



The Mid-South Flyer

July/August 2014



A Publication of the Mid-South Chapter of the Railway & Locomotive Historical Society, Inc

“Remembering A Railroad”

(Editor's note: The following article featuring Mid-South member James Lowery's Birmingham Mineral sign project appeared in the June 2014 issue of *Village Living*, a local publication covering Mountain Brook, Alabama. Our thanks to Starnes Publishing for granting permission to excerpt the article in *The Mid-South Flyer*).

The Birmingham Mineral Railroad Route was the lifeline of the Iron City. For a century, the route carried minerals like limestone from coalmines to furnaces, and then transported pig iron from the furnaces to blast furnaces in Bessemer.

James Lowery had heard that his daily paths from his home near The Altamont School traced the railroad's remnants through English Village and started to looking for its route. You can see it cut out of the tree line on Google maps, he said.

“I got to thinking that a lot of people are not aware of its existence,” he said. Now he hopes to change that with a new educational project to mark the history of the railroad in the area, and he's starting it in Mountain Brook.

In 1884, the local division of the Louisville and Nashville (L&N) rail line extended past Oneonta and Helena, but its heart was in Mountain Brook. Rails were still present in the 1950's, and the Mountain Brook segment was used for other commercial purposes.

“Really, it was the crux of what made Birmingham able to be such a historic area for the iron industry,” Lowery said. “If it wasn't for the Birmingham Mineral Railroad, Birmingham wouldn't be what it is today.”



The official logo for the Birmingham Mineral Railroad sign project incorporates the three minerals—coal, iron ore, and limestone—that gave rise to Birmingham's iron and steelmaking industry.

Meeting Reminder!

Chapter to host July BBQ

Real Southern barbeque with all the fixins', washed down with iced cold tea....plenty of train-watching on the platform....favorite railroad slides....and all enjoyed in the good company of fellow Mid-South members.

Sound like your glass of tea? All of this and more will be waiting for you and your family this Saturday, July 12 beginning at 11:00 at the Historic Leeds Depot. Admission is a covered dish of your favorite picnic food to share. Pulled pork barbeque will be provided by your Chapter, compliments of the Dollar A Month fund.

Members are invited to bring up to a dozen of your favorite slides or a short video to share on a thumb drive or CD/DVD disk.

Please contact Tim Smith at tws1999@gmail.com to reserve your spot at the table and let him know what you'll bring.

The line transported minerals from mines in Red Mountain along what is now the Vulcan Trail. From there it would run under what is now Red Mountain Expressway to English Village to pick up more from the Hedona Mine, whose location is now marked by brick walls on either side of Carlisle Road. On Oxford Road between Carlisle Road and Sterling Road outside English Village, the road flattens mid-way up the hill, and you can get an idea of where the railroad ran perpendicular to the road through what are now backyards.

From there it traversed behind the Crestline post office down in front of Ramsay Park off Montclair Road behind the Levite Jewish Community Center, where you can see the rail bed in the present-day trails behind the center. The belt line would then head past what is now Century Plaza toward Ruffner Mountain and then back around to furnaces in the city.

“Every time I mention this to people, they say, ‘I used to play on that railroad,’” Lowery said, recalling stories of people laying pennies on the track and hearing the loco motive in their backyards. (Continued on page 2)

“Remembering A Railroad” (continued)

Working with historians, Lowery has identified 50 high visibility locations along the rail lines that would catch the attention of motorists as well as many who are cycling, hiking or enjoying parks. Collectively they will form an “urban trail” and connect to existing trails, parks and nature preserves.

A website will also provide additional educational information for teachers and the general public. It will include a map and GPS coordinates for the locations, information about each site, general information about the area’s iron history and additional information and resources. Lowery is considering adding a corresponding geocaching website with the project as well.

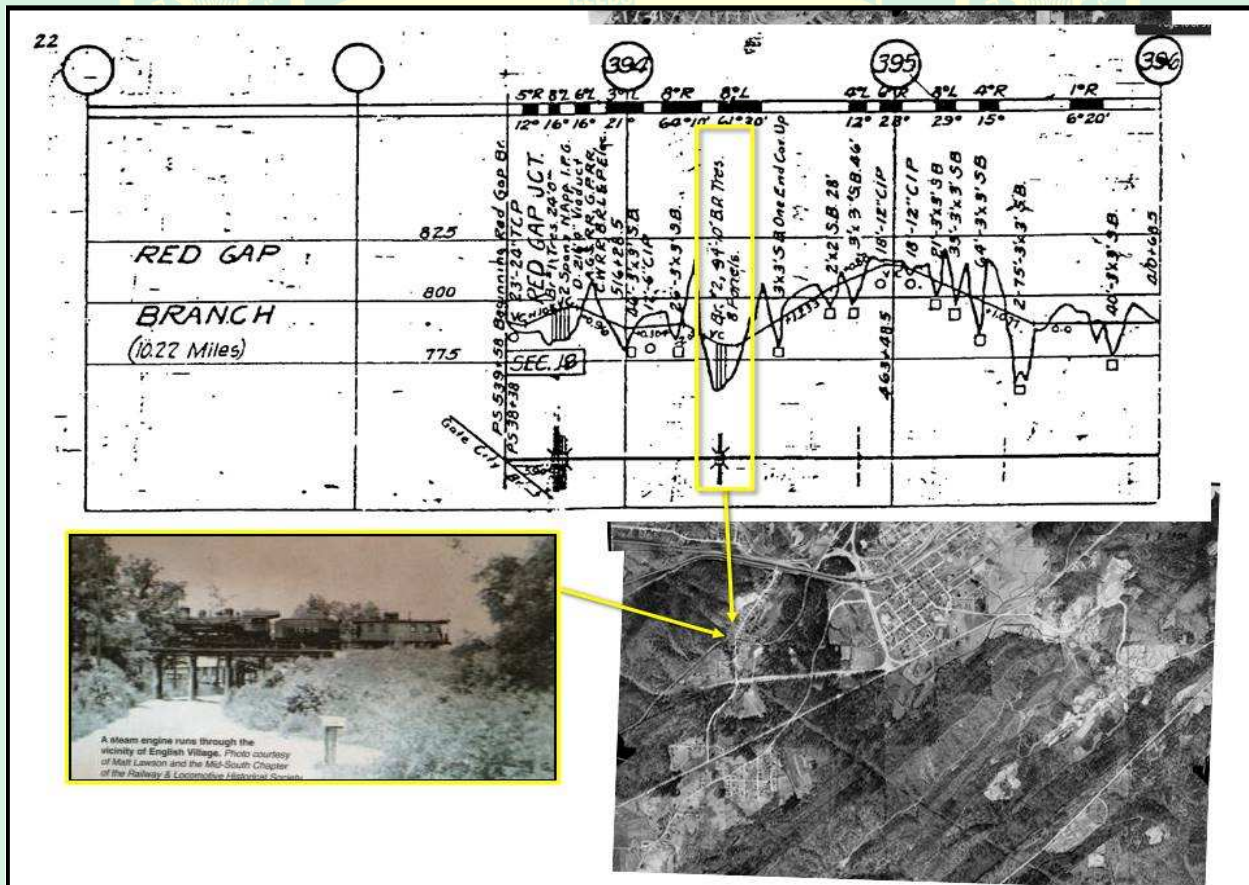
Before approaching other cities about the project, Lowery came first to Mountain Brook, where he wanted the signs to go up first. In January the City Council approved his proposal for five signs marking the railway pending Village Design Review’s approval. He plans to raise the funds for simple signs, which will cost about \$100 a piece.

