

News from Houston N'Crowd



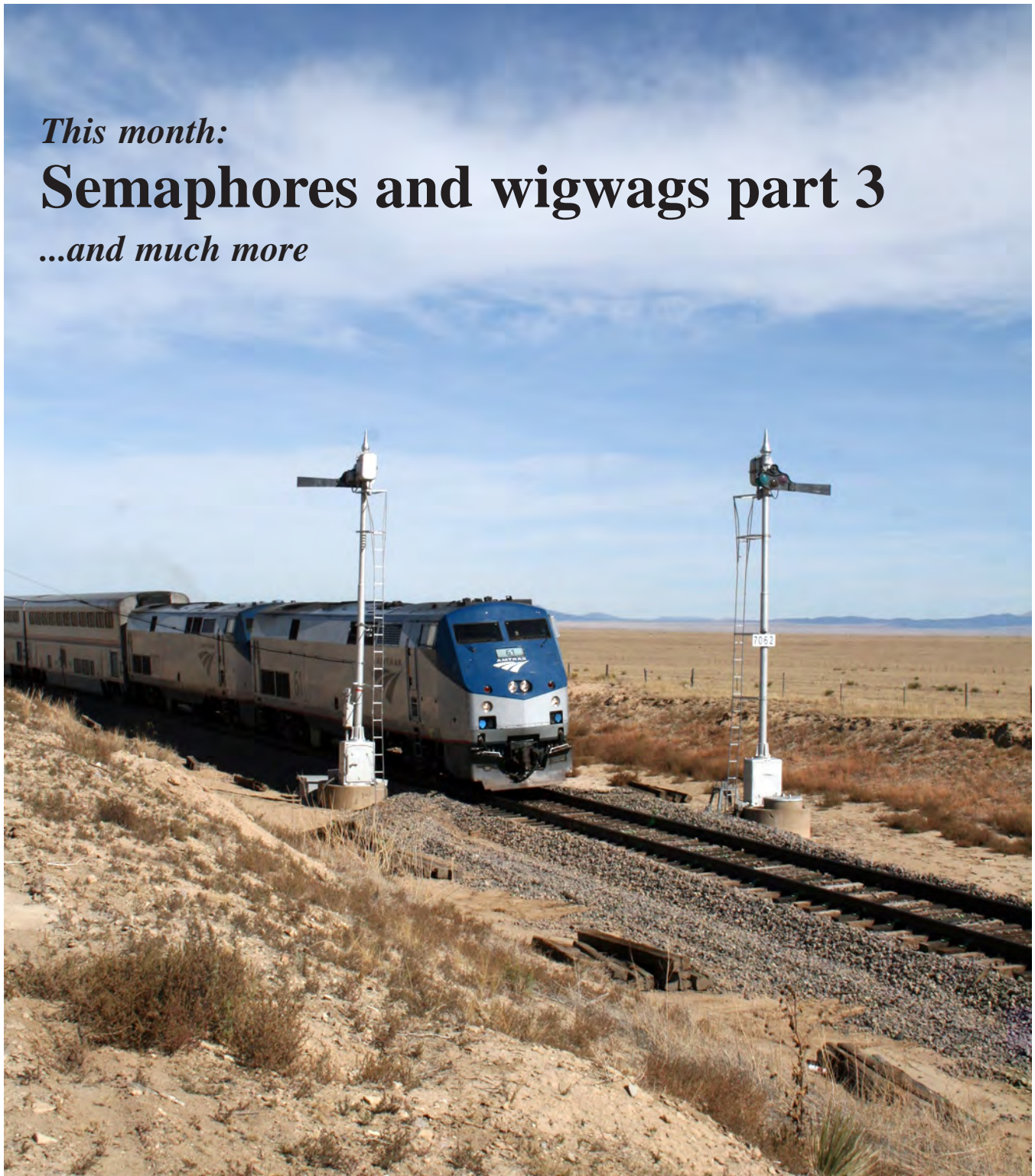
THE ORDERBOARD

March/April 2021

This month:

Semaphores and wigwags part 3

...and much more



Gordon Bliss

"GREEN EYE" - CLEAR BLOCK

by Tom Marsh, President

Light at the end of the tunnel?

It could be a train, or it could be a sign that we will soon emerge from the COVID-19 darkness. Either way, things will change.

