

**THE HISTORY  
of  
San Antonio NTRAK**

**By Jim Ladd**

## FOREWORD

I believe that every organization needs to be able to look back upon its history, clear back to its very beginning. Therefore, I decided to start this project, but I quickly realized that I would need a lot of help from other members regarding events and dates.

Some people would probably call me a pack rat because I never seem to throw anything away. Of course, that also creates the problem of not being able to find something when I have a need for it. However, I have been able to locate most of my collection of SAMRA newsletters and a couple of the early membership lists of the N-Scale group. These have been invaluable to me in determining some of the more important date/time periods. My biggest problem has been the fact that the N-Scale group was already active when I joined up with them, so I have little or no information regarding the first year or two of their existence. At the time I joined the group, membership was small, the group was somewhat disorganized and very little effort was made to record the everyday club events.

In so far as I am the main writer, up to this point, I openly admit that I have recorded the events as I remember them, as I was able to research them, or as I observed them at the time, from my point of view. Some people may say that I have allowed my personal feelings to be reflected in my writing. This may be so, but at least I have established a base that others may expand upon.

Therefore, it is not my intention that the following information should be treated as absolute fact and repeated as such. I have probably made many errors in spite of all of my efforts. Instead, I hope that some of the older members will come forward with additional information that can be added to what I have already collected. This information could then be retained within the club and updated periodically.

I hope you enjoy reading about our club as much as I have enjoyed tracking down and compiling the information up to this point.

Jim Ladd

## **THE HISTORY of San Antonio NTRAK**

As most of us NTRAKers know, the first NTRAK module was assembled out on the West Coast and displayed at the 1973 MRIA (Model Railroad Industrial Association) Show in Costa Mesa, California. The idea inspired such enthusiasm that a group of modelers decided to construct enough modules to form an oval layout for up-coming shows the following year. The 1974 NMRA National Meet saw a 12 ft. X 72 ft. layout running 50 to 100 car trains all during the meet. It was a very impressive sight and from that point on, the idea of NTRAK began to flourish. A newsletter was soon established and in 1977 they began a regular publishing schedule of every other month.

I guess I saw my first NTRAK promotional material sometime in the late 70's or early 80's but at that point my hobby time was about 75% model airplanes and 25% model trains. My first memory of an NTRAK layout is David Coates setting in the middle of a bare plywood, circular layout (4 of the battleship corners) with a couple of trains running around and around. This was at a SAMRA Jamboree in a motel on Austin Highway, sometime in 1983 or 1984. Shortly thereafter, I began to think more about model trains. After all, when you loose control of a model airplane and it hits the ground, it is gone!!! Model trains don't break as easily.

At that point, most of the N-Scale modelers were also members of SAMRA and, as I understand it, the four large, battleship corners were financed by the club and were therefore property of SAMRA.. Individual members then began to construct straight modules to go with the corners. Shortly thereafter, David Coates purchased the four corners from SAMRA and began working on his freight and passenger yards while Bill Carpenter started construction on his 8 ft. industrial complex. For the next two or three years, the N-Scale group operated within SAMRA and as part of SAMRA. Club rosters of the N-Scale members during those early years seem to have disappeared, if they ever even existed. Some of the earlier names that I have found are listed below, but I am sure there are others that I have missed.

Robert Arrington, Cliff Bemrose, Bill Carpenter, David Coates, Tom Fairchild,  
Rick Surber and Bruce Whalen.

In the 1988 - 1989 time period, SAMRA was lucky enough to have a semi-permanent meeting place at Terrell Plaza. However, during the second or third quarter of 1989, SAMRA negotiated for a five year lease on a building located at 4025 Naco-Perrin. This deal was to have a profound effect on the future of the N-Scale modelers within the next year or so. It was also sometime in 1989 that I decided to join SAMRA. However, I had attended some of the annual Jamborees before that time as well as attending some of the gatherings of the N-Scale group.

I began to get serious about N-Scale during the time that David worked in a rehabilitation center up on Babcock. The group used to bring their modules and set up on the gym floor for a short running session on Saturdays. I went to a couple of meetings up there, looked at the construction techniques, looked through Bill Carpenter's collection of NTRAK Newsletters and ended up purchasing my first "How To" manual

By June 1990, the N-Scale group was beginning to come together. At this time we had enough modules to make an oval layout 8 ft. wide by 34 ft. long. This layout was owned by a total of four NTRAK /SAMRA members. We were set up along one wall in the Terrell Plaza building while the SAMRA modular HO layout occupied the rest of the space with a huge operating pit in the center. I had completed my sandpit module by this time and started working on a six foot industrial module. Also, there were other NTRAK members and interested individuals with modules under construction. It was at this point that we decided on the name San Antonio NTRAK Association or SANTRAK for short.