The signs will list the name of the branch that ran through the location and the dates it was active in hauling minerals and ores in the area. He also hopes to post the url for the educational website.

The Jefferson County Historical Association and L&N (Railroad Historical Society) recently endorsed the project, which Lowery hopes will complement other historical efforts in the area.

...and speaking of the Signs Project

Mid-South member John Stewart has been assisting James Lowery with mapping various points on the Birmingham Mineral Railroad. In the process of sleuthing out locations, John was able to tentatively identify the location of an early photo from the Mid-South archive as taken at what today is the Oporto-Madrid Road in the Eastwood area near Crestwood Boulevard. According to John: “The attached images show my “case” for the conclusion. The aerial image is Feb 17, 1941, and everything seems to line up just right. I don’t believe there was another bridge of this type on the Red Gap Branch according to the track charts. The track chart refers to this one as an “8 panel” pile bent trestle. I would have said 7 panel (spans) but there may be a very short bent on the left side of the picture or out of the picture. Anyway, that’s my best judgment on the location.” Any other opinions?





By the Board

Minutes from the June 2014 Board of Directors Meeting

A meeting of the Board of Directors of the Mid-South Chapter was called to order by John Browning on June 28, 2014, at 10:16 a.m. The meeting was held in the agent's office due to the baggage room being in use for an outside event.

Board of Directors members present: John Browning, Marvin Clemons, Lamont Downs, Hal Holley, Larry Kelpke, James Lowery, Lee Singletary, Tim Smith, John Stewart

Board of Directors members absent: Natasha Bettis, Dr. Carl Marbury, Donnie Strickland

Guests (non-voting): Pat Honsa

A quorum was present for the meeting.

Treasurer's Report

James Lowery presented the Treasurer's report. John Stewart asked about the balance in the Ardrey Exhibit Project fund; we have \$2114. Lee Singletary moved that the treasurer's report be accepted. The motion was seconded and approved.

The Mid-South Flyer

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The Mid-South Flyer is published bi-monthly by the Mid-South Chapter of the Railway & Locomotive Historical Society (R&LHS), Inc. The R&LHS is a non-profit educational organization dedicated to the study and preservation of railroad history. National and chapter dues are \$47 and include subscriptions to the Society's twice-yearly magazine Railroad History and quarterly newsletter, and the chapter's e-newsletter, The Mid-South Flyer. Membership applications for R&LHS and the Mid-South Chapter are available on the Internet at www.rlhs.org.

News, articles, photos, and comments are invited and should be emailed to:

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Secretary's Report

Lamont Downs announced that we have 63 paid up members. 15 members from last year have not renewed, and 3 have renewed their R&LHS membership but not their Mid-South Chapter membership. We are down 7 members from the end of last year. Hal Holley moved that the minutes be approved. The motion was seconded and approved.

Old Business

Ardrey Exhibit Equipment Setup. Stewart said that there have been no new developments.

Archive Committee Report. Marvin Clemons said there was nothing new to report, and that at this point we are waiting for Leeds. Stewart reported that the Heart of Dixie Museum is looking into having the University of Alabama scan in some of the large format maps in their collection. Clemons mentioned that the person who was to scan the Ardrey photos has passed away and we will need to find a replacement. Some proposed future developments at the Heart of Dixie Museum were discussed, as well as our possible cooperation with the Museum.

Update on Chapter Roster and Dues. This was covered in the Secretary's report and no new information was presented.

(Continued on page 4)



By the Board

Minutes from the June 2014 Board of Directors Meeting

Chapter Collection of Sales Tax--Business License. Lowery said that we are now submitting sales tax reports to Leeds, Jefferson County and the State of Alabama. Lowery has asked that Leeds and Jefferson County waive the cost of a business license and they have agreed, but we must still pay Leeds a \$10 issuance fee. We are currently paying sales tax out of sales, not charging a separate sales tax. Lowery added that Alabama requires any organizations that solicit contributions to submit a report to the Attorney General, but since we collect less than \$25,000 per year we were able to have that requirement waived.