On March 8, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued new COVID-19 safety guidelines that take into account the growing number of people who are fully vaccinated against the virus. In addition, Texas state COVID-19 safety mandates were rolled back in early March as well. These actions have a bearing on how we as an organization can approach our activities in the coming months.

COVID-19 protocols remain in place at Papa Ben's: Despite Gov. Abbott's recent rescension of certain state pandemic rules, pandemic protocols remain in effect at Papa Ben's, according to owner Allyn Pearlman. Proper and effective masks covering nose and mouth must be worn at all times in Papa Ben's.

As the business owner, Allyn sets the rules. The governor's executive order states in part: "Nothing in this executive order precludes businesses or other establishments from requiring employees or customers to follow additional hygiene measures, including the wearing of a face covering." The governor's order also notes that while there are no jurisdictional penalties such as jail time or fines for not wearing facial coverings or adhering to other protocols, "a legally authorized official may act to enforce trespassing laws and remove violators at the request of a business establishment or other property owner."

N'Crowd in-person meetings: CDC officials say fully-vaccinated people are relatively safe visiting with other fully vaccinated people indoors without wearing masks or staying six feet apart. However, in the same statement, the CDC indicated that "everyone - even those who are vaccinated - should continue with all mitigation strategies when in public settings."

The agency's recommendations include, among other things, wearing a well-fitted mask; staying six feet apart from people you do not live with; and avoiding medium and large-sized in-person gatherings. As noted above Papa Ben's will continue to require masks and encourage social distancing in the store.

As for our meetings, I propose we tentatively schedule our first return to in-person membership meetings for Wednesday, June 16, at Papa Ben's. We will review the ongoing situation in the first half of the month before deciding whether or not to go ahead with the plan. Masks will be required, and unvaccinated members should probably not attend. However, through the miracle of modern technology (if we can make it work), we will also set up a Zoom meeting so people who are unable to attend in person can participate virtually.

In the meantime, watch your email for info on upcoming Zoom meetings. Until we meet again, in-person or virtually, happy and safe railroading!

Tom

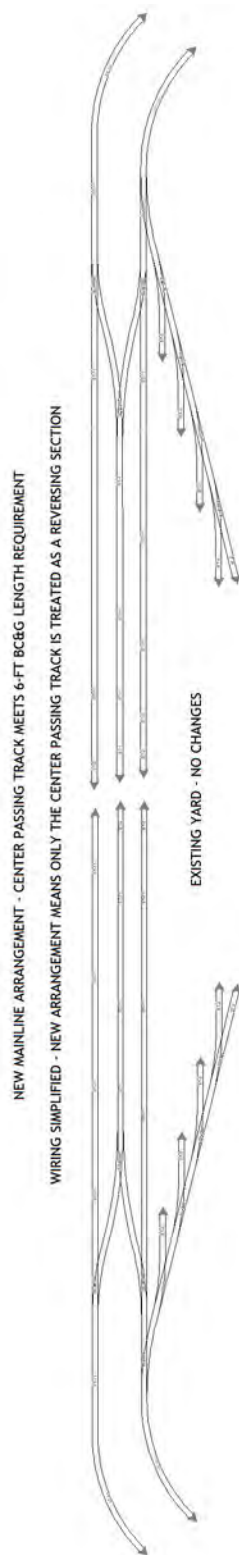


N'Crowd monthly Membership Meetings: To be held virtually until further notice. Members will receive meeting details via email.

N'Crowd monthly Test & Tune Sessions: CANCELLED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE.

N'Crowd Even-Month Ops Sessions: CANCELLED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE. Saturday and Sunday BC&G running sessions are ongoing. Members will receive session details via email.

BC&G work will address reversing section issues



Changes are coming to the mainline track arrangement through the BC&G's Englewood Yard to address ongoing electrical issues.

Everyone who has spent any time running trains on the BC&G has probably encountered the intermittent fault that can stop all train movement in the Englewood Yard and Union Station electrical blocks. The problem centers on the reversing section formed by the current track arrangement, and it is exacerbated by some issues related to aging wiring as well.

N'Crowd board member Ray Byer has come up with a plan that should address most of the issues. As per the (not to scale) diagram at left, Ray proposes a new track arrangement that will include a passing siding between the east and west mainline tracks. The center passing siding will become the reversing section in the Englewood Yard electrical block; with this design the transition to/from the reversing section will only be necessary when a train is actually changing direction, as opposed to just passing through the yard. Many more trains pass through the yard without changing direction than do change direction.

