



THE ORDERBOARD

November/December 2021



Kansas City Southern

Happy Holidays from Houston N'Crowd!



Canadian Pacific



Jerry Huddleston via Wikimedia Commons

With the holiday season upon us and the merger of Kansas City Southern into Canadian Pacific (because that's what it will be) moving ahead, *The Orderboard* takes this opportunity to say "Happy Holidays!" with these photos of the KCS and CP holiday trains.

Unfortunately, due to the ongoing pandemic, the holiday trains will not run in 2021, but let's hope we'll see one or both in 2022.

However, the third photo foreshadows something exciting that may happen if the merger goes through. CP President Keith Creel said in a recent interview with *Railway Age* that a special train would travel from Calgary to Mexico City over CP and KCS lines powered by CP 4-6-4 No. 2816 *Empress*.

Get you cameras ready!

"GREEN EYE" - CLEAR BLOCK

by Tom Marsh, President

End-of-year stuff

So we find ourselves at the end of another year, and I am happy to say that from my perspective, 2021 was better than 2020! This was borne out to me during a recent Saturday visit to Papa Ben's Train Place. The store was full of (masked) customers. In our layout room, manned by cheerful N'Crowd volunteers, multiple trains were running and visitors of all ages were clearly enjoying their BC&G experience. Thanks to all of the volunteers who are "minding the store" this holiday season. And special thanks to Papa Ben's owner Allyn Pearlman for his continued support of the Houston N'Crowd.

November is N'Crowd election month: Our November 17 membership meeting is also our annual corporate meeting, during which the main business is election of officers and one board member for the coming year. The nominating committee has made its recommendations, which will appear on the ballot. Nominations will also be taken from the floor prior to the start of voting.

Return to the Spaghetti Western: No, Clint Eastwood is not returning to his career roots, but N'Crowd is returning to the Spaghetti Western Italian Cafe on Shepherd Dr. for our annual combat gift exchange and party. This year's bash will take place on Wednesday, Dec. 15. Doors will open at 6:30 p.m. and the buffet service will start about 7:30 p.m. Cost is \$26 for adults. More details can be found on page 7 in this issue; a reminder will be sent out by email closer to the date.

Membership dues increase coming in 2022: As those of you who have attended recent meetings know, we have decided to implement our first annual dues in-

crease in many, many years. Beginning Jan. 1, 2022, "Active Member" dues (our standard individual dues) will be \$20 (\$21 for online renewal). However, if you renew before Jan. 1, you will pay the current dues of \$15 (\$16 for online renewal). Renew early and save!

T-TRAK at the 2022 Greater Houston Train Show:

We have been allocated a 16 foot-long space at the next Greater Houston Train Show. I'll have more information at the November meeting.

Stay safe, and happy railroading!

Tom



N'Crowd Wednesday Membership Meetings:
November 17 / December 15 (PARTY!) / January 19
Meetings start at 7 p.m. at Papa Ben's Train Place.

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

N'Crowd Even-Month Ops Sessions: No December session. Operating sessions subject to change or cancellation.

Operations return to the BC&G

by Gordon Bliss; photos by Jason Valdez

It has been a while since we moved freight and passengers on the Bayou City & Gulf Railroad in a prototype manner. That happened again on October 3 when five crew and two brass hats showed up and rolled some wheels on steel rail to get things moved from place to place.

N'Crowd members Randy Ollett, Naz Hally, Phil Poirier, Michael Boehnke, Michael Cianciolo and Jason Valdez joined Road Masters Eddie Aycock and myself to run some trains. We used the colored tab system that I have used on my railroad for a while. On your next visit to the BC&G, you may notice some new name tags on the fascia that identify the locations on the railroad to facilitate operations.

Randy held down Englewood Yard and Naz gave Austin Yard a try. Everyone else worked as road engineers across the railroad.

We had a few electrically-dead sidings that tried to derail us. However, we managed to run the 15 scheduled trains across the railroad, although the last three did not make it to the final destination due to time.

Three passenger trains whisked passengers east and west making stops at several stations. We even tried cutting the engines off at Bayou City for fuel and had a private car or two on the runs. Tom Wayburn will be happy to know that Wayburn Gravel down in Hunter below the bridges was switched. Access to the gravel operation is via a lead that is the longest on the railroad to serve a single industry.

A good time was had by all. BC&G operating sessions will restart in the first part of next year, so watch your email and sign up for fun. And if you get invited to an operating session on another railroad, give it a try. You will have a lot of fun!