Browning asked whether we were required to file any kind of annual report with the Secretary of State's office, and Lowery said we do not. Downs raised the issue of mail being sent to him as Registered Agent for the Chapter with the Depot's address. There was no response. Stewart moved that the address of the Registered Agent be changed to Downs' home address. The motion was seconded and approved.

Other Old Business: Clemons reported on a day spent at the Depot with Donnie Strickland and John Peterson to connect our CTC board to the Internet. We still need a URL to download software for adjusting settings.

Lowery displayed a set of Southern Railway glasses donated by Mountain Brook mayor Terry Oden. Downs asked that Browning provide him with a copy of the thank-you letter sent to Oden for our files.

Lowery reported on the progress of the Birmingham Mineral Line historical markers project. Several communities have already granted approval to place the markers. The markers need to be consistent with the communities' regulations for construction and placement of signs. An article about the project has appeared in the R&LHS national newsletter. Since we do not have 501(c)(3) status, national will accept donations for us and we can also apply for grants under their 501(c)(3) umbrella. Lowery has created a form to acknowledge contributions. He is applying for several grants this summer for the project. Various locations on the Mineral Line were discussed. Clemons discussed the possibility of reprinting an article about the project from a community newsletter in the chapter newsletter.

New Business

July Picnic. We have plenty of cups, plates, napkins and utensils in the cabinet. Browning will pick up barbecue so that we do not need to cook outdoors, to be paid for out of the Dollar-A-Month fund. Clemons recommended that Browning send a message with a sign-up list to the membership as a whole, since the chapter newsletter will not go out until after July 4. The time for the picnic was set as 11 am, with food at about noon. Tim Smith asked who should be contacted if someone wants to bring something, so that he can put something on the chapter's Facebook page. Browning designated Smith as contact person and Smith agreed. Clemons suggested that people could bring some of their favorite photos on a thumb drive instead of scheduling a formal program; Smith suggested that short videos would also work.

Phone at Depot--Billing Options. Browning described his conversations with Windstream. An unexpected increase in our monthly bill was traced to the expiration of a \$20 "thank-you" incentive credit we have been receiving. The current package includes telephone, Internet, and voice mail. Browning was given a quote of \$80 per month plus taxes if we agree to a 2-year contract; this would probably be about \$100 per month with taxes. Clemons has installed an answering machine which would enable us to drop voicemail

(Continued on page 5)



By the Board

Minutes from the June 2014 Board of Directors Meeting

services. Clemons pointed out that the current expense of phone/Internet was consuming our annual dues.

Stewart moved that we go to a 2-year contract for phone service. Discussion ensued on the options available and the taxes. Browning confirmed that the \$80 was the lowest price available from Windstream that would include both phone and Internet service. The motion was seconded.

The telephone service was discussed at length. There are currently 27 messages on the answering machine, but none have been listened to yet. Browning asked for a volunteer to be telephone coordinator, and Smith agreed to take this on. Clemons pointed out that our phone number is included in the Trains tourist guide, and that to be listed we must have a phone number. The listing will need to be renewed or dropped by December. Downs suggested that we postpone the issue until we find out what basic telephone service minus Internet would cost. The pros and cons of Internet service were discussed. Downs also suggested asking the membership for donations from those that felt this service was essential. Apparently we know of only one person who has accessed the CTC board via the Internet.

Stewart withdrew his motion. Browning will ask Windstream for a quote on phone service only and report to the Board via email.

[Update: Later on Saturday, June 28 Clemons reported via email that an alternative discussed with Donnie Strickland and John Peterson was to relocate the ATCS broadcast to Larry Kelpke's house using his Internet connection. (The move would not effect the depot display, since it is picked up on a local antenna.) On Monday, June 30 Browning notified the board that Clemons had moved to discontinue Internet service, with a second from Stewart. Inasmuch as 7 'aye' votes were entered and no 'no' votes the motion is considered passed.]

Helena Train Swap Meet Saturday August 9. Stewart reported that the cost would be \$10 per table, but he will ask if they are willing to donate a table as we would not be selling anything (we may give away calendars). Singletary plans to attend, and will cover the \$10 fee if necessary.

PA System. Browning displayed the new PA system purchased for \$133.49. It includes a microphone, rechargeable battery and speaker. [This was approved by the Board via email in a discussion held June 12-13, 2014]. The pros and cons of the system were discussed; online reviews were favorable. Downs moved that Browning be reimbursed for the sum of \$133.49 for the PA system. The motion was seconded and passed. It was decided that we would store the system in the company store or the agent's closet.

Other new business. Smith reported that progress is being made on acquiring the Birmingham Terminal Station stone lions.

A Facebook site with Birmingham photos was discussed;

Adjournment. Smith moved for adjournment. The motion was seconded and passed. The meeting was adjourned at 12:12 am.

(Minutes recorded by Lamont Downs, Secretary)

Railroad History

The Birmingham Railroad Grade Separation Project: The Final Chapter

By John Stewart

Our last installment showed the battle lines being drawn for the downtown grade separation project. Apparently there was already a somewhat detailed plan, if not actual engineering plans for most of the components:

- Raising the railroad enough to enable underpasses to be built – no small undertaking
- A concept plan to remodel the L&N Station
- The 24th Street viaduct was likely a “done deal”
- There were potential mechanisms identified to replace the 22nd Street Viaduct

A year passed from fall of 1924 to the fall of 1925. About the only positive progress during this time was to move the 24th Street viaduct project forward. The project moved forward with the Southern RR as the agent for construction on behalf of the L&N and the Seaboard. The cost was estimated to be about \$350,000 (this would be at least \$4 million dollars today) with the City paying 35%.