The first heavy blow to the N-Scale group came at the August 1990 SAMRA meeting.

We were informed that SAMRA had to vacate the Terrell Plaza location as soon as possible. The Naco-Perrin location was still being refurbished and storage space was at a minimum. There was nothing left for the N-Scale members to do but get together and store their individual modules along with the four battleship corners that now belonged to David Coates.

There had been discussions about the layout designs for the new building for several months. A couple of us submitted ideas with possible track plans because we still had hopes of getting a corner for N-Scale. However, that was not to be. Sometime around September or October 1990, the planning committee decided the track plan would be in HO and it would take up ALL of the available space! This was the second and final blow to the N-Scale group. We had no place to go and were no longer supported, as a group, by SAMRA. The members of SANTRAK were on their own!

Yes, there was considerable rivalry between some of the HO modelers and the N-Scale modelers at that time, and it didn't get any better when we offered, earlier in the year, to build the annual raffle layout for the 1991 SAMRA Jamboree. Several people said that no modeler in his right mind would buy a raffle ticket for an N-Scale layout. Well, we got together at Marshall Long's house, built the layout in his garage and had it ready well before jamboree time. In fact, we even had it on display at Dibbles for about two months prior to the jamboree. Some of the older HO modelers still didn't believe people would be interested, so they decided to sell the tickets, during the jamboree, for a quarter a piece or five for a dollar. They were quite surprised by mid afternoon when they ran out of tickets! They were even more surprised later on when they found out that, in spite of the low ticket price, the little N-Scale layout had brought in more money, after expenses, than any previous raffle layout up to that date!!!

The year 1991 was a year of learning for the members of SANTRAK. Each member kept his modules at home and brought them out for shows or an occasional club meeting. Storage facilities and the periodic handling often caused minor damage that the owner had to repair. During this time a couple of the members were able to provide enough space to host a meeting or two on Saturdays. Tom Fairchild allowed us to set up in a barracks on Lackland a time or two, David Coates allowed us to set up in his garage one time and Tom Crow allowed us to set up in his flower shop two or three times. These meetings were "long on work" and "short on running time" but they gave us a chance to practice our set up and tear down techniques along with a chance to check out new modules as they were completed. If we were able to run trains for four hours before time to tear down, we felt the meeting had been a success.

SANTRAK, as a club, began to mature in the late spring and early summer of 1991. We realized the need for club officers before we could become a formal club entity and establish a bank account. The elected officers were:

Marshall Long - President  
David Coates - Vice President  
Bob Swayze - - Secretary  
Bill Carpenter - Treasurer.

With a list of duly elected officers, Bill Carpenter, as treasurer, was now able to obtain a tax number, establish a bank account and also register the name of the club at the Bexar County Courthouse. San Antonio Ntrak Association became a legal entity on 29 July 1991.

It was also about this time when we decided on the club colors of maroon and gold. Immediately after that decision, we obtained our first club shirts which a few of us still have. Tom Crow was the one that placed that order with a distributor that he had done business with.

SANTRAK also became involved in a couple of community projects during this time period. The first project concerned the plans to renovate the old Southern Pacific passenger station. A few other cities have done similar projects and have included model railroads to illustrate the railroad's past history. I dug through my old model magazines and found several pictures of first class layouts while someone else wrote up a brief resume about our club and our suggestion for a display. This material was then copied, assembled into several brochures, and presented by David Coates and Bob Swayze to several officials that were connected with the project. They turned the idea down. Oh well, nothing ventured, nothing gained!!!

Our other involvement was more productive, possibly because we were invited into it. Some members of the New Braunfels club had started an N-Scale layout in their old train station but a couple of members had left and the remaining members were overloaded and lacking in some basic skills. They needed help so we were invited to come up and assist them in the construction. This resulted in an active working relationship between the two clubs that has lasted for many years.

Several of the SANTRAK members went up for the first few Saturday work sessions, but as the project began to develop, the work crew trimmed down to Carl Lawson, Marshall Long and myself along with the three or four New Braunfels members that were interested in N-Scale.

