

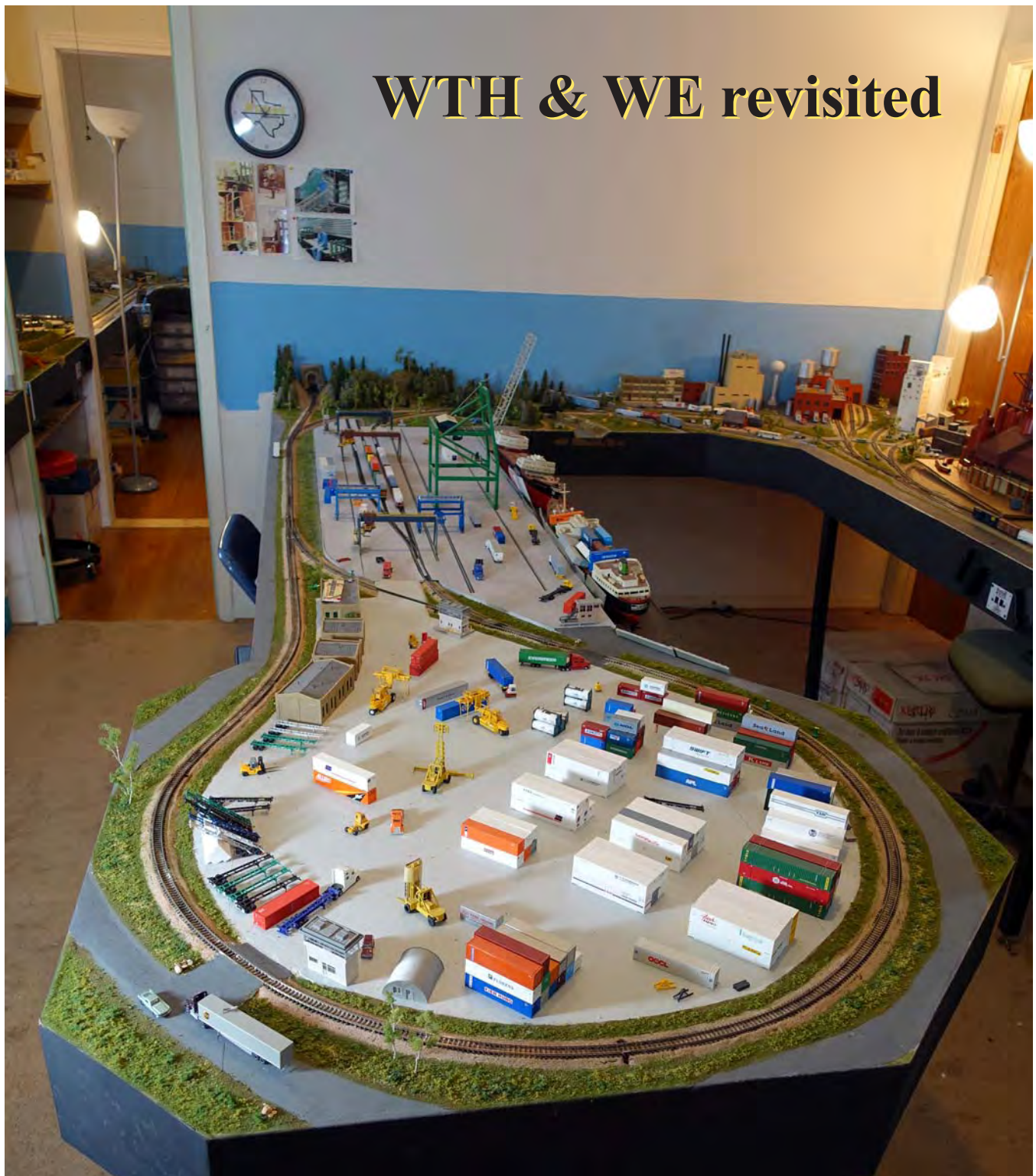
News from Houston N'Crowd



THE ORDERBOARD

July/August 2021

WTH & WE revisited



"GREEN EYE" - CLEAR BLOCK

by Tom Marsh, President

Working our way back to normal

Things are getting back to normal, sort of, and that means for the first time in quite a while, we are meeting in-person and we need volunteers for a train show!