The new passing/reversing track will meet our six-foot long standard. However, a longer, lighted passenger train may still encounter electrical issues when changing direction. For this and other reasons, we do not encourage the running of long, fully lighted passenger trains at this time.

In addition to the track modifications, Ray intends to inspect and repair all of the wiring in the Englewood Yard area. Member Gordon Bliss and others have volunteered to assist Ray with the work, which is expected to start in the second half of March.

While the work is underway, trains will not be able to run on the back portion of the layout. The front "show loop" through Bennett, Austin, Giddings and Flatonia will be in operation on Saturdays to meet our obligation to run trains for the benefit of Papa Ben's customers on Saturdays.

For those who want to know more about DCC reversing sections, the April 2021 issue of *Model Railroader* magazine has a straightforward article on the topic. The magazine is available at Papa Ben's.

New throttles for the BC&G

As agreed during our last (virtual) membership meeting, we have purchased two new Digitrax UT6 throttles for use on the BC&G. With this purchase, we have three new and one recently refurbished Digitrax throttles for members to use when running trains on the BC&G. Our Wi-Fi capability is functioning as well for folks who like to use their smart phones to run trains, so we should have fewer throttle-related problems with the oldest Digitrax throttles now retired.

Please handle the throttles with care, treating them like your own, which they are. Your dues paid for these upgrades. Thank you!

Houston N'Crowd 2021 Officers and Volunteers

President Tom Marsh
 Vice President John Sweigart
 Secretary Bill Busch
 Treasurer Eddie Aycock
 Board Member (2021) Randy Ollett

Board Member (2022) Allan Melton
 Board Member (2023) Ray Byer
 Immediate Past President Samuel Townsell II
 Layout Master Randy Ollett
 Editor & Webmaster Tom Marsh

Classic and modern from Monaghan

N'Crowd member and prolific custom painter Andrew Monaghan recently completed several projects, and after release from the Monaghan Shops, these gleaming beauties found their way to the N'Crowd's Bayou City & Gulf Railroad. Watch for more from the Monaghan Shops in the next issue of *The Orderboard*.



Above, Missouri Pacific EMD E8 No. 7018 shows off its Eagle colors while passing through Austin on the BC&G. Below left, MoPac E8 No. 7020 prepares to make the curve around Union Station on the BC&G. Below right, No. 7020 rolls through the countryside at Giddings on BC&G rails.





Above, freshly painted power poses for the photographer at Austin on the BC&G. Below, CN 8924 is one of a group of 50 EMD SD70M-2 locomotives delivered in late 2010/early 2011. Bottom, EMD SD70MACs in an imaginative Maersk paint scheme will not likely turn up in too many places other than the Bayou City & Gulf.



A Peruvian mountain expedition *by Hugh Boyd*



These pictures were taken in August 2004 when I took a railfan trip to Peru organized by Chris Skow's Trains Unlimited. This was my second trip to Peru with Trains Unlimited and it covered an almost identical itinerary to my first trip two years earlier.

The tour involved journeys on Peru's two major railroad systems, Ferrocarril del Sur and Ferrocarril Central Andino, which are unconnected. Ferrocarril Central Andino makes a dramatic eastbound ascent of the Andes with numerous switchbacks and tunnels on its alignment from Peru's capitol Lima to La Oroya and on to Huancayo ("Wan-Kayo"). Huancayo, a city of around 500,000 citizens, is the capital of Junín Region in the central highlands of Peru. The journey on Ferrocarril del Sur from the southern city of Arequipa to Cusco included a side trip to the Inca ruins at Machu Picchu.

The photo above exhibits some obvious Photoshop monkeying so as to display our train's progress as it ascends the barren areas of 10,000 ft.-plus elevation along the route from the mining town of La Oroya to Huancayo. We also visited a railroad retirement yard in the Cusco area and were treated to some first class hospitality. This was heavy duty railfanning.





The photo above incorporates more Photoshop work to show our train ascending a switchback alignment on the line from La Oroya to Hauncayo. The photo at left below shows our train after passing through a railroad-related village on the ascent of the western side of the Andes on our trip to La Oroya. This village has features in common with Andean villages I have seen in other South American countries. All have a lot of steep ground and a shortage of level terrain. Nevertheless, the townspeople of yesteryear found space for a central plaza with an elaborate church, and yet more space for a regulation-size soccer field.