A new wrinkle is introduced in late November 1925. Someone at the City realized that the original 22nd Street viaduct had been erected in 1885 by The Elyton Land Company, the original developer of the City of Birmingham. This wooden structure was now 40 years old and still carried streetcar traffic as well as vehicles and pedestrians, although it was originally built for horse pulled trolleys. The viaduct was built based on a contract between the City and the Land Company. The City granted a “franchise” for the “utility” that was the streetcar, and the Land Company agreed to maintain the structure and “take care of traffic”.

By 1925 the City regularly inspected the viaduct and required repairs to be made. An interesting wrinkle was that the repairs were made by the “utility” then known as the Birmingham Electric Company (“BECO”), today known as Alabama Power Company. In December, the *Age-Herald* reported that BECO would agree to replace the viaduct if “demand is made per the 40 year old agreement.”

And another small issue turned up on the 21st Street viaduct. The 1919 structure was found to have been “damaged” by locomotive smoke due to corrosion of the concrete exposing the reinforcing bars. That led the City to fight another issue with the railroads over repair costs of \$6,000.

During 1925, the legal issues finally went to court. As noted the issue had been brewing for some time and the new City Commission did not take any steps to stop the move toward court. The issue was the City’s ability to mandate the railroads to pay (at least part of) costs for grade separation when required for the public health and safety. So, as Christmas 1925 approached, the City and the railroads found themselves in court. The specifics were three ordinances passed by the City requiring underpasses to be built at 14th, 18th and 20th Streets. The railroads lost and appealed to Circuit Court with “demurrers,” which are objections stating “although the plaintiff’s facts may be true, they do not entitle to plaintiff to pre-



One of the few early accomplishments at downtown grade separation prior to the grade separation project was construction of the 24th Street viaduct, seen here in the background as L&N Eng #200 passes underneath on May 23, 1948 with the Local Accommodation for Gadsden, AL. (Frank Ardrey photograph)

vail". (Sounds a lot like, "Never let the facts get in the way.") Apparently this went more in the railroads favor, so the City appealed to the State Supreme Court. It would be weeks before a decision would be rendered.

In the meantime over the holiday season it was announced that Birmingham's population had grown to 238,000 over the year, a bit over 5%, including the suburbs. Fairfield grew at 33% for the year. It was also reported that George Gordon Crawford brought a "Christmas present" back from New York in the form of a \$10,000,000 commitment by US Steel for improvements at the Steel Works. This would include two new blast furnaces at Fairfield, the first outside of the six at Ensley. Development at Fairfield had begun in 1917 during WWI.

While the City awaited a court decision from Montgomery, Commissioner Dickson used creative thinking to seek a law in the Legislature to assess property owners for part of the cost of the grade separation projects. The idea was to enable the cost sharing to be rearranged to be more palatable to the railroads. And it was further reported in the *Post* that "considerable 'quiet work' has been done to convince the railroads to the view of underpasses". But the railroads are complaining that underpasses require raising their grades, adding to the cost of motive power and moving the L&N Station located at the corner of 20th Street and Morris Avenue with a four-track train shed.

The *Age-Herald* reported that City Attorneys worried that litigation could take five years. Commission President Jones responded "no compromise," and that the City would go to the US Supreme Court if needed. For reasons that are beyond the author's imagination, the City then invited "citizens" to study the crossings! A committee was formed in January, 1926, to "assist the City in solving the traffic problem." (Actually there was wisdom to the City's ploy for citizen involvement, but it may not be what the reader would guess).

By the winter of 1926, the 24th Street viaduct was progressing with pictures and headlines running in the various newspapers. Inspections were conducted jointly by City Engineer Hawkins and Southern RR's M. R. Stone.

More Delays

Then in February, another twist occurred with the death of L&N President W.L. Mapother. That caused the *Age-Herald* to headline that "Crossing Plans in Danger" and that City Commission President Jones had gone to Atlanta to confer with Southern RR president Fairfax Harrison.

Although 24th Street viaduct construction was proceeding smoothly, the *Birmingham News* reported on February 8th that 70% of impacted property owners were seeking an injunction to halt construction! The City would not admit damages and refused to acknowledge or pay anything until construction was complete.

On July 4th, 1926, the 24th Street Viaduct opens to great fanfare and celebration. An *Age-Herald* editorial recommended naming the viaduct for Commissioner Dickson. Commissioner Dickson declined to have the bridge named in his honor. The bridge opened to daily traffic on July 8 and traffic lights (new at the time) are installed at both ends.

Later in July, the City hired an out-of-town expert, Ross Harris from Madison, Wisconsin, to perform a \$30,000 study. (*Some things never change—Editor*). Harris was a well-known consultant who performed traffic and transit studies. The author has seen one such study performed on the streetcar system in Nashville and it is an impressive piece of work.

Things started heating up in December. On December 10, 1926, the *Post* reported "Court Holds City Can't Force Action Under Present Laws". The next day the *Age-Herald* reported "Underpasses Impossible Under Ruling," and "City Engineer declares raising of tracks necessary." The *Post* heralded "City Will Seek New Hearing in Viaduct Battle." To top it off, the efforts previously reported in the Legislature were postponed.

Matters lingered on into the following year. In May 1927, the *Age-Herald* reported the "Supreme Court Studies Another Angle", but later in the week the *Post* reported "Grade Crossing Confab Ends in Definite Break" and "RR Refuse to Bear Half Cost of Elevated Tracks."

On July 26, the *News* reported the "Railways Refuse Birmingham Plan," to which President Jones responded that "Grade Crossings Must Go [Forward] – Says Commission will go to the limit to protect life and property." The *Post* weighed in with "City May Open Drastic Grade Crossing Fight", "Police Power May Be Invoked to Eliminate Danger Spots" and "Negotiations End – Relief for 14th, 18th and 20th Street Crossings Sought."

In a *Post* guest editorial on August 2, 1927, the L&N opined that the raising of the tracks was not the best plan and that

viaducts were more feasible. A detailed article presenting the railroads' side of the argument was included.