Return of in-person meetings: We had good attendance at our in-person membership meeting June 16 and our Test & Tune session July 7. These were our first in-person meetings in over a year. Assuming the pandemic situation continues to improve, upcoming membership meetings and Test & Tune sessions will take place in-person.

But we'll still be Zooming: Even though we will be meeting in person, we still hope to arrange virtual home layout tours of members' layouts. We'll discuss this more at the July 21 membership meeting. If you are interested in hosting a virtual tour of your layout, let us know at the membership meeting or email me at tom@houstonncrowd.org.

Greater Houston Train Show is a go: We have been informed that N'Crowd will have a table at the 2021 Greater Houston Train Show, and a table will also be available for promoting T-TRAK. However, space for a T-TRAK layout will not be provided this year. No reason for this decision was provided. Also, no food or beverages will be sold at the show; exhibitors may bring their own. In any event, we'll be asking you to volunteer an hour or so of your time at the August 14 show at the Stafford Centre. We'll have more information at our July 21 membership meeting.

Stafford show not enough for you?: The Austin Train Show is set for Saturday and Sunday, Aug. 28-29. The

show will take place at a new venue, the Palmer Events Center in Austin. The organizers promise over 25,000 sq. ft. of vendors, model and Lego railroads, along with home layout tours. Adult admission is \$8.

Postcard and Paper Show: Vintage postcards are a good source for images of railroad stations, name trains, rail-served industries, railroad bridges and more. The range of images caught by postcard manufacturers over the years is surprising. You can get a feel for this variety at the Fall Houston Metro Postcard and Paper Show, which will take place Oct. 1-2 at the Holiday Inn Houston Intercontinental Airport. The 2022 Houston show will take place at the same location on March 18-19.

Members get things done: It's hard to keep up with every contribution that members make to our organization, but everyone's efforts are appreciated. Ray Byer continues to track down BC&G electrical gremlins. Naz Hally has made great progress on the new BC&G layout diagram; come to the July 21 meeting to see the latest version. Mauricio Varon has updated the computer we use for JMRI. Joe Kingsberry has undertaken routine maintenance and repairs on a number of BC&G locomotives. Randy Ollett and Bill Busch continue to lead our weekend BC&G operating sessions; Gordon Bliss, in addition to work on the BC&G, has invited us to run trains on his Santa Fe All The Way on two occasions this year. And I'm sure there are others who have helped out. Thanks to you all!

Stay safe, and happy railroading!

Tom



N'Crowd Wednesday Membership Meetings:
July 21 / August 18 / September 15 / October 20
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: CANCELLED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE. Saturday and Sunday BC&G running sessions are ongoing.

Update on the Eagle Route 3 *photos by Vincent Walker*

N'Crowd Past President Vincent Walker is moving ahead with his Eagle Route 3. His recent focus has been on structures, including this municipal fire station and yard tower.



Railroads respond to service complaints

On May 27, 2021, the chairman of the Surface Transportation Board sent letters to the top brass at BNSF, CN, CP, CSX, KCS, NS and UP, indicating that the STB has received “concerning reports from a meaningful number of rail customers of subpar performance, including missed switches, railcars delayed at intermediate yards or interchanges, extended out-of-route movements, and prolonged dwell at origin for some unit train traffic.”

The STB chairman requested from each railroad “an updated and detailed description of your preparedness to

meet anticipated future demand, including (1) the availability of train crew, yard, and maintenance employees (active, reserve, and furloughed workers) and your plans and time frames for employees to return to work and any re-training, if necessary, and (2) the availability of equipment resources (active and short-term / long-term stored locomotives and rail cars).”

The responses, which varied in their compliance with the STB request, offer insights into modern railroad operations. The letters can be found on the STB website at: <https://prod.stb.gov/news-communications/non-docketed-public-correspondence/>

Expedition to Ecuador

by Hugh Boyd



Two trains perform a photo run-by for the railfans at the famous Devil's Nose switchback near the community of Alausi.

In previous issues of *The Orderboard* I have covered some of my railfan trips to international railroad hotspots. This issue, I have several pictures along with some background on my Trains Unlimited railfan trip to Ecuador in July 2003.