Below right, our locomotive is awaiting our return descent to Lima. It's at Huancayo on the standard gauge rails of the dual gauge track. We started out on the trip further southeast to Huancavelica on the 3-ft. narrow gauge line, but our locomotive quit and we never saw Huancavelica. The narrow gauge track has since been lifted and replaced with standard gauge, so this scene no longer exists.





Until the recent Chinese railroad expansion into Tibet, Ferrocarril del Sur was the world's highest-altitude standard gauge railroad. These two pictures were taken at Galera at an elevation of 15,681-ft. on the Amazonian side of Peru's watersheds. Out of the picture on the left is the Galera Tunnel.

According to various online sources, locomotive No. 1002 is a GE C30-7 with modified radiator layout so as to be able to traverse the line's tight tunnel clearances. No. 705 is a JT26CW-2B dual-cab locomotive designed and built by Brazil's Villares using some design elements and compo-



nents licensed from EMD. In a press release issued in 1986 after delivery of five JT26CW-2B locomotives to Peru, Villares noted that the locomotives were “designed and built specifically to meet the operating conditions of the National Company of Ferrocarriles del Peru - Enafer - at altitudes of up

to 4,800 meters and sections of difficult layout (operation zigzag pattern).”

Shown at left is our train to Cusco, which originated in Peru’s second city, Arequipa. Locomotive No. 555 is an Alco RSD-34 built in 1961. We first took a journey to the Pacific coast port of Mollendo and back. In the picture, the train is awaiting departure with Volcan Misti dominating the scene with its 18,900-ft elevation.

After a pause at Juliaca, elevation 12,400-ft. near Lago Titicaca, we continued on to Cusco on another train and enjoyed a local band’s musical presentation. Below, power for this train was No. 654, an MLW Series C-26 locomotive built in 1974.

I would make these trips again!



Have you renewed your membership?

To continue your membership in the N’Crowd Model Railroad Society, please renew no later than March 31. 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. You can also renew online.

Semaphores and wigwags: The COVID trip of 2020

Part 3, by Gordon Bliss



Amtrak's Southwest Chief, with private car Tioga Pass in tow, cruises through the wide-open spaces of New Mexico next to the still-functional Santa Fe line poles.

Last time we left you we were staying overnight in La Junta, Colo., the starting point for our chase of Amtrak's westbound Train No. 3, the *Southwest Chief*.

Before the *Chief's* 7:49 a.m. arrival, we spotted an ATSF covered hopper in use, elevated at a grain mill. We also made a quick stop a little west of the La Junta station to take a look at former Santa Fe 2-6-2 No. 1024. The Prairie-type is displayed with a pair of semaphores on a low rise beside US 50 where a new La Junta Welcome Center is proposed.

This morning we decided to head the 36 miles southwest to Delhi to catch the *Southwest Chief* passing one of the last operating wigwag crossing signals in service. (Editors's note: The wigwag was replaced with a modern crossing signal on March 9 of this year.) On the way, we spotted an old wooden depot on a farm near Timpas. We also came upon an old one-lane truss bridge on the other side of the tracks and took a few moments for pictures. I

would guess the bridge was built in the 1920s or 1930s. Before we reached Delhi, we crossed a two lane concrete highway bridge, which according to a marker, was built in 1937 across the Hoe Ranch Arroyo.

South of La Junta the Santa Fe main still has the Automatic Train Stop (ATS) inducer coils on the track. This told us that track speed through here is 79 mph.

We braved 28-degree weather at Delhi when we spotted our prize. The "Magnetic Flagman", more commonly known as a wigwag, is a crossing signal with a warning board that sways back and forth as a train approaches, similar to the way a brakeman would wave his lantern. We took a lot of close-up pictures and detail shots, and set up the GoPro camera for the arrival of Amtrak.

It was a beautiful, crisp and cold morning with the sun shining. We heard a train horn and the wigwag started to wave back and forth. The *Southwest Chief* swept past us, with a private passenger car carrying the rear markers. The

car was the *Tioga Pass*, a business car built by Canadian National in 1959. What luck! I have a back story with this car. During a Dallas Area Train Show in Plano some time back, we saw the car at Dallas Union Terminal and met the car's owner, Norm Orfall. Someone had sprayed graffiti on the car and he asked if we would go to the store and get some thinner and rags to clean it off. We did, and he asked if we wanted to ride to Fort Worth the next day. We did, but that's another story!

