 visit to the Galveston Railroad Museum and the Texas City Train Festival. And then it will be time to start planning for the holidays. Time flies!

Happy Railroading!

Tom



### N'Crowd Wednesday Membership Meetings:

**March 20 / April 17 / May 15 / June 19 / July 17 / August 21**  
Meetings start at 7 p.m. at Papa Ben's Train Place, 4007-E Bellaire Blvd. and are open to all.

**N'Crowd Test & Tune Sessions:** First Wednesday of odd-numbered months. 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. at Papa Ben's.

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



# Another easy car number change by Mauricio Varon

After the initial success with renumbering my Japanese covered hoppers (*see the last issue of The Orderboard - Ed.*), I decided to do the same with another set of cars, this time five Tomix Japanese box cars. As with the previous cars, I started with the least aggressive approach first, the eraser method. Unfortunately, after several patient attempts, I knew I needed to try something different. After some online research and watching a few videos, the next approach I tried was using Micro Sol decal setting solution from Microscale Industries ([www.microscale.com](http://www.microscale.com)).

As with the previous cars, I isolated the area I wanted to work on with regular wrapping tape. Then for about ten minutes I dabbed the numbers with a cotton swab dipped in the Micro Sol, always making sure the surface was damp.

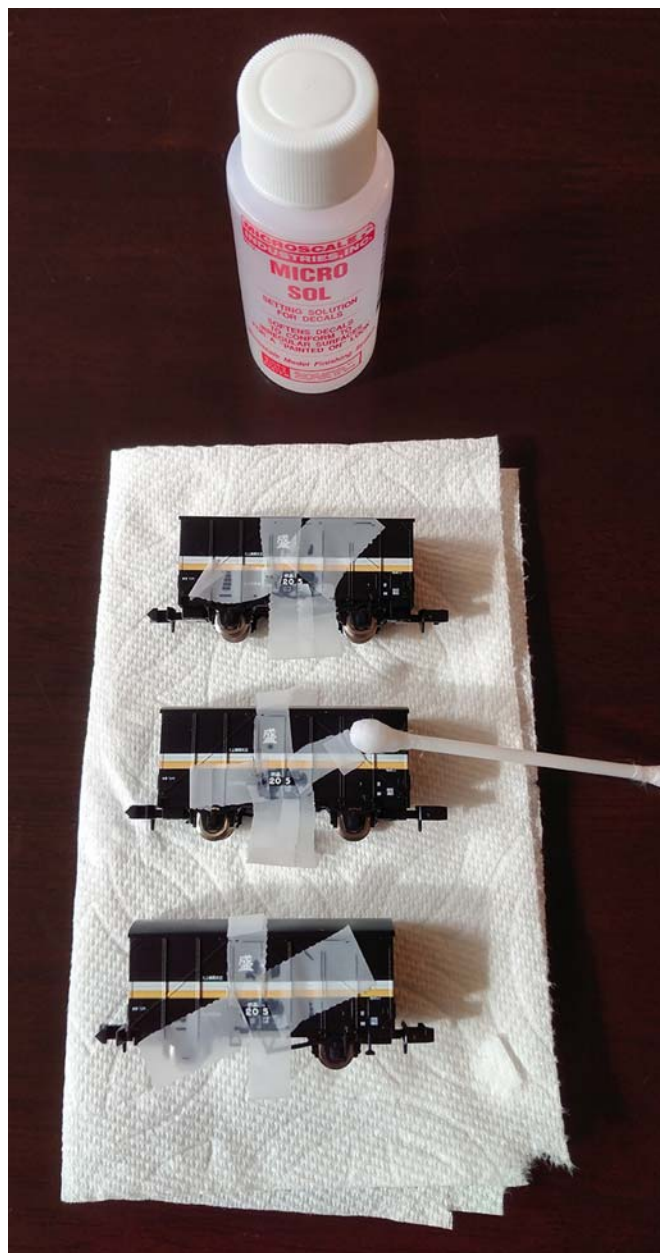
With the surface still somewhat wet, I used another piece of tape to pull off the numbers. For those tiny pieces that were stuck on a little harder, I rubbed a toothpick over the tape gently so as not to leave any marks on the car body.

Once the isolation tape was removed and the surface dried, I inspected the car for any damage and discoloration. As I had seen in the online videos, my cars too were unaffected by the solution. After prepping the decals and applying them to the box cars, the results were once again fantastic!

If you're still on the fence about it, don't hesitate to change those car numbers you've been wanting to do, now that you have two proven, easy-to-use methods.