Lee Stewart, one of the New Braunfels members, was very active in the construction phase of the layout. In fact, Lee is the one that taught us how to stir up the latex paint and Celuclay mix, then spread it onto a loose layer of cheese cloth that has been spread over various types of supports to create the rolling hills type of scenery. Carl Lawson improved his technique of using white bead styrofoam for rocky hillsides and the original scenery on that layout has survived to this day. I, of course, spent my time under the layout installing the wiring along with the two control panels. We all learned a lot during the construction of that layout. Carl and Marshall joined the New Braunfels club during that time period and Marshall went on to become Club President a year or two later. Of course, he still maintained his membership in SANTRAK.

Meanwhile, it was in late summer of 1992 when SANTRAK found their first real home. Marshall Long happened to notice that the Terrell Plaza location, previously occupied by SAMRA was still vacant. Renovation of the facility had started when SAMRA vacated the place, but was never completed. We were granted permission (rent free) to use the location for meetings and storage of our modules, but we could NOT open to the public because of the overall torn-up condition of the place. We had a small restroom in which the commode worked but the wash basin drain was hopelessly plugged up. We soon determined that electricity was available at the main switch panels and a few outlet receptacles, but all overhead lighting circuits had been disconnected and open wires were free and dangling from sections of conduit attached to the metal rafters overhead. It wasn't pretty, but the price was right and it WAS A HOME.

David Doege (a member of the New Braunfels train club at that time) is a licensed electrician so he agreed to assist us in pulling back all the loose wiring and also agreed to sign any required papers as the senior electrician. SANTRAK had built up a small bank account by this time, so we agreed to buy about six shop lights, two spools of wire and a few odd fittings so that we could have some lights in the place. I took a short vacation from my job and installed the necessary wiring. We had enough modules at this time to make an oval layout about 12 ft. Wide by approx. 30 ft. long. We now had a place to run trains and hold meetings but as winter time came around, we soon began to realize there was no heat available. We were a little uncomfortable at times, but winters in San Antonio are short and warm weather soon returns. We were able to stay in this location for less than a year before we had to vacate.

In spite of the sparse surroundings, our club was able to make some interesting changes during our brief stay at Terrell Plaza. The biggest problem in setting up at various shows in the past had been the transportation of those big battleship corners. However, an article in the Nov./Dec. 1992 issue of N-Scale Magazine showed us a way to solve our dilemma. This is the article that prompted the construction of our first two 180 degree end-loop modules. Time was short, the building was damp and cold, and I thought the Celluclay scenery mix would NEVER dry out. After about five days the scenery was still damp and set-up was scheduled for the following evening. Thankfully, Texas type weather came through for us on Thursday evening with a change that brought warmer temperature and a drop in humidity.

We took the modules up to the Seven Oaks Motel on Friday evening to set up for the Jan. 1993 SAMRA Jamboree the next day. This was to be our very first "Compressed NTRAK Layout"; in other words, no center pit area and no big corner modules. Imagine our surprise when we discovered that tracks on our new end modules would not match when two standard modules were placed back-to-back and one of the modules had a backboard on it. With a little shifting of modules and a narrow bridge, we were able to put the layout together and were ready to run trains the following morning. We also started planning the second set of end-loop modules to provide the 4 inch back-to-back clearance that we have on our layouts to this day. However, it would be several months before those units could be completed.

As I continued to search for information about our past, I began to realize that 1993 was definitely the beginning of a change for our club. We were well pleased with our "Compressed Layout Concept", but considered it more for shows than for the main club layout there at Terrell Plaza. We now had more time to come in and run trains on a pre-assembled layout, but this soon led to boredom for a few of our members. We began to look at our modules from the standpoint of operating flexibility and found that they were sadly lacking. This discovery, of course, led to some spirited discussions about how we could improve our modules and the resulting club layout as well as the show layout.

Some years before, David Coates had constructed an extensive yard layout involving engine facilities, a freight yard, passenger station and passenger car yard. However, less than ideal storage facilities, coupled with the Texas heat, had taken a stiff toll on those modules by the time we moved into the building at Terrell Plaza. Consequently, we had no way to set up additional trains other than to stop one train, remove it from the layout, then set up a different train on the recently vacated tracks. This was very time consuming and soon led to discussions about the need for one or two set-up tracks with access to at least one main line. We also began to discuss the need for more crossovers between the three standard lines along with the possibility of constructing light weight three foot corners to replace the heavy four foot corners. This latter discussion eventually led to the construction of two three foot corner/bridge type modules by Carl Lawson and David Coates.