A bit further down the tracks we spotted a former Santa Fe 24-ft. by 49-ft. water tower standing alongside an old alignment of the mainline. It took several miles to catch up with the *Chief*, but we were able to get some great pacing shots. Allan was doing 80 mph just to keep up with the fast-moving train.

At Trinidad we saw some former Santa Fe buildings where the old, larger yard once was. The climb up Raton Pass starts here. Just outside of town we found a set of crossovers at the small town of Jansen, where the old Colorado & Southern branched off. The crossovers are protected by a set of cantilevered signal bridges. We also spotted 132 pound, 39-ft. jointed rail still in service.

The challenging 3.3 percent grade on Raton Pass made it easy to pace the *Chief*, which travels through the pass at 20 to 30 mph. However, the road has no or only narrow shoulders, leaving few safe spots to pull off for photos. With good timing, we caught the train rounding the curve at Wootton Ranch. The railroad here was constructed on part of a toll road built in the early 1870s by American frontiersman Richens "Uncle Dick" Wootton, providing a shorter, if more difficult, route for travellers using the Santa Fe Trail. Wootton later sold the toll road right-of-way to the railroad.

US 85/I-25 carried us through Raton Pass into New Mexico. At Keota we caught the *Chief* rolling downhill towards the next stop at Raton. Going through the town of Springer, we saw track equipment on a siding. This equipment was probably supporting what the Federal Railroad Administration calls the "SW Chief Raton Route Modernization Program", which will ensure continued operation of the train on the Raton Pass line. The program will also result in the removal of the line's oldest signals.

Just south of Springer we saw our first set of active semaphores signals and meet another railfan. These are Union Switch



Above, the last active "Magnetic Flagman" on the Raton Pass line. Our travellers' timing was fortuitous: The old wigwag signal was replaced on March 9 of this year.

Below, the "Magnetic Flagman" waves to the private car Tioga Pass.





At top, Amtrak Train No. 3, the westbound Southwest Chief, accelerates under a cantilevered signal bridge with US&S H-5 searchlight signals. Above, the train rounds the curve at Wootton Ranch near the summit of Raton Pass.

& Signal (US&S) type T-2 semaphores (upper quadrant) installed in the early 1920s. They are almost 100 years old, and it's a miracle they are still in service. The signals are still powered over the old code lines on the telegraph poles, although copper theft has become a problem. Other signals on the line slated for replacement are US&S type H-5 searchlight signals, which are almost as rare today as semaphore signals.

It is expected that the 40-plus semaphore signals being replaced will find homes at museums, lineside towns and maybe a few BNSF managers' backyards. The wigwag is said to be going to the Colorado Railroad Museum.

This issue's cover photo shows the *Southwest Chief* splitting the blades at the signals near Springer. Note that both blades show a stop indication; this is a malfunction. The dispatcher radioed the engineer and said he was not able to clear the signal, so he gave permission for the train to pass at walking speed with visual confirmation that the track ahead was clear.

We passed another work train at Wagon Mound before arriving in Las Vegas, N.M. Here we saw another 2-6-2, No. 1129, along with the brick 1899 Santa Fe station and the last standing Santa Fe roundhouse. The turntable has been gone for many years. Adjacent to the station is the

Castañeda Hotel, Fred Harvey's first trackside hotel, built in 1898. South of Las Vegas we caught the *Chief* at Chappelle, where all six semaphore signals protecting the main and siding were still in service. As the train passed, I spotted date nails in the ties of the jointed-rail siding dated 1956 and 1962. We pulled two for preservation.

In Glorieta we photographed the *Southwest Chief* passing the old Santa Fe station, which is now the community's post office. We then headed through Glorieta Pass down into Lamy, where we ended our chase of the *Chief* with its early afternoon arrival at Lamy's 1909 Santa Fe depot. Lamy is the Amtrak stop for Santa Fe, New Mexico's capital city. The branchline that goes to Santa Fe, which most recently was operated by shortline Santa Fe Southern as a tourist line, has been inactive for a number of years. The railroad has been sold to a local partnership that plans to restore excursion service.

Our chase over for the day, we headed back to Las Vegas for what turned out to be an awesome overnight stay at the Castañeda Hotel. The hotel reopened in 2019 after having been mostly closed and partially derelict for some 70 years.