As a reminder, my decals were printed by William J.A. Brillinger, Precision Design Co. See his web site for more information: [www.pdc.ca](http://www.pdc.ca)

*Tools needed for a second method of easy car number changes: Micro Sol, cotton swabs, wrapping tape, toothpicks and paper towels. For the first method, see Mauricio's earlier story in the January/February issue of The Orderboard.*



## Houston N'Crowd 2019 Officers and Volunteers

President ..... Tom Marsh  
 Vice President ..... Joe Kingsberry  
 Secretary ..... Bill Busch  
 Treasurer ..... Eddie Aycock  
 Board Member (2019) ..... Allan Melton

Board Member (2020) ..... Samuel Townsell II  
 Board Member (2021) ..... Randy Ollet  
 Immediate Past President ..... Samuel Townsell II  
 Layout Master ..... Joe Kingsberry  
 Editor & Webmaster ..... Tom Marsh

## N'Crowd rides the rails in style

Several N'Crowd members experienced first class private railroad car travel in early February when they took advantage of an opportunity to ride from New Orleans to Houston on cars owned by Houston-based Patrick Henry Creative Promotions. The Feb. 9 trip was sponsored by Gulf Coast Chapter - National Railway Historical Society, Inc., and featured dome/lounge/observation car *Warren R. Henry* and

sleeping car *Evelyn Henry*. The cars were carried on the rear of Amtrak's Train No. 1, the *Sunset Limited*. The train departed New Orleans on time at 9:00 a.m., but despite running at speeds of up to 79 mph during the course of the day, arrival in Houston at 7:54 p.m. was a little off the advertised 6:18 p.m. However, no one was complaining as this gave the group more time to enjoy the journey!



Above, Bliss times two: Happy campers enjoy the observation car's rear platform. Photo by Allan Melton



Top, dome lounging means seats with a view. Bottom, crossing the Atchafalaya River. Photos by Tom Marsh

## Big blue power on the BC&G

Andrew Monaghan's busy paint shop has released Bayou City & Gulf EMD SD90/43MAC No. 8297 in a variation of the railroad's blue, gray and yellow paint scheme. The big locomotive can be seen working various jobs on the railroad. If you haven't been trackside on the BC&G in a while, stop by. You never know what you might see!





# An introduction to the Florida East Coast

by Marty Giesecke

In late February, my travel plans included a brief trip to St. Augustine, Fla., to attend the annual meeting of the Academy of Anesthesiology. St. Augustine is the oldest continually inhabited European settlement in North America, having been established as a Spanish outpost in the 1500s. In addition to seeing friends at the meeting and visiting St. Augustine for the first time, my goal was to see a little bit of the Florida East Coast Railway.

The Florida East Coast Railway (FEC) runs from a connection with CSX Transportation in Jacksonville, Fla., to its Bowden Yard, also in Jacksonville. From Bowden Yard, the FEC runs along the east coast of Florida to Miami and its Hialeah Yard. It is the only railroad to interchange with the NASA Railroad in Titusville. The FEC has been around since 1885, having been established by Standard Oil tycoon Henry Flagler to bring wealthy tourists and goods to his newly built hotels and casino in St. Augustine.

Driving from Jacksonville International Airport to St. Augustine, my first view of an FEC train was a long, double-stack intermodal train that was southbound through St. Augustine. From the vantage point of my rental car, it was not possible for me to see the locomotives, but I was determined to increase my chances on

Sunday, Feb. 24, when driving back to the airport.

My route back to the airport from St. Augustine took Highway 1, the Dixie Highway, north to Jacksonville. I was hoping to catch a train on the parallel railway tracks, but there was no action. Approaching south Jacksonville, it became apparent why there were no trains on this beautiful, late Sunday morning. There was track work going on, with excavators and other track machines working on a new turnout off the mainline. Still, when I reached the southern end of Bowden Yard, I was able to drive along the tracks to take photos of some of FEC's GE ES44C4s. These locomotives can be powered by straight diesel fuel, liquid natural gas (LNG), or a combination of the two. Most often, FEC's GE ES44C4s are seen coupled back-to-back with an LNG tender in between the two locos. One of these can be seen in my photo of units 806, 823 and 820.

A nice YouTube video by River Line Productions that shows these units and other FEC locomotives in action can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LaTj1YwO5S4>. In addition, the April 2019 issue of Trains Magazine has a good story on the "Dual-fuel downturn," which mentions FEC's dual-fuel locomotives.



*Colorful Florida East Coast Railway power, including a multi-fuel set, wait at the railroad's Bowden Yard in Jacksonville, Fla.*



# Tracking the Transcon

Part 1 by Hugh Boyd

US Highway 60 extends around 2,600 miles eastwards from an exit on Interstate I-10 in western Arizona near the California line, to Virginia Beach on the Atlantic coast. The railfan, and those interested in land utilization, will find the western portion of this route fascinating due to its proximity to the BNSF Southern Transcon that extends from the Los Angeles area to Kansas City and on to Chicago.

Over the years, my railfanning in this corridor has been confined to New Mexico, Texas and Oklahoma, and that will be the focus of this series of articles.

For many miles, the highway and the railroad are right next to each other, while in other places they are a little further apart, but the tracks are readily visible from the highway. At times, the tracks lead away from the highway, later to return from their unseen location. Along the New Mexico, Texas and Oklahoma alignment the railroad is double tracked. Former single-track bottlenecks at Abo Canyon, Vaughn and Fort Sumner, all in New Mexico, have been eliminated.

There are three or four trains an hour along this line, including hot-shot double stack container trains with multi-colored loads, often with five or six bright orange BNSF locomotives and many times with forty or so road trailers at the rear. The action also includes coal, autorack, grain, manifest and tank car trains, modern railroading's whole nine yards, and all are 100 or more cars long.