Two photos above, BC&G road and yard crews hard at work on the railroad.

At right, you can see the colored tabs on the cars that facilitate car forwarding.



Railbox reporting marks on the move?

by Tom Marsh



I recently had the opportunity to do some railfanning with a friend on a beautiful October weekend, and our search for trains took us from Houston to San Antonio and points (sort of) in between. At one point we came across a southbound KCS manifest freight. We positioned for a photo at the Rice Belt Warehouse in El Campo.

The train had one unit on the head end and two in the DPU position at the rear. The light was good and I snapped away at various cars in the consist as the train passed.

A couple of weeks later as I was looking over photos from the trip for possible use in this issue of *The Orderboard*, I noticed something odd about the reporting marks on some of the Railbox cars. You can see in the photos of two new boxcars that the reporting marks and other required stencils are positioned high on the car side.

I am guessing that the object is to keep the reporting marks and other stencils above the usual level of the so-called “artists” who constantly are tagging freight cars with graffiti. I’ve inquired about it through the TTX Company website, but did not receive a response in time for this story. If I learn more, I’ll let you know.

This looks like a good excuse for model manufacturers to release some new Railbox cars featuring the modified scheme.



Two above, KCS EMD SD70ACe No. 4150 leads a manifest freight through El Campo, Texas, on Oct. 24. On the tail end are GE ES44ACs No. 4695 and No. 4804. In between is a mixed bag of cars, including several new Railbox boxcars with reporting marks that have migrated up their sides as illustrated below.



Tackling our JMRI

by Naz Hally

I recently volunteered to sort out issues with the BC&G DCC programming track and Java Model Railroad Interface (JMRI) setup.

I first took a look at the club's Digitrax PR3 and determined it works fine, if a bit slowly, as a stand-alone programming interface between a Windows laptop and an isolated, stand-alone section of programming track. I found no apparent issues with the PR3's USB connecting cable. The PR3 is running the latest firmware available from the Digitrax website.

I then assembled a test set-up at home with the following components::

1. JMRI software, version 4.24, running on an up-to-date Windows 10 laptop
2. Digitrax PS14 power supply connected to a PR3
3. PR3's USB cable connecting laptop with block connector on PR3 base
4. Programming track consisting of:
 - 1x Kato Unitrack 62 mm feeder track
 - 1x Kato Unitrack 186 mm straight track
 - 2x Kato Unitrack 62 mm concrete bumper track
5. Standard Kato blue/white electrical wire connecting feeder track (using supplied Kato track-underside connector) to track connection block on PR3. I cut off the Kato transformer connector and split and stripped ~1/4 in. of blue and white ends for insertion in track connection block.
6. Various Kato locomotives equipped with either Digitrax mobile decoders or ESU LokSound sound decoders for test reading/writing of loco address, CV values, functions, etc.

Windows 10 recognizes the PR3 as soon as it is powered up and plugged into an available USB socket on the laptop. Windows automatically assigns a COM port which appears on a pull-down menu in JMRI when setting up the new PR3 connection.

To keep the test simple, the PR3 was set up under JMRI's Connections menu as a stand-alone programmer (no LocoNet connection to any command station).

If there are already existing connections set up in JMRI for other devices (like a PR4), those connections must first be either disabled or deleted before the newly set up connection for the PR3 will work properly; this is a fiddly process requiring frequent re-starts of JMRI.

Since the PR3 was not connected to any Digitrax Command Station, it must be set to operate as a

"LocoNet termination"; this requires that the termination switch be toggled on using the push button next to the ERR LED.

The PR3 is appreciably slower reading JMRI pages of info and CV values than a new PR4 running with the same laptop, connecting cables and wires, and programming track. Although slower reading/writing than a PR4, the PR3 had no issues reading/writing pages of info or individual CV values for Digitrax and ESU LokSound decoders.

At my first opportunity, I went to the layout room to reconnect and test the PR3 with the N'Crowd laptop. The PR3 works okay as a stand-alone programming interface between the club's laptop and the same section of Kato Unitrack I used for the at-home tests on my own laptop. Two DCC equipped locomotives (one with a Digitrax DN163K1C decoder, one with a LokSound V5 micro DCC decoder) were tested for read/write of parameters and CVs using JMRI; although the PR3 still seems slow, there were no issues with reading/writing data on either of the two decoders.

I did find that JMRI was running version 4.22 on the laptop; I updated it to the current production version, 4.24. JMRI depends heavily on Java to function, and Java has now been updated on the laptop to the current version.