It was in the early summer of 1993 when Marshall and I got busy and made up his eight foot yard module with set-up tracks plus my crossover module with extensions to his setup tracks. We had no idea, at that time, of ever expanding beyond that ten feet or so of setup track. It only took us a year or two to realize the error of our short term planning. The construction of those two modules occurred in my back yard, so this would indicate that we had been evicted from the Terrell Plaza location by this time.

I believe it was during the construction of the eight foot yard that Marshall and I decided to take a layout up to the mid-September Temple Show. The big problem was how to find enough people to transport the modules necessary for a decent layout, and stay for a two day show. A discussion of this problem soon led to the possibility of a U-Haul Trailer, and finally to the possibility of removable racks to fit into the trailer. I had some wood, so I made the racks after taking many measurements of several trailers. The resulting racks are quite heavy because of the 3/4 inch plywood that I used, but they serve the purpose very well. The racks are ideal for carrying nine, four foot modules plus a couple of narrow, four foot bridges along with the eight foot yard module on the floor of the trailer. This allowed us to transport a good sized layout in one compact package. We received about as many compliments on the trailer arrangement as we did on our layout at the next few shows.

During this period, many of our modules were just "bare plywood plains" or just had a minimum amount of scenery. Also, we had lost several members, along with their modules, during the period when we had no type of permanent location. Of the remaining modules, some were six feet long and therefore presented a slight transportation problem. Marshall was still president of the New Braunfels Club at this time and was aware of the fact that they had three serviceable NTRAK modules, complete with scenery, that were just collecting dust in a storage room. Also, they were the standard 2 foot X 4 foot modules and would be easy to transport. Therefore, he arranged for us to borrow those units when we went to the Temple show. We put the modules back into storage when we returned, but we went back and borrowed them again for the next train show which was in February of 1994.

Although 1994 started out on a rather low note for SANTRAK, our luck quickly changed after we attended the first train show of the year. It was at the Feb.'94 SAMRA Jamboree that we met the manager of Westlakes Mall. After a few brief discussions (we needed a new home and he had empty store spaces) we were invited to occupy a space within the Mall. It took us a couple of weeks to work out the final details such as obtaining the necessary Liability Insurance, but we were in our new home by the first of March.

Our first location in the Mall had a very large storage space in the rear that was ideal for a workshop area. We quickly set up shop back there and were able to complete several projects before we were required to make our first move within the Mall. One of our first projects was the construction of what is now known as the Johnny Seguin Module. The track work on that module includes two crossovers between the Red and Blue lines, thus allowing us much more flexibility for switching trains back and forth from line to line.

We now had a rather large layout space to fill and suddenly needed more modules. Again, we fell back on Marshall's dual membership in the New Braunfels Club and SANTRAK. We remembered the three NTRAK modules that we had borrowed from New Braunfels in the past, and decided we could put them to good use, so Marshall soon arranged for us to borrow the modules for an extended length of time, with the promise that we would keep them in operating condition. This increased our total number of completely decorated modules available for show purposes, and the loan remained in effect until mid 1998.

Up until this time, we had two possible choices for NTRAK layouts. We could use the large corner modules and make an Open Pit layout or use the end loops and set up a Compressed layout. We used the Compressed layout for the Feb.'94 SAMRA Jamboree and it was 41 feet long plus the stand-off ropes. We liked this style of layout, but felt there was still something lacking. In other words, we needed something a little different that would draw attention.

Back in late 1988 , a few of us had discussed the possibility of an inside corner to go with the large outside corners. We had a new individual come into the group about that time and he promised to make an inside corner as soon as he heard part of our discussion. He seldom discussed his construction techniques, but when he did, it sounded like he knew what he was doing. We did not see the results of his work until set-up time, the night before a show in New Braunfels. To make a long story short, the module was heavy, bulky and an electrical disaster. Some members worked half the night to get the unit in working shape for the show the next day, but it was never used again. The individual dropped out of the club shortly thereafter. That incident made us realize the need to council new members closely and try to get them started in the right direction.

Time has a habit of healing old wounds and dulling bad memories, but we never quite forgot our experience with that first inside corner. Time can also bring new ideas and new construction techniques so I guess it was just natural for us to start discussing inside corners again. By this time, Carl Lawson and David Coates had both built lightweight outside corners based on a three foot square. This meant that an inside corner would have to be based on a five foot square to match their three foot corners. What we failed to consider at the beginning of this project was the four inch clearance that we had built, by this time, into the center of our Compressed Layout configuration . After a false start and a lot of head scratching, we finally realized the inside corner had to be based on a four foot, eight inch square in order to work in our layout. During our discussions, I happened to recall an article in a previous N-TRAK Newsletter (Jan./Feb. 1991) that showed a large radius corner that was constructed in two pieces. This solved any possible transportation problem so we were off and running! Our first "L" shaped layout was shown at the October 1994 AMRE show.