Our trip home thru Belen and Abo will be in part 4, the final chapter.



Above, semaphores stand guard as the Chief approaches Chappelle. Note the jointed rail on the siding.

At right, the engineer has notched up the throttle, and the Chief leaves Chappelle behind in a cloud of diesel exhaust. Enjoy such scenes while you can; Amtrak's aged GEs are to be replaced by more fuel-efficient, environmentally-friendly locomotives.

Below, No. 3 pulls into Lamy, ending our chase of the Southwest Chief.



Members spot ‘foreign power’, warbonnet



Allan Melton recently found himself in the right place at the right time to catch this BNSF/Ferromex lashup crossing Texas 99 in Sugar Land. In the lead is BNSF No. 7584, a GE ES44DC built in 2007. The trailing unit is Ferromex 4053, an EMD SD70ACe built for the Mexican railroad in 2011.



More “foreign” power, this time caught by Mauricio Varon near downtown Houston at Tower 26. The two Canadian Pacific locomotives are headed east through the junction. The lead KCS loco on the westbound train is a GE ES44AC unit lettered for KCS de Mexico.

Warbonnet sightings are rare these days, but Mauricio recently came across “yellow bonnet” BNSF SD40-2 No. 1772. The locomotive was delivered to Santa Fe as No. 5212 by EMD in 1978.



T&NO 982 moves again

by Tom Marsh



After sitting cocooned in downtown Houston without its tender since 2014, the woeful tale of T&NO 2-10-2 No. 982 took another turn February 28 when the locomotive was moved from downtown to a new storage location in the East End. The photos here were taken during the move.

Future plans for the locomotive have not been officially announced, but reportedly ownership will be transferred to an organization that is the successor to the Texas Railway Preservation Association (TRPA). TRPA volunteers years ago had taken on maintenance of the locomotive with a long-term goal of restoring it to operating condition.

No. 982 is a Santa Fe type built in 1919 by the Baldwin Locomotive Works. Originally delivered to Southern Pacific as No. 3651, the locomotive was transferred to T&NO in 1922. It was donated to the city of Houston in 1957 and put on display in Hermann Park.

The full story of the trials and tribulations of No. 982 and the TRPA over the years, including the loss of the tender, is too long and complicated to go into in *The Orderboard*, but maybe this latest chapter bodes well for the locomotive's future.



LCL

Less than Car Load: a few notes from your editor

Thanks, and a call to action: Thanks to this issue's contributors, who have taken us from our fair city to places far and wide.

Won't you consider sharing through *The Orderboard* this year? The deadline for the May/June issue is Saturday, May 1.

Calling all Rock Island fans: If you have an interest in that mighty fine line, the Rock Island, you should join the online Rock Island Lines group at groups.io/g/RockIslandLines. In recent months the group has published over 230 photos from the Don Ball Jr. collection. The subjects include steam and diesel action and roster

photos, all in high resolution and many in glorious black and white, like the example below.



HOUSTON N'CROWD 2021 TIME TABLE - SUBJECT TO CHANGE

TBC = To Be Confirmed

March 3

N'Crowd Test & Tune **CANCELLED**

March 17

N'Crowd Membership Meeting will be held virtually starting at 7 p.m. Details will be sent to members via email.

April 4

N'Crowd Operating Session **CANCELLED**

April 21

N'Crowd Membership Meeting will be held virtually starting at 7 p.m. Details will be sent to members via email.

April 24-25

New Braunfels Annual Spring Jamboree & Train Show

May 5

N'Crowd Test & Tune **TBC**

May 19

N'Crowd Membership Meeting will be held virtually starting at 7 p.m. Details will be sent to members via email.

May 21-23

Oklahoma City Model Railroad Expo, Oklahoma State Fairgrounds

June 6

N'Crowd Operating Session **TBC**

June 16

N'Crowd Membership Meeting; tentatively planned as hybrid online and in-person gathering

July 7

N'Crowd Test & Tune **TBC**

July 21

N'Crowd Membership Meeting **TBC**

August 14

Greater Houston Train Show, Stafford Centre

THE ORDERBOARD

News from Houston N'Crowd

N'Crowd Model Railroad Society, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit educational organization incorporated in the State of Texas.

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 any and all submissions for clarity and length.

Visit our Web site:

www.houstonncrowd.org

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