In my railfanning, I try to stay on public property, primarily public roads or public parks, and I stay well back from the grade crossing gates. I diligently try to avoid setting foot on BNSF property.

In my train photography I often look for vertical elements to add height to the image so there's more to it, instead of just the train along the

bottom of the picture; hence my interest in including elevators, trees and other background scenery.

The photos in this installment of Tracking the Transcon were taken in 2011 and 2012 starting out from Belen, a sizeable community in central New Mexico on the Rio Grande River. Belen is not actually on US-60,

but it's close and a good place to start from, being a busy spot on the east-west Transcon. From Belen, the original Santa Fe transcontinental main line heads north, sharing rails with the New Mexico Rail Runner Express commuter service to Albuquerque. Another former Santa Fe line heads south towards Las Cruces and



*Two above, colorful late afternoon BNSF action in New Mexico. Below, an eastbound BNSF train exits Abo Canyon on the new second track. Construction of the track involved substantial new cuts in the canyon's west wall.*







*Above, BNSF GE ES44C4 No. 6608 leads an eastbound stack train out of Abo Canyon on the original railroad alignment. The new second track is at the left. The author later purchased an N-scale model of this locomotive, which by coincidence turned out to share its number with his 2015 Mustang's license plate, as seen below.*

El Paso. Belen also hosts a railroad museum that I have yet to visit.

The rugged Abo Canyon area east of Belen is the attraction here. The line through the canyon was recently double-tracked at some expense to BNSF. A grade crossing near where NM-47 meets US-60 provides good views of trains moving east and west. A nearby gate gives access to the tracks through the canyon, but it's padlocked and has all sorts of threatening signs.

The railroad alignment through Abo Canyon is not visible from US-60, as the highway takes a different route to the east end of the canyon where it crosses the tracks on a bridge that has an adjacent parking area. From the bridge it's possible to watch trains enter and exit the east, upstream end of the canyon. It's also possible to see how the double

tracking was accomplished with a considerable cut through the west side canyon wall.

On one occasion I was on the bridge when along came a train with the lead GE locomotive bearing the number 6608, which turned out to be

my Texas license plate number several years later. I purchased an N-scale model of the same locomotive, so I have had several interactions with No. 6608.

We'll continue the journey east in the next issue.



# LCL

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

**March Test & Tune:** Our March 6 Test & Tune session at Papa Ben's was well-attended. Among the participants, Randy Ollet brought in a number of older DC steam locomotives to test, and many of them ran much better than most of us expected. Allan Melton was able to tune the speed settings on some F units and learn about MRC sound decoders. And I brought in a Kato CB&Q E5 that had given me trouble the last time I ran it, and of course it ran perfectly, so no tuning was accomplished in my case. We were able to tune the programming on some of the club's locomotives, including the new ABBA set of Santa Fe Warbonnet F units that haul our recently-expanded *Texas Chief*.

Our next Test & Tune will take place Wednesday, May 1, starting at 6 p.m. at Papa Ben's Train Place.

**UP sets big steam schedules:** Union Pacific has

released the schedule for what the company is calling "The Great Race to Ogden" in celebration of the 150th anniversary of the completion of the first U.S. transcontinental railroad. UP notes that running times and scheduled stops are subject to change, and the most accurate schedule information will be on the UP website at: <https://www.up.com/heritage/steam/schedule/index.htm>

Both Big Boy No. 4014 and "Living Legend" (in UP parlance) No. 844 will take to the high iron in April and May for the anniversary celebration. Union Pacific also stated that the historic locomotives will be "touring the Union Pacific system throughout 2019 to commemorate the transcontinental railroad's 150th anniversary." Maybe mainline steam will be headed our way this year!

Thanks to Richard Bartlett for forwarding this information to *The Orderboard*.

## HOUSTON N'CROWD 2019 TIME TABLE - SUBJECT TO CHANGE

### March 6

N'Crowd Test & Tune, Papa Ben's Train Place, 6 p.m.

### March 9

NMRA LSR Div 8 Clinic, Bayland Park

### March 16-17

Cotton Belt Train Show, East Texas Fairgrounds, Tyler

### March 20

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

### March 29-31

OKC Railroad Expo, Oklahoma State Fairgrounds, Oklahoma City

### April 6

Rosenberg Railfest, Rosenberg Railroad Museum

### April 6

Flatonia Spring Railfan Party, Flatonia Photo Pavilion

### April 7

N'Crowd Operating Session

### April 13

NMRA LSR Div 8 Clinic, Bayland Park

### April 13-14

New Braunfels Railroad Museum 31st Annual Train Show Jamboree, New Braunfels Civic Center

### April 17

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

### April 28

N'Crowd Swap Meet hosted by Gordon Bliss

### May 1

N'Crowd Test & Tune, Papa Ben's Train Place, 6 p.m.

### May 4-5

Austin Area Train Show

## THE ORDERBOARD *from Houston N'Crowd*

### Tom Marsh, Editor

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

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