This particular show also brought another stroke of good luck to our club. Ever since the 1993 Temple Show, we had been renting a U-Haul trailer to transport modules to and from shows. It was an expense, but we felt the added convenience was worth it. David Doege approached us during the AMRE show with the idea that we could use a trailer of his that was just setting and gathering dust. It was to be an extended loan and we would take care of the trailer as if it was our own. We quickly agreed to accept his offer.

Th new "L" shaped configuration was like a shot in the arm for us. It was something different and it stirred the imagination. It also caused me to start thinking about constructing a second inside corner, but my big question was how and when. About three or four months earlier, I had agreed to head up a wiring crew to wire up the SAMRA layout at Naco-Perrin and that was taking up much of my time. However, that is another story. Let's just say it was almost a year before I was able to complete the second inside corner.

While I was busy wiring up an HO layout, some of the other SANTRAK members were busy building NTRAK modules. It was during this period that Marshall built the two mountain division reversing loop modules and Bill Carpenter built the automatic reversing circuit to control them. Meanwhile, two relatively new members, but experienced modelers, Orphie Neathery and Norm Phillips, were working hard at turning out modules like their lives depended on them. Their modules also brought a new level of quality and detail into the club which has been an inspiration to all of us.

By October 1995, we were ready to display some of our new modules at the AMRE show. These included the automated mountain division, three of Orphie's four foot modules and my second inside corner. This was our first "U" shaped layout. Things seemed to work out very well, so we began to plan for a REALLY BIG layout for the upcoming SAMRA show in February 1996. However we failed to consult with Mother Nature.

February 1996 will always be remembered as **The Year of the Big Ice Storm!** As usual, we met at Westlakes on Thursday evening to fold up modules and load them into the trailer. We knew that bad weather was predicted along with possible icing conditions, but we didn't realize just how fast the system was moving in. By 7:00 p.m, when a couple of people failed to show up with their promised vehicles, we quickly revised our possible layout plans, loaded the trailer and a couple of vehicles and prepared to leave Westlakes about 8:15 p.m.

For those that have never driven a vehicle on glaze ice, it can be a truly, hair-raising experience. Hook a trailer behind your vehicle and you will really have something to remember.

As we were preparing to leave, we began to hear radio and TV reports within the Mall about bridges icing over and roads being closed. City crews were working as hard and fast as possible with their sand trucks, but were unable to be everywhere at once. The reports seemed to indicate that Highway 90 and I-10 East were still open, so I headed out in that direction with Gary Rouse behind me in his pick-up truck. I often look at my rear view mirror while driving, and there were times, that night, when I thought that trailer was going to come around in front of me. However, very light traffic, along with a whole lot of luck, permitted us to get home without so much as a scratch.

By 9:00 or 10:00 the following morning (Friday), the ice had melted and it turned out to be a very nice day. We managed to set up our layout in the new "U" configuration that evening and had trains running for the Saturday show. That was the first time we presented Norm's modules in a show and they were a great attraction. It wasn't the REALLY BIG layout that we had planned, but it was a good layout and everyone was well pleased with the results. However, Gary and I often look at each other and mutter, "Never Again".

The year 1996 turned out to be our year for big layouts in terms of work as well as size. We set up a pit type oval at Frolin's Summer Show, using the battleship corners along with the automated mountain division modules. This layout was somewhat smaller in terms of size, but the large corner modules, along with the automated mountain division modules, plus four six foot modules with detachable legs instead of folding legs, all added up to a lot of additional work.

Our last show of the year (Oct.'96 AMRE) saw one of our best layouts in terms of size and attractiveness. For new modules, it featured Gary Rouse's Harbor Scene and Orphie Neathery's Lion King module. This layout consisted of 24 modules with approximately 110 linear feet of track or about 3 ½ scale miles. It was a good layout, the trains ran well and everyone had a good time during the show. However, in terms of show layout size, this was a peak that our club would not match for the next two years. Some of our members began to speak of shows in terms of work instead of fun. Also, Norm Phillips withdrew his modules immediately after this show for the purpose of additional detail work and wiring. It was time for the club to do a bit of re-evaluating.