But earlier than that date, my brother Dave, now an enthusiastic “birder”, rode the same tracks during the late steam era prior to the system’s decay, neglect and approach to possible abandonment. He was in Ecuador in July 1963 as part of his and his buddy Mike’s multi-month VW drive from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego and many places in between. While in Ecuador they took a steam powered train (the Mixta) from Riobamba to the Guayaquil area and even partook in a cab ride in the locomotive.

At my request, Dave looked through his Kodachrome slide collection and found the photo that appears at the top of the next page. Dave’s picture

shows a steam powered train on the mid-level of the Devil’s Nose switchback. This is July 1963. Note the roof-riding passengers, a common practice at that time.

The first adventure on my visit to Ecuador was behind a bright red Guayaquil & Quito 2-6-0 steam locomotive running from Guayaquil to the nearby port of Duran. By the time of my visit, the Guayaquil to Quito rails had significant unused sections and a complete journey by rail between the terminal cities was not possible. In fact, I subsequently learned that several intermediate communities had paved over the disused rails.

The photo on this page shows our two-car steam train and a diesel-powered train undertaking a photo run-by for the railfans’ benefit while transiting the famous Devil’s Nose switchback. The switchback is near the community of Alausi, which is south of the city of Riobamba, which was founded in 1534. The



Hugh's brother Dave took this picture at the Devil's Nose switchback in 1963.

switchback is part of the northbound track. The track continues its ascent through several horseshoe curves on its approach to Riobamba, the Avenue of the Volcanoes and eventually to Quito. The railway from the Pacific Ocean to Quito rises 9,350 feet in only 50 miles.

The photo at the top of the next page shows a Brazilian-built six axle, three truck locomotive arriving at the Cotopaxi National Park. During our train journey from Quito to the park, many passengers, including Yours Truly, rode on the roof of the passenger cars, a continuing practice from the railroad's earlier days. Volcan Cotopaxi is one of the world highest active volcanos at 19,347 ft. It's about 30 miles south of Quito and keeps company with many of the neighboring volcanos in the Avenue of the Volcanos. Ecuador has 47 active or inactive volcanos. Cotopaxi's most recent eruption was in 2015/2016.



Guayaquil & Quito 2-6-0 No. 11 nearing the terminal at Duran.

I have read that the almost abandoned Ecuadorian rail system has been revitalized by the government, and diesel and steam powered passenger trains have returned to several routes. I understand the

steam locomotives were sent to Spain for refurbishment. A ride on Ecuadorian rails still offers challenging rail alignments, spectacular vistas, operating steam power and vibrant Spanish culture and heritage.



Above, Hugh joined in the local practice of roof-riding on his journey to Ecuador's Cotopaxi National Park.

Right, this view illustrates the tremendous challenges the early railroad builders had to surmount to create the Ecuadorian version of "Steam in the Andes". Hugh's brother Dave, an accomplished civil engineer was in awe over the railroad designers' skill and audacity.



Below, local vaqueros' mounts seem not to mind their iron cousin simmering nearby.



WTH & WE revisited

by Ted Davis; photos by Tom Marsh



Above, N'Crowd Past President Ted Davis is CEO/CFO of the WTH & WE. He is seen here watching over part of his empire.

It was May 2014 when my WTH & WE last appeared in these pages. The space was created by joining two bedrooms through adjacent closets, as can be seen in this issue's cover photo.

The freelanced layout is built for continuous running but also has multiple industries that offer

plenty of switching action. Tracks still need to be laid at the turntable and steel mill, but otherwise trackwork is about 90 percent complete.

Scenery is about 80 percent complete, and includes a few touches that are just for fun. Enjoy the tour!



Above, a BNSF freight train with a Bayou City & Gulf boxcar in tow rolls past a new pipeline construction site.

Right, the Humble refinery is in the WTH & WE's Western Division. With its three production units it supplies the state with plenty of oil products.

Below, a big part of the WTH & WE's Eastern Division can be seen here. On the right is the town of Eastern West, with its homes and industries. On the left is the BNSF intermodal yard. At the far end is the city of West.

The busy BNSF intermodal yard is also pictured on this issue's cover. The terminal handles two container ships at a time, and incoming and outgoing over-the-road traffic as well.



Below, West has a busy main street and station where Amtrak has just arrived.