Initially, no attempt was made to connect the PR3 to LocoNet, which is necessary if we want to use the permanent programming track on the layout. However, I am happy to report that JMRI is now set up to program locomotives on the layout programming track. The PR3 is connected via LocoNet to the DCS100 which communicates with the programming track on the lower level of the layout near the laptop pull-out drawer. The Unitrack programming track that was used for initial testing has been deliberately disconnected from the PR3. It should not be reconnected to the PR3! The programming track section and connecting wiring remains in the drawer behind the laptop.

We were able to read/write locomotive parameters and individual CVs on the programming track while other locomotives were running elsewhere on the layout at the same time. Although it can seem a little slow at times, a "busy" LocoNet operating environment doesn't seem to appreciably degrade the PR3's ability to execute read/write commands issued by JMRI.

We'll have some hands-on demonstrations about how to use the programming track in the near future.

Soldering tips

by Don Shaw

Editors note: Don Shaw, who lives in St. Thomas, Ontario, became a “corresponding member” of the N’Crowd in 2014 due to a typographical error on my part. I was trying to sort out an N’Crowd member’s email address who had a similar name. Apparently I got it wrong, because after sending out an email to all members, Canada Don replied. By happenstance, it turns out that Don is an active N-scale modeler and we’ve been corresponding ever since.

With N-scale scale, we are often called upon to do some extremely accurate soldering. I have a soldering tip I’d like to share that I use to hardwire decoders into my older locomotives that works great for soldering in very fine, intricate areas.

When hard-wiring a decoder into an old DCC locomotive (some of mine are over 50 years old), the solder needs to be extremely targeted to attach a fine piece of wire. To do this, I use my soldering iron in conjunction with a long hat pin. The pin has a plastic ball on one end to protect my fingers from the heat.

First I “tin” the pin with solder. Then I put a tiny touch of flux where I need to attach the wire. The pin is used to hold the wire on the spot to be attached. Then the soldering iron is held on the pin to heat it until the solder lightly rolls down onto the prepared spot to

attach the wire when the pin is lifted and the solder cools.

This method works every time for me. I hope it is as successful for y’all if you try it too.

I have 156 locomotives on my roster. I have successfully completed 78 DCC conversions soldering the decoders in myself. My most intricate job thus far has been converting my old “Galloping Goose” to DCC. It runs excellently.

I wish I could come to your clinics and learn from your experts, but not this time. Hopefully in the future we will be able to travel with more freedom.

Until then, thanks for letting me be a “Distant Member” of the N’crowd. And you are ALL welcome up here anytime you can make it!

Editors note: Here is the first correspondence I received from “Canada Don” back in September 2014.

Hi Tom. I’m Don Shaw, from St. Thomas, Ontario, Canada. I would have loved to come to your Texas N scale model train show, but I was busy that weekend with our HUGE N-scale train layout here in the “Train Capital of Canada”. We used to have 19 different railways, two round-houses, and lots of train people in St. Thomas. Back in the 1920s to the 1950s, we were the “hub” of trains in North America. Since our location was exactly half-way between New York and Detroit, we were the logical choice for all major railways to meet for exchange of goods and supplies.

I belong to the London NGineers model train club, which is located in our “Southern Station” in St. Thomas. This station is over 130 years old, and has been fully restored to

original condition, right down to the horse hair in the plaster walls! Our N-scale layout is just over 1,000 sq. ft. on the second floor of the station.

I personally have been in N-scale modelling for 48 years. I run my layout on Digitrax DCC, and I install my own decoders, including hard-wiring them into tiny places.

If you ever plan to come North, please feel free to contact me, and I can show you our club layout, as well as my own, which has 600 scale miles of track, and a roster of 100 locomotives, some of which are 50 years old, and still running well. Coming here would be a great excursion for your club in Texas! Keep in touch to see what we can arrange. I look forward to hearing more from the Lone Star State.

Don Shaw



Above left, the Canada Southern station in St. Thomas, Ontario, now home to a museum and the London NGineers N-scale club. Canada Southern was a division of Michigan Central, then New York Central, and Penn Central. [Narhfwiki](#) photo via [Wikimedia Commons](#). Above right, a Canada Southern train detours over the Bayou City & Gulf in 2019.



All aboard for fun!