Progress at Last

Finally, after a hot and hotly contested summer, on October 18, 1927 the *News* reported that an agreement had been reached in Atlanta between the City and the Southern and L&N Railroads to raise the rail grade and build underpasses. The report indicated that expenses would be split for the "giant project" and that the City Engineer and the railroads would meet on October 20. Apparently the meeting on the 20th went well as the *News* heralded the next day that "Track Elevation and Viaduct Work Suffer No Delay."

Combined with the railroads meeting, progress was also made between the BECO and the City, although the BECO proposed a "friendly suit" to determine the width of 22nd street and whether to pave the 20-foot width set aside for tracks.

On November 19th, the *Age-Herald* reported "Underpass Plan Makes Progress" and "Engineers confer on best method for raising tracks". Then surprisingly, the following week the *Age-Herald* reported that the "Court Nullifies City Ordinances" and "Regulations on Crossing Controversy Called Void by Tribunal." Apparently the City's request for a re-hearing did not go well. Nonetheless, progress continued during ongoing meetings between the City and railroads.

As a side note, in December, 1927 heavy rains flooded the Terminal Station underpass ("subway") which was then 20 years old. The story indicates the tunnel was flooded to depth of 30 inches for a distance of 400 feet for over 30 hours. The pumping system was labeled inadequate and a fire pump had to be used to lower water levels. In case any should doubt, the article noted that the new underpasses for the elevation project would be "specified for adequate drainage".

Returning briefly to the previously mentioned "citizens committee" convened by the City, from the author's viewpoint that apparently was a reason for this apparent madness by City officials. It turns out that the City had been planning to fund its share of the project with a bond issue, and that the bond issue would require a vote of the people in a public referendum.

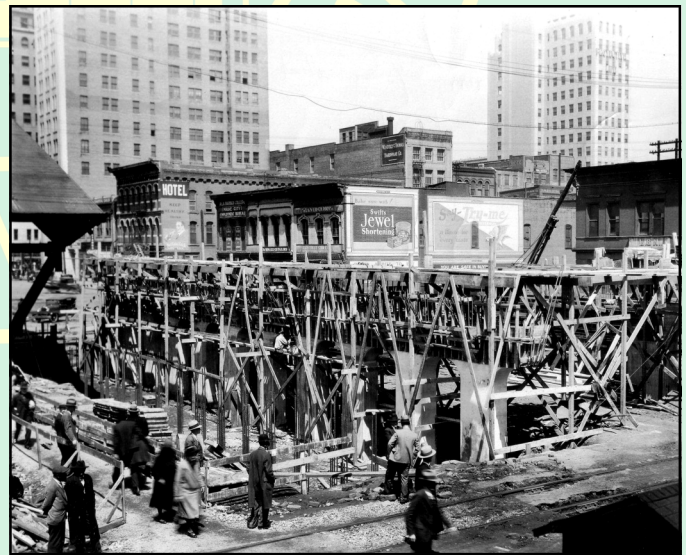
Good News All Around

The February 9, 1928 edition of the *Age-Herald* reported a swath of great news in headlines including "Underpass Plans Are Approved" and "RR/City Engineers Favor System; Vote of People Comes Next." Two weeks later the paper further heralded, "Way Clear for Ballot by Citizens" and "14th, 18th and 20th Streets to be Cleared After Bond Issue." Articles reported that "the tracks are to be raised 14 feet and the streets lowered 3.5 feet resolving a controversy that has been ongoing for [over] 25 years".

In an apparent scoop, on February 22, 1928 the *Post* headlined "Reveal Plans in Underpass Buildings Here (in the paper)." It was reported that "train service to be kept continuous and traffic at maximum [for streets]. Tracks will be raised a few feet at a time with large automatic jacks. A temporary trestle will be built to support the tracks and after each raising vacated space underneath will be filled with dirt and gravel. Retaining walls are to be built prior to moving tracks." Bonds in the amount of \$4M at 5% were to be sold for construction and a budget



Flooding in the 5th Avenue underpass at Terminal Station led to assurances that the new underpasses for the elevation project would be built with adequate drainage. (Don Phillips photo)



Piers of the 20th St underpass under construction. The street would be lowered about 3 feet when it was done. The corner of the L&N train shed is in the right side, and the front of the L&N freight house is visible to the right. (John Stewart collection)

for any damages.

On the 24th the *Age-Herald* continued the good news with “Railway Underpass w/o Tax Raise is Plan of Commission” and “Money to Come from ‘Sink’ Fund.” Another headline indicated that the L&N train shed of four tracks located in the Reservation at 20th Street was to be torn down and a “tunnel” planned. The article explained the method of “tunnels, stairs and umbrella sheds to be used with a new separate storm sewer to be built in Powell Avenue [on the south side of the Reservation] so that no pumps are required.” This may explain why Powell Avenue remains today through Railroad Park.

The *News* reported on March 7th that the City would finance the project with bonds to be repaid with interest by the railroads. The following week the *News* reported that the American Association of Railroads had stated the need to eliminate railroad grade crossings across the country. Perhaps this partly explains why the railroad changed its mind over the previous months.

One More Glitch, and then...

The *News* also reported that momentum was building for the bond issue. Several civic groups were reported to support the bond referendum. But true to the old adage, it seems no good progress can occur without someone fouling the punch. On March 18 an individual, an attorney by the name of Altman, had a guest editorial challenging the bond issues and attacking Commission President Jones, saying that Jones and “real estate speculators” were working to unfairly burden the public with cost rather than the railroads.

Apparently this guest editorial was taken seriously, as the *Post* published a statement the next day to negate Altman’s opposition. Altman claimed, among other things, that the railroads would claim damages on their property and require the City to pay. The railroads responded that they anticipated damages only to private property. By issuing such a public statement, the railroads were effectively waiving damages to their property.