Above, the Eastern Division is also where we find the Coors Brewery. Out on the main road we stop for a beer. The milkman is delivering to the biker bar!

Right, it looks like the nuclear plant has had an accidental release. Side effects apparently include mutant crustaceans.



Right, the expansive Rohm & Haas chemical plant has multiple tracks for the switching crews to work.

Below, the Jurassic Park mining site is abandoned for now, but a surprise awaits anyone reopening it.



Road trip to the train show

Part 1, by Tom Marsh

In late April, with pandemic restrictions easing, a friend and I were able to charge up the camera batteries, load up the car and set out on a railfan road trip to an out-of-town train show for the first time in more than a year. Our destination was the New Braunfels Annual Spring Jamboree & Train Show. Here are a few things that caught my eye during our three-day expedition.



Above, we headed out on Friday, April 23, and made it all of 24 miles before having to stop for a photo. This Union Pacific trio at Katy is probably waiting for the next run with empty hoppers from the nearby Cemex cement plant. The weather was not promising for the day.

Right, even though the rain moved in and dogged us the rest of the day, the former MKT station at La Grange was worth a quick stop.



Below, after leaving La Grange we came upon a seemingly endless string of empty autoracks on a long siding. We weren't expecting to see any power, so were pleasantly surprised when the UP's Rio Grande heritage unit materialized out of the haze. After this, we saw more rain than train action, so we headed for the barn.



Saturday and it's show time! Right and below right, N-scale was well-represented at the New Braunfels show, with modular layouts representing both NTRAK and T-TRAK standards.



Below, here's an innovative way to entertain the younger, shorter crowd. This nicely-done model railroad was the only HO scale layout at the show. It is privately-owned rather than being a club layout.



Below, during the course of the train show I was tracking the progress of Amtrak's westbound Texas Eagle with the expectation that we would be able to intercept it in the New Braunfels area. However, the train was running nearly two hours late, which meant we needed to head north to photograph it before we lost the light. I figured our best bet was at Hutto, a little over an hour's drive from New Braunfels, and the plan worked out. As seen here, the Eagle had a typical pandemic-year five-car Superliner consist optimistically powered by a single aged GE P42.





Left, with the Saturday light fading, we stumbled across this R J Corman transload facility and grabbed a few shots before heading to Temple to tie up for the evening. The locomotive, now heavily rebuilt, started life as an EMD GP9 in 1957, being delivered in December of that year to Illinois Central Railroad.



Sunday dawned clear and bright at Temple, perfect for train pictures. The city boasts two classic brick railroad stations, the Katy's boarded-up 1913 Romanesque Revival station with its imposing tower, above, and the former Santa Fe station, below left, built in the Prairie-Beaux Arts style in 1911. The Santa Fe station serves Amtrak passengers and is home to the Temple Railroad and Heritage Museum. The Temple station and adjacent public park are excellent places to catch BNSF action and check out what's happening in the locomotive service facility. The wood Santa Fe Moody, Texas, station is also on the site.





Above and left, Temple's Santa Fe heritage is not hard to spot, with the warbonnet-painted sanding tower and the notices still declaring that this is the property of the AT&SF. Below, more BNSF power at the locomotive service facility.



*Two above, Opal is the point about one mile southeast of the former Santa Fe station where the BNSF ex-Santa Fe Gulf Coast mainline crosses the UP ex-MKT San Antonio mainline. Here Amtrak's eastbound Texas Eagle is about to leave Katy rails and turn northwest on former ATSF tracks for the stop at Temple. **Our road trip concludes in the next issue of The Orderboard.***

Operations by the book



A hot Rock Island pig train cruises through South Omaha, Neb., on Oct. 4, 1962. Image courtesy RockIslandLines@groups.io

As noted in the March/April 2021 issue of *The Orderboard*, photos from the Don Ball, Jr. collection are being posted regularly on the online Rock Island Lines group at groups.io/g/RockIslandLines. The image above was posted recently, eliciting the comment below that casts a light on “operations by the book”.

The picture was taken Oct. 4, 1962, and shows a hot, mostly TOFC Rock Island train behind a brace of EMD F-units. The location is South Omaha, Neb. at 3.55 p.m. CST.