Houston N'Crowd members, spouses, family and friends are
invited to join us for our 2021

Holiday Party and Combat Gift Exchange

Mark your calendar! We'll gather Wednesday, Dec. 15 (our scheduled meeting night) at the Spaghetti Western Italian Cafe, 1608 Shepherd Dr. at Eigel St. just south of I-10 in Houston.

Park behind the restaurant off Eigel St. Our room will open around 6:30 p.m. for setup, socializing and appetizers, and the buffet dinner will start about 7:30 p.m. Dinner includes choice of lasagna or "Spaghetti Western Formal Wear" (bowtie pasta tossed with chicken, sun dried tomatoes, and mushrooms in a roasted garlic cream sauce), salad, dessert and light beverages. A cash bar will be available for those desiring more robust beverages. This year's banquet is \$26 per person for adults and \$16.00 for children ages 5-15.

Pre-payment is required by Monday, Dec. 13 .

To make your reservations online, go to:

<http://houstonncrowd.org/2021party.html>

To pay by check or money order, make your check payable to Houston N'Crowd and mail it to: Tom Marsh, 8502 Sharpcrest St., Houston TX 77036

Please provide your full name and tell us how many will be in your party!

We'll finish the evening with our annual Combat Gift Exchange. Rails and non-rails are invited to play! Here's how it works: Bring a wrapped gift, \$15-\$25 limit. We'll have exchanges for both rail and non-rail; anyone can participate in either or both exchanges. Everyone who brings a gift pulls a number. No. 1 selects the first gift, then No. 2 has the choice to take that gift or select another, and so on, and the combat is on! Note that any one gift can only be stolen once in each round. The process continues through all the numbers until everyone playing has a gift, then the last selection is made by No. 1, who can exchange for any gift he or she wants. Good strategy or good luck will win the day!

We look forward to seeing you in person. Masks are optional.

LCL

Less than Car Load: a few notes from your editor

Thanks: This is the final issue of *The Orderboard* for 2021. I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has contributed to the newsletter during 2021, and urge everyone to share their model railroad-ing and railfanning experiences with us during 2022.

This is your newsletter: I look forward to hearing from YOU!

Happy holidays, and best wishes for a safe and happy New Year!

HOUSTON N'CROWD 2021/2022 TIME TABLE - SUBJECT TO CHANGE

November 3

N'Crowd Test & Tune, Papa Ben's Train Place, 4007-E Bellaire Blvd, Houston, 6 p.m.

November 17

N'Crowd Membership Meeting, Papa Ben's Train Place, 4007-E Bellaire Blvd, Houston, 7 p.m.

December 5

N'Crowd Operating Session **Cancelled**

December 15

Annual Holiday Party and Combat Gift Exchange, Spaghetti Western Italian Cafe, 1608 Shepherd Dr. See page 7 for more information.

2022

January 5

N'Crowd Test & Tune, Papa Ben's Train Place, 4007-E Bellaire Blvd, Houston, 6 p.m.

January 19

N'Crowd Membership Meeting, Papa Ben's Train Place, 4007-E Bellaire Blvd, Houston, 7 p.m.

February 6

N'Crowd Operating Session **To Be Confirmed**

February 12

Greater Houston Train Show, Pasadena Convention Center. Our T-TRAK Division will have layout space, and volunteers will be needed to assist.

February 16

N'Crowd Membership Meeting, Papa Ben's Train Place, 4007-E Bellaire Blvd, Houston, 7 p.m.

March 2

N'Crowd Test & Tune, Papa Ben's Train Place, 4007-E Bellaire Blvd, Houston, 6 p.m.

March 16

N'Crowd Membership Meeting, Papa Ben's Train Place, 4007-E Bellaire Blvd, Houston, 7 p.m.

April 3

N'Crowd Operating Session **To Be Confirmed**

April 20

N'Crowd Membership Meeting, Papa Ben's Train Place, 4007-E Bellaire Blvd, Houston, 7 p.m.

May 4

N'Crowd Test & Tune, Papa Ben's Train Place, 4007-E Bellaire Blvd, Houston, 6 p.m.

May 18

N'Crowd Membership Meeting, Papa Ben's Train Place, 4007-E Bellaire Blvd, Houston, 7 p.m.

June 5

N'Crowd Operating Session **To Be Confirmed**

June 15

N'Crowd Membership Meeting, Papa Ben's Train Place, 4007-E Bellaire Blvd, Houston, 7 p.m.

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

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Send newsletter contributions to: tom@houstonNcrowd.org.

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

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www.houstonNcrowd.org

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