The *Post* went on to report the following day that a key term of the underpass agreement provided that the railroads would “waive any damages to the railroads that cannot be replaced in whole or in kind, [such as] house tracks [or] the railroad shed”. Any damages not waived were already identified and would be split evenly between the railroad and the city.



The Southern Railway warehouse/freight house on the south side of the grade separation at the 21st Viaduct as it appeared in the 1940s. The retaining wall was part of the elevation project as completed in 1933. The “street” was originally an AGS RR right of way. (Birmingham Public Library Collection)

The \$4M bond issue referendum was held on March 27th as scheduled. The following day The *Age-Herald* reported passage with about a 2 to 1 margin with 12,601 persons voting. At the time the population of the City was 327,000, so the voter turnout appeared quite low. It is assumed that the bond referendum was City wide although this is not known. I should be noted that this bond issue only covered the last large step of elevating the railroad right-of-ways and building three underpasses. The 22nd and 24th Street bridges were funded separately.

As the smoke cleared in May, it was reported that the 22nd Street viaduct project was also moving forward and the major issue was the width of the viaduct. The City wanted 80 feet and the Southern RR, whose freight house was underneath wanted 56 feet. On May 31st, the *Age-Herald* reported that this was worked out by compromise so that the road would be 56 wide except at the north end it will be 43.5 feet with 12 foot sidewalks. Two low level roadways would be built at the north end to access the Southern property. And certain areas of the viaduct would have 7 foot sidewalks over railroad property.

If you look at the intersection of 22nd Street and 1st Avenue North you can see all this odd geometry today, and now you know why.

Finally (again), on October 31, 1928 the *News* reported “Underpass Contracts Signed and Delivered” by the L&N and Southern railroads. The joint Engineering Committee was finally ready to obtain bids for construction. On November

19th the *Post* reported that contracts had been signed by Birmingham, Southern Railroad and the Atlantic, Birmingham & Coast Railroad.

Meanwhile, the 22nd Street viaduct project was moving forward as the *News* reported on December 14th. The contract was awarded and the existing bridge was to be closed on December 27th. The streetcars on the 22nd Street bridge would be rerouted onto 20th Street, which would remain open during construction of the underpass at that location. The new 22nd Street viaduct opened on September 25 with the streetcars resuming their proper routing.

On September 5, 1928, the *Post* reported that the first of the railroad retaining wall projects had been let to a Birmingham contractor, Walter T. Weaver for \$70,000 and a working time of 90 days. The actual raising of the tracks was reported by the *Age-Herald* on January 13th, 1930 with one of the few photos found of the actual work in progress. The article explained "tracks are being raised in nine-inch steps, slag is dumped by car and leveled with a railroad tie pushed forward. After the slug of cars is withdrawn jacks were used and track lifted by scores of laborers."

The retaining walls were needed to enable the tracks to be raised so that the underpasses could be constructed. Recall that the tracks were raised 14 feet and the roads lowered about 3 feet. Thus the tracks would have to be raised and when enough grade had been gained, underpass construction would begin. Tracks would likely have been shifted horizontally to enable some working area at each track's final location for the underpass forming and concrete work to be done. The first underpass contract was reported in the *Post* on March 31, 1930 as being award to a Nashville firm, Gould Construction Company. There was no cost announced for this contract.

Success!

So, by the end of 1928 work had finally begun on the grade separation project. It was early 1930 before significant progress on the underpasses was made. Imagine the complexity of raising the track and keeping work crews and trains moving throughout the day and likely even at night, although no mention has been found of night work. One wonders how many trains per day passed the location and whether any trains were detoured on the north side of town, which would have been possible for both the L&N and Southern over their existing lines. There is no question that this was a very complex project.

The story to this point has been a complex series of political and legal battles and posturing. There is more to tell as we have a good look at the finished projects in three articles you may access online at the author's website. These are the *Railway Age and Gazette* article and two *L&N Magazine* articles all covering the completed work with interesting photos.

The link is: <http://www.bhamrails.info/DwntnTrmsTrfc.html> . On this page you will find three links to the three articles listed above. After such a laboriously detailed account you will likely enjoy browsing the articles and images that show the work done and some of the details of the improvements.

The *Railway Age* article especially has interesting technical information about the bridges and tunnels. It shows a detailed profile of the raising of the mainline tracks throughout the project. It also shows a floor plan of the completed two level platforms and work spaces beneath the tracks, part of which is still in use by Amtrak. The *L&N Magazine* articles focus more on the completed work and have good images of the newly completed project. The author appreciates these articles being provided by Lee Singletary.



A southbound L&N passenger train calls on the newly constructed train sheds at Union Station, while fresh ballast indicates the recent completion of the Birmingham grade separation project. (Marvin Clemons collection via Bill Hudson)

Member Trip Report

Of Steam Ships and Steam Trains... In the 21st Century

Text and Photos by John Browning

The terms *steam ship* and *steam train* evoke thoughts of travel in a grand era that only existed in days gone by. The days of great steam-powered vessels plying the waters of the world are extinct, as are the days of awesome coal-fired steam giants running on the rail system of the United States.

Those days are gone...or are they? In June of 2014, my wife and I set out on an adventure to experience these two lost modes of travel that were once so commonplace in our society.



To experience a trip aboard an actual coal-fired steam ship, we made our way to Manitowoc, Wisconsin and boarded the *SS Badger* for a four hour trip across Lake Michigan. The *Badger*, originally built in 1952 as a railroad car ferry for the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad, is the only coal-powered steam ship in operation in the United States today. Originally designed to ferry rail cars across the lake for the C&O Railroad, the 410-foot long *Badger* has always carried passengers and automobiles. Today, it no longer carries rail cars, but still carries passengers and their automobiles as well as RV's, semi-trucks and buses.