We started 1997 with a slightly smaller and tighter "U" shaped layout for both the Feb. SAMRA show and the April New Braunfels show. We used mostly four foot modules and were able to transport the layout with the trailer and about three extra vehicles. Both layouts featured Orphie's modules (the town modules and Lion King module) across the front and they really drew a lot of attention. However, Orphie decided, at this time, to pull his modules from future show displays, and we were suddenly faced with a loss of seven modules including two 3 foot corners. Time to fall back and re-group, one more time.

For Frolin Marik's Summer Show, we managed to assemble a shallow "U" shaped layout that was 26 feet across the front. This was accomplished by using the three New Braunfels modules and a couple of bridges. Three foot corners were provided by Carl Lawson and Ken Stewart. Ken had just completed his corner by adding a very nice farm scene that included a barn, house, an orchard and various other details.

Every move to and from a show has the potential for damaging modules, and this move was no exception. During the pack-up process, after the show, one of the wooden pads that go between modules, managed to fall down onto Ken's corner module and broke the edge of the roof on Ken's carefully made, scratch built, farm house. This was a very irritating incident because of the newness of the module, and because of the workmanship that Ken had put into the assembly of the house. However, Ken managed to come out ahead by placing a broken tree onto that part of the house, then adding a repair truck and two or three workers in the yard. An excellent recovery from an otherwise, disgusting accident.

The last two shows of 1997 saw us fall back to the simple "L" shaped layout. Bryan Weidner was limited for space at his Summer Show, so our "L" shaped layout fit his needs perfectly. However, several of the SANTRAK members seemed to be out of town or otherwise occupied at the time of the AMRE Show in October. Consequently, our layout at that show was somewhat smaller than it had been at previous shows. This apparent lack of interest may also have been brought about by the comments and discussions that had been taking place between four or five of our members over the past several months.

As I said before, the year 1996 was our club's year for big layouts and our biggest layout was at the AMRE Show in October of that year. There is a lot of work involved in the disassembly, movement and re-assembly of a modular layout. Consider a layout that is normally on display in a semi-permanent location, and the work factor doubles for any given show. Finally, add the additional modules for a *large* layout and one soon realizes why some of our members were getting tired and beginning to loose interest. Yes, there is a lot of work involved, but there is also a lot of satisfaction and pleasure to be gained when the crowds gather around the club layout, compliment the overall layout and ask questions about certain modules. The highest level of pleasure though, comes when an individual begins to ask questions about joining the club. After all, isn't that what NTRAK is all about?

We did tend to overload ourselves that year, but that was not the only thing that was being discussed during the latter part of 1997. The problem with those discussions was the fact that they were not being voiced during club meetings. Instead, they were being voiced outside of the club environment and within very small groups. Up until that time, our club had been a loosely knit, disorganized, but very compatible group. Club membership had ranged from about eight to eighteen members, with a core group of about eight members that had been in the club from the early years. It was this core group that usually showed up at designated meeting times, brought up subjects for discussion, and tried to provide some form of leadership for the club. Their pleas for suggestions and/or ideas often resulted in silence, or the age old comment, "What ever the Club decides, it is OK with me". This worked as long as we had about fifteen members. However, we suddenly realized we had over thirty paid up members !!! This was the result of our displays at the shows along with our display at the Mall. We had impressed people with the idea of N-Scale model railroading, but we were now faced with the problems of a club membership that had practically doubled.

The increase in membership over the last two years, was a good selling point for the discussions that began to be voiced as we went into 1998. *The Club needed a set of By-Laws !!! By-Laws would cure all of our problems !!!*

This would be a major change for SANTRAK! Much of our increase in membership had been due to our relaxed and informal club structure. Did the membership really want the organized structure of By-Laws? Would it really help our club to go forward and expand? What problems did we have, other than a lack of participation at club meetings and what would the By-Laws do to correct that particular problem?

The first club meeting of the 1998 calendar year saw a very respectable turnout of club members, more than had been seen in the past couple of years. When the subject of By-Laws came up, it was decided, by vote, that we would explore the possibility of adopting a set of By-Laws.

During the February meeting, we had a reading of a modified version of the proposed By-Laws as written in the NTRAK How-to Manual. A couple of changes were suggested and adopted at this time.