One Mr. Philip Weibler added this comment to

the post: “Standing orders at that time called for five units on the piggyback train. I guess six is close. The idea was to have enough horsepower to keep the speed up. Any two of these units could have pulled this train - just don’t be in a hurry for it to get to Denver.

“Less than a year later I recall watching the pigs head west out of Silvis, with the mandatory five units. One day it would be a FT-F2-F7 mix and the next day it would be five brand new U-boats, with twice the effective horsepower.

“Yesssir, boss, five units. Just like you said, boss.”

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A consist you can model

by Tom Marsh



Some of you will recognize the prototype photo as one I emailed to members as a “Train Pix Fix” on Dec. 31, 2020. This was one of four photos I included in the weekly email under the heading “Consists You Can Model.”

The photo was taken in May, 1989, at Canyon Diablo on what is now BNSF’s “Transcon”. The image of two big Santa Fe “Kodachrome” six-axle units with a single 40-ft. gondola and a caboose (or “waycar” in Santa Fe parlance) inspired me to dig around in various storage boxes to see if I could model this consist.

Turns out, I couldn’t. The caboose was no problem; I have plenty of N-scale Santa Fe waycars, but I could not find a suitable 40-ft. gondola and I had no six-axle locomotives in the failed SPSF merger “Kodachrome” paint scheme.

I was not surprised about the locomotives; I’ve never been a big fan of the red and yellow livery. I was surprised that I couldn’t find an appropriate 40-ft. steel gondola. Most that I had were steel and wood composite cars or just not right for the train, such as Penn Central models in “Deepwater Green”.

I figured someone must have made a Santa Fe 40-ft. steel gondola at some point. I also knew Kato had made both EMD and GE six-axle units in the “Kodachrome” paint scheme, but they have been out of production for some time.

My first stop was Papa Ben’s Train Place where I thought I might come across a gondola among the many Micro-Trains cars in store stock, but I had no luck this time. So I turned to the internet, where I found that Bachmann had an N-scale Santa Fe 40-ft. steel gondola in production. I ordered one through Papa Ben’s.

The Kato locomotives were a problem, however; I couldn’t find any new ones online, and used examples on auction sites, besides being few and far between, were pricey. I put my waycar and gondola in a box together and set them aside until I could address the power problem.

A month or so later I received an email from a friend saying that one of the vendors normally seen at bigger train shows in our region was having a locomotive clearance sale, as the COVID-19 shutdown had affected sales. I sent for the sale list and was pleased to find both a GE C30-7 and EMD SD45 in “Kodachrome” were available.

With my consist in hand (and locomotive decoders installed), now I needed a photo location. Gordon Bliss’ “Santa Fe All the Way” immediately came to mind, and by coincidence just a week or so later, Gordon invited us to his house for a swap meet and to run some trains. Perfect! But not really: I had the caboose facing the wrong direction! So it was back to Gordon’s to get the shot right; results below.



LCL

Less than Car Load: a few notes from your editor

For the record, UP 4014 returns: Almost everyone probably knows by now, but for the record Union Pacific "Big Boy" No. 4014 is headed back to Texas. The 4-8-8-4 will be on display in Houston on August 17. For more information, go to: <https://www.up.com/heritage/steam/schedule/index.htm>

Thanks: Once again, thanks to everyone who submitted items for this issue of *The Orderboard*.

The deadline for the September/October issue is Wednesday, Sept. 1, which also happens to be a Test & Tune date. See you there!

HOUSTON N'CROWD 2021 TIME TABLE - SUBJECT TO CHANGE

July 7

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

July 21

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

August 1

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

August 14

Greater Houston Train Show, Stafford Centre

August 17

UP "Big Boy" No. 4014 on display in Houston

August 18

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

August 28-29

Austin Train Show, Palmer Events Center

September 1

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

September 16

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

October 1-2

Fall Houston Metro Postcard and Paper Show, Holiday Inn Houston Intercontinental Airport

October 2-3

Annual Fall Plano Train Show, Plano Centre

October 3

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

October 20

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

October 31 - November 1

33rd Annual New Braunfels Train Show Jamboree, New Braunfels Civic Center

November 3

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

November 5-7

East Texas & Gulf Rail Modelers Association 2021 Annual Model Train Show, Hebert Public Library, Port Neches, Texas

November 17

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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tom@houstonncrowd.org.

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