The *Badger* is powered by two steeple-compound Skinner Unaflo reciprocating steam engines built by the Skinner Engine Company of Erie, Pennsylvania. These two 4000 horsepower giants get their steam from four large coal fired boilers.

Railroad car ferries across Lake Michigan were once a prominent and very popular way to move freight from one side of the lake to the other. As well as transporting rail cars, these ferries also offered motorists the option of getting their automobile across the lake without having to drive hundreds of miles around the lake and go through the Chicago traffic. They also had dining areas and both inside and deck seating for passengers to relax during the crossing. State rooms were even available for an extra fare.

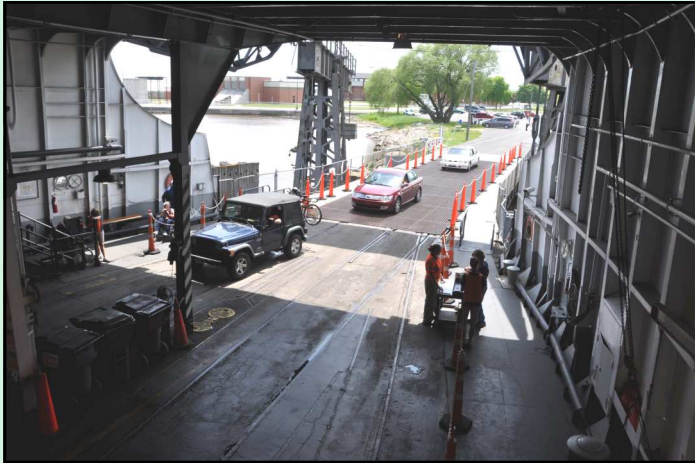
The Pere Marquette Railroad owned and operated a large fleet of these steam ships. When the Pere Marquette was absorbed by the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway in 1947, the deal included the marine operations. The



SS Badger preparing to depart Manitowoc, Wisconsin

C&O decided to expand the ferry fleet and had two new ships built. These were the *SS Badger* and her twin, the *SS Spartan*.

The C&O Railway continued to operate the Lake Michigan ferry service until the summer of 1983. At that time, the remaining ferries were sold to the Michigan-Wisconsin Transportation Company which continued to operate them until 1990. In 1992, Lake Michigan Car ferry Service, Inc. headed by Charles Conrad, purchased the *SS Badger* and refurbished it to meet the needs of tourists. This company still operates the *Badger* today.



View of the car deck of the *SS Badger* with railroad tracks still visible

Our experience on the *Badger* was very enjoyable. We had made reservations and had our confirmation in hand. We arrived at the dock in Manitowoc and received a warm welcome from the ship's staff. We gathered the belongings that we would need during the crossing and left the car in their hands (you cannot access your vehicle during the trip). They immediately drove it onboard the ship. As we boarded the vessel, I noticed that railroad tracks were still visible on the lower deck. The area around the tracks has been paved, but the tracks and even the switches are still clearly visible.

Once onboard, we found a seat on the deck and watched the crew prepare for our departure. The smell of the coal smoke coming from the giant stack was unmistakable. As we departed Manitowoc, we sailed past a unique old lighthouse. After about thirty minutes, land was no longer visible.

While we were eating a late lunch, we noticed that we had become somewhat surrounded by fog. The temperature got much colder and the winds got stronger. The ship started to rock somewhat, leading to a slight case of sea sickness. It was nothing that a couple of pills from the gift shop couldn't control.

We visited the ships onboard museum, which gives a quick history of maritime operations on the Great Lakes and presents several unique pieces of memorabilia. In addition to the museum, there are photographs with detailed captions mounted all throughout the ferry. They even provide onboard movies and bingo to help pass the time for those not interested in exploring this great old ship. They also offer state rooms for those wishing to be alone or take a nap during the voyage.

After about three and a half hours, we started to see the Michigan shore line and the port of Ludington. As we passed another lighthouse on our way into port, people in the city park were waving to us and watching the ferry head toward the dock. As we arrived at the dock, the captain moved to the aft pilot house and expertly maneuvered the *Badger* into position at its dock. As we were approaching the dock, I realized that the *Badger's* sister ship, the *Spartan* was sitting in another slip next to where the *Badger* would dock. From what I understand, the *Spartan* has been docked here since 1979 and is used as a parts source for the steam engines on the *Badger*.



***SS Spartan* docked in Ludington, Michigan since 1979**

As soon as the ship was secured, a large crew of workers waiting at the dock ran onto the ship and started unloaded the cars and placing them in the parking area. They had the ship unloaded in about thirty minutes and were ready to start loading another group of vehicles for the next trip.

After spending the night in Ludington, we headed out across Michigan in search of the next component of our trip...the steam train. After traveling several back roads and seeing several interesting sites, we arrived in Flint, Michigan. Flint is located in Genesee County, home of what is called the Huckleberry Railroad. This is a three foot narrow gauge railroad operated by the Genesee County Parks and Recreation Commission. They have about four miles of well-maintained track with a broad turning loop at each end. The track has been built on a former Pere Marquette roadbed and even has several public grade crossings.

The current motive power is locomotive 464, one of the few surviving Rio Grande K-27 engines. This beautiful locomotive is still painted in Rio Grande livery. They use a mixture of narrow gauge coaches from the Rio Grande and other railroads as well as a few cars that were built in their own shop. The forty minute trip was quite enjoyable and the train crew members were all very friendly.



**Huckleberry Railroad in Flint Michigan
with Rio Grande K-27 #464**

While the narrow gauge experience was great, we were now headed to our ultimate destination, Train Expo 2014, held at the Steam Railroading Institute in Owosso, Michigan. This had been advertised as a once in a lifetime event with eight operating steam locomotives offering multiple trips of varying length. It had been advertised correctly. It was an awesome event.

The two stars of the Expo were the museum's own Pere Marquette 1225 and Fort Wayne Railroad Historical Society's Nickel Plate 765, both big Lima-built Berkshires and fine examples of "Lima Superpower". Both of these engines put on a great show.