At the March meeting, there was a final reading of the proposed By-Laws. But, Article V, which is Association Rules, was NOT discussed. When questioned, the answer was that the Rules could be changed at any time by a simple majority. Another comment was made to the effect that we should go ahead and vote and get it over with. Our By-Laws were adopted by a 51% majority - - - one vote! After the vote was taken and the meeting adjourned, a couple of members were heard to say, "Oh, I didn't understand it that way, I should have voted against it". Other members voiced their distaste for anything political, they just wanted to run trains.

And so, as of 22 March 1998, SANTRAK changed from a disorganized group, to an organized club that was to operate under a duly elected set of By-Laws. The first act of the club was to elect a set of officers, and from that point on, things started to go down hill. The whole idea of organizing under a set of By-Laws, had been sold as a means to improve club operations. In actuality, the discussions and voting process simply magnified the difference in opinions of various members, eventually resulted in bad feelings and ended up causing us to lose several members. In less than two months, two of the newly elected officers had resigned. This, of course, required another election to fill the vacancies. Some members again voiced their distaste for anything political and simply failed to show up for business meetings. The "Fun Factor" had disappeared from our model railroad club. The usual low, summertime attendance at this point, resulted in a less than quorum count as set forth in the new By-Laws so that the club was unable to call a meeting to order for two months in a row. A member now had to own one or more modules in order to vote. Active, participating members, that had not yet constructed a module, could no longer vote on club business.

Attendance began to improve by September of 1998, but we still had some lessons to learn. Major decisions that could easily have been voted on in the past, now had to be brought before the membership, discussed during two consecutive meetings and then brought to a vote. This again resulted in a couple of failed actions and created additional bad feelings

1998 was a year of revelation for our club, but we were able to learn from our mistakes. We initiated a couple of minor changes in the By-Laws and will probably make some more revisions as time goes on. Our New Year's Resolution for 1999 - - - LEARN TO OPERATE WITHIN THE BY-LAWS!!!

The first meeting of 1999 (11<sup>th</sup> of Jan.) started off with an election of two officers as required by our By-Laws. Marshall Long planned to leave the state by the end of June, so he resigned as president of the club. Dennis Valis resigned his position, but then applied for re-election. This created two vacancies, as required, and one candidate, so I submitted my name as the second candidate. Dennis and I were then voted in as the new train crew members and Dennis was later designated as president of the club in accordance with the By-Laws as written. This meeting also saw the second reading of an amendment to the By-Laws concerning the movement of modules within the club and the specific rights of the module owners. That amendment was finally approved and adopted by the membership at the February meeting

SAMRA was the guest of SANTRAK on the night of 8 January 1999 for the purpose of holding their monthly meeting. During that evening, they invited us to display a layout at their February Jamboree, but they asked us to do it without compensation. This caused some spirited discussions at our own business meeting the following Sunday, but we eventually put up one of our largest displays ever because it was to be one of Marshall's last shows in this area. The layout was a pit type oval that measured 16 feet by 36 feet and contained 24 modules. This included four battleship corners, four 6 foot modules and both of the automated mountain division loops, plus Gary Rouse's yard complex. It was a very popular layout and drew a large crowd, but it was also a lot of work.

For the New Braunfels show in April, we displayed our Kellerman's Junction module for the first time ever. This allowed us to set up a branch line that extended over to the Austin Club layout. We had tried a similar connection at the AMRE show in October of 1998 by going out the back of Gary's yard, but the curves within the yard caused some problems with long trains. The layout for this show permitted us to swap a couple of trains back and forth between their DCC throttle and our analog throttle, but we soon realized we still have some fine tuning to do before this idea would really work. Our layout was an "L" shape with Kellerman's Junction in place of the usual 3 foot corner. Gary Rouse's yard complex extended to the inside of the layout.

The members of SANTRAK have never given much thought to family socializing, but this changed on 1 May 1999. After several weeks of planning, a group of us (including wives and children) went up to Cedar Park for a ride on the Austin Steam Train. We were very fortunate in our timing because the locomotive was pulled out of service about three weeks after our trip. The maintenance crew found some cracks in one of the cylinder castings. They estimate about a year for fund raising and eventual repair.

Frolin Marek's show on 5 June 1999 allowed us to use the same basic configuration as was used for the New Braunfels show except that the branch line between layouts had an extra four feet. Austin now has an adapter module that allows them to come out or go in on any one of the three Ntrak lines.