Nickel Plate Road 765 during photo run by in Ithica, MI

The first day, we rode a 4 hour round trip from Owosso to Alma Michigan behind Nickel Plate 765. This trip ran up the old Ann Arbor Railroad, which is now operated by Great Lakes Central Railroad. This was a very enjoyable trip, as passengers were allowed to stand in open vestibules and experience the full sights and sounds of an operating steam locomotive. The crew even stopped the train and conducted a photo run by for those wishing to participate.

The next morning, we took the same trip again, but this time the train was powered by the Pere Marquette 1225, the famed "Polar Express" engine. This proved to be another very enjoyable trip.

On the afternoon of the first day, we rode a short, one hour trip pulled by a double headed combination of Little River Railroad #1, a Vulcan 0-4-0 tank locomotive and Viscose Company #6, a Baldwin 0-4-0 tank engine. These two small engines put on a show as they backed the train about three miles out of town and pulled us back after stopping for a "train robbery" enjoyed by all of the kids on board.



Little River Railroad 110

On the afternoon of the second day, he took another one hour trip that was scheduled to be powered by the Little River Railroad #110. This is the smallest standard gauge 4-6-2 "Pacific" type locomotive ever built. She was built by Baldwin for the original Little River Railroad in Townsend, Tennessee in 1911, where she was used in passenger services as well as serving as a logging engine. The 110 was sold to the Smoky Mountain Railroad, which ran from Knoxville to Sevierville, Tennessee in 1940, where she worked until she was abandoned as Shooks Gap, Tennessee in 1964. In the early 1970's she was rescued and now is used in regular tourist service on the Little River Railroad in Coldwater, Michigan.

As we boarded the train, I spotted the 110, but didn't realize that an additional locomotive had been added to create another doubleheader. The operating crew had added locomotive 63, "Leviathan" to the head end. Leviathan is billed as "America's Newest Operating Steam Locomotive". It is a recreation of a Central Pacific Railroad 4-4-0 locomotive from 1868. It took the Klocke Locomotive Works ten years to complete this gorgeous engine in 2009. Since the Leviathan had been scheduled for display only during the event, it was a real treat to have the opportunity to ride behind it, double headed with Little River 110.

As we boarded the train, I spotted the 110, but didn't realize that an additional locomotive had been added to create another doubleheader.

Also in attendance at the Expo were Grambling Locomotive Works' Flagg Coal Company 75, a Vulcan 0-4-0 tank engine and Leigh Valley Coal 126, a Vulcan 0-6-0 tank locomotive. Both of the engines were used throughout the weekend in a "Hand on the Throttle" program, which allowed paying participants the opportunity to operate one of the locomotives under the supervision of an instructor.



Little River #1 and Viscose #6 after a short trip

The Steam Railroading Institute is now the owner of former Mississippian #76, a small former Frisco 2-8-0 "Consolidation" that operated for many years on the Mississippi Railway in Amory, Mississippi. This little locomotive is now undergoing a complete restoration that will hopefully lead to it being in operating condition once again. For the event, the organizers moved it outside of the shop for display. No. 76 is currently a project that is being worked on by a local Explorer group under the supervision of the Institute.

With a little luck and some hard work, this little engine will soon see steam again.



I don't know if you could go so far as to say that we had the same experience that we might have had in the grand days of steam, but we did have a great time and did manage to find a steam ship and several steam trains...in the 21st Century!



From the Observation Platform

By John Browning, Mid-South Chapter President



Dear friends and fellow Mid-South Chapter members,

I hope you are all having a great summer. With the days being longer, summer is usually a great time to pursue a few outdoor interests, such as railfanning and train watching. Hopefully, we will have great weather on Saturday, July 12th for our annual chapter picnic. We are planning to gather at the Leeds depot at 11:00AM and eat about noon. We will be having barbeque as the main course again this year. Please plan to bring along your favorite dish to share. Tim Smith is handling the coordination of the picnic this year. Please email Tim at tw1999@gmail.com and let him know how many will be in your party and what you would like to bring. Instead of a regular program, we are asking everyone to bring a few (5 to 10) of their favorite photographs or short videos on a thumb drive. We will have a computer and projector set up to share these after we eat. We should all have a good time eating, watching trains and looking at pictures.

James Lowry's sign project along the route of the old Mineral Railroad is continuing the move forward. James has obtained permission from the proper authorities to place signs at several key locations. We are all looking forward to seeing the first of these signs put in place.

Instead of holding our regular membership meeting in May, several of us participated in the Alabama Railfan Event at the Heart of Dixie Railroad Museum in Calera. This was an event that the Heart of Dixie was trying in conjunction with National Train Day to bring together area railfan and rail history groups from around Alabama. The turnout was somewhat small, but the event was put together quickly and there was a limited amount of time to get the different groups involved. They are looking at trying it again next year with more advance notice. Hopefully, this will grow into something of interest to all of the rail groups across the state.

I look forward to seeing everyone at the picnic. Please remember that there is always a place for you to get involved in the chapter. It is YOUR chapter. Please share your ideas with me or any other board member. Until next time....

John Browning

Chapter Meetings and Events Calendar for 2014

- Saturday, July 12 — Annual Chapter Social & BBQ— Depot Meeting Room — 11:00AM
- Saturday, August 30 — Board Meeting — Agent's Office — 10:00AM
- Saturday, September 13 — Chapter Meeting — Depot Meeting Room — 2:00PM
- Saturday, September 20 — Chapter Open House — 9:00AM to 4:00PM
- Sunday, September 21 — Chapter Open House — Noon to 4:00PM
- Saturday, October 25 — Board Meeting — Agent's Office — 10:00AM
- Saturday, November 8 — Chapter Meeting — Depot Meeting Room — 2:00PM