This practice of connecting between club layouts has been an experimental exercise to learn about the possible problems of running trains between different control systems. It has allowed the club members of both clubs to work much closer together and it has allowed the SANTRAK members to learn more about the DCC system that is used by the Austin Group. This new interest in DCC soon inspired Johnny Seguin to bring in an MRC Command 2000 system, along with a decoder equipped locomotive, for experimentation on the SANTRAK layout. I soon followed by ordering a couple of decoder equipped locomotives and we then began to sample DCC operations.

The Command 2000 system was specifically designed as a simplified system and is very limited in what it can or cannot accomplish. However, it is an ideal system for a small, home layout and is also ideal for our experimental use at the club.

We were invited, once again, to connect our layout to the Austin Group layout for Bryan Weidner's Summer show on the 21<sup>st</sup> of August. This time we connected our red line directly to their red line and ran DCC equipped locomotives between both layouts. Now we were progressing, but we were also finding new problems. It seems that DCC requires absolutely clean track for faultless operation. This problem was taken care of with the use of a Bright Boy. The other big problems were erratic locomotive operation and a locomotive's occasional complete loss of memory. After the train show, some further research in the user's manual by Joe Cox of the Austin Group indicated these problems can be corrected by proper programming of the locomotives. The next time we hook up together should result in much smoother operations.

At this time, there are four SANTRAK members that own decoder equipped locomotives and two or three other members that are becoming very interested.

The train show in Temple, Texas has interested me ever since Marshall and I took a layout up there in 1993. This year, some of the members started talking about the show early enough for us to do some planning. As a result, SANTRAK (as a club) returned to Temple for the show on 17 & 18 September 1999. We were placed at the front entrance way and we really made an impression on everyone. Our crossbuck was copied from the Temple crossbucks that Marshall and I saw back in 1993, without blinking lights. The Temple members were quite impressed when they saw our version of the crossbuck with lights. We received many, many compliments on the overall appearance of our layout and everyone of our members that went up there had a very enjoyable time. The Temple Group even gave us a blue ribbon for the layout with the best scenery!

The AMRE train show on 2 October 1999 was the last local train show of the year. However, they did not invite us so we were able to relax for the rest of the year and work on our raffle layout for the Christmas season. This layout was originally constructed on a hollow core door by Carl Lawson and was donated to the club for the purpose of the raffle. Two or three members banded together to add track ballast, touch up the scenery, add a couple of buildings and give the edge of the layout a final coat of paint. Ticket sales were started the later part of November which was a little later than we had planned. However, due to the efforts of our two super salesmen, David Kellerman and Ron Bell, we did exceptionally well with this layout. The winner was the four year old son of a young couple here in San Antonio. The parents were present for the drawing and were nearly speechless when they realized they held the winning number.

Believe it or not, our club was able to survive all of the dire predictions of computer failures and power failures that were associated with the beginning of the year 2000. However, the Human Race, as a whole, never did quite agree on the question of whether this is the last year of the 20<sup>th</sup> century or the first year of the 21<sup>th</sup> century. Be that as it may, let us go on about our business of Model Railroading!

We started the year with a very modest layout at the SAMRA Jamboree on the first Saturday in February. Our layout was a simple "L" configuration and this was the last time we used the eight foot set-up yard originally designed by Marshall Long. Carl Lawson had previously purchased the module from Marshall, so he took it home for renovation immediately after this show. This move left us with Gary Rouse's yard complex and the operations yard which had a long way to go before completion.

Our next show of the year was a new experience for our club. We decided to take a layout to the Great American Train Show which was held 25 & 26 March at the Airport Convention Center here in San Antonio. We chose a large "U" shaped configuration with Gary Rouse's yard complex on the inside of one leg of the "U". This layout had a total of 39 modules and measured 21.5 ft. X 42 ft.. For transportation to and from the Center, we used several vehicles plus we made two trips with the trailer during set-up on Friday.. There was a lot of work involved, but everyone enjoyed the experience. Oh yes, we also received First Prize (\$400.00) along with a Blue Ribbon for Best of Show!

Just three weeks later, we were setting up our next layout in New Braunfels for the Historical Society's annual Jamboree. Jim Burns had asked us to bring a large layout, so we decided to take a "Z" shaped layout that consisted of approximately 25 modules. This was the first time we had displayed a "Z" shape at a train show, so it was quite a surprise for several people.

Notes: SanTrak eviction notice at Westlakes; Tuesday, 8 July 2003. Folded and removed modules to temporary storage; Sat. & Sun., 12 & 13 July. Moved everything to Crossroads Mall on Sat. 19 July 2003.