



Mid-South News Bulletin

November 2009



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

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Out on the Seaboard

November meeting highlight

Frisco No. 4018 “on the move”

Our November program will feature a video presentation by Mountain Brook Mayor Terry Oden, who helped spearhead the effort to relocate Frisco steam locomotive No. 4018 from the Birmingham Fairgrounds to its new home at Sloss Furnace Museum.

Built in October 1919 by the Lima Locomotive Works of Lima, Ohio, No. 4018 is a USRA 2-8-2 Light Mikado-type of the “War Baby” class ordered through the United States



Frisco #4018 reposes at Fairgrounds

Railroad Administration (USRA) during World War I. No. 4018 was purchased by the St. Louis—San Francisco Railway (“Frisco”) in 1923, and the “Mike” spent most of its career hauling freight through the heavily industrialized territory between East Thomas Yard and Bessemer.

No. 4018's last run took place on February 29, 1952 when the locomotive was moved to the Fairgrounds over the adjacent Atlantic Coast Line Railroad (ACL). Over the next 57 years, Frisco employees and groups of local rail enthusiasts attempted to maintain No. 4018's cosmetic appearance, but exposure to the elements and lack of security accelerated the locomotive's deterioration.

In 2008, as the City of Birmingham planned redevelopment of the fairgrounds area, funds were raised to move the locomotive to a more secure location. Through the hard work of Mayor Oden and others, the move to Sloss Furnace took place during the period of February 19 -21, 2009.

Please join us on Saturday, November 14 at 2pm as Mayor Oden chronicles the successful team effort to relocate and preserve this important part of our local railroad history.

Annual dues are due!

Death and taxes may be all that's certain, but we certainly can't pay the bills or keep R&LHS going without member support. Your membership dues are vital to our efforts to preserve and share our wonderful railroad heritage with present and future generations. If you would like to continue receiving the *Mid-South Bulletin* and enjoying the outstanding programs and educational opportunities available to our members, please take a moment now to return the enclosed membership renewal / application form with your chapter dues. Thanks for your continued support!



Special Holiday Events for Mid-South Members

Several special occasions will highlight the holidays for members of the Mid-South Chapter.

- Smokey City Model Rail Show, Saturday, December 5. The chapter will have a display table and all are invited to participate. Details on the web at <http://www.smokeycityrails.com/5.html>
- Holiday Tour of Joe Fiore's S-Scale Model Railroad, Vestavia Hills - Date and time TBA
- Family Social and "Railroads in Winter" Slide Show at the Depot - Date and time TBA

From the Head Shed

Board receives chair reports, discusses plans for 2010

The Mid-South Chapter board of directors convened on November 1 to conduct the chapter's business and receive reports from the newly appointed committee chairs. The following reports were made:

- Publicity & Publications (Marvin Clemons)** - The chapter brochure has been published and is available for distribution. A website is under development and should be on-line by mid-2010. The November newsletter will be distributed on November 9. It was noted that this will be the last complimentary issue sent to non-members.
- Programs & Special Events (Ron Mele)** - The program schedule for 2010 is shaping up with several speakers already committed. Group outings to BNSF's East Thomas Yard, Red Mountain Park and/or the Southern Museum of Civil War and Railroad History at Kennesaw, GA are under consideration.
- Membership (Stan Burnett)** - Membership renewals for 2010 are due by December 31st. A family membership category has been added and members are encouraged to renew at the family rate of \$15, which includes spouse and children. A renewal form will be distributed with the November newsletter.
- Exhibits & Artifact Acquisition (Tim Smith)** - The first design sketches for the Exhibit Room were submitted and will be presented at the November meeting. A museum curator will be consulted regarding the final design and for assistance with developing an overall plan for the depot exhibits.
- Grants & Fundraising (Lee Singletary)** - Grants will be pursued to support restoration work and exhibit development. Fundraising events for the coming year will include souvenir sales at model train shows and possible sponsorship of a rail show at the depot.
- Community & Government Relations (Eddie Cook)** - A meeting will be scheduled with the Leeds Historical Society to discuss security needs at the depot. Continued efforts will be made to involve local officials and civic leaders in the chapter's development and activities.
- Strategic Development & Marketing (Dan Ferris)** - The board will develop a strategic short and long-term development plan, including a budget for 2010. A strategic planning session is planned for the board's first meeting in February 2010.

The board wishes to thank Dan and Sam Ferris for hosting members and their families to an enjoyable gathering at their lovely home. The board will meet again on December 19 to take up its regular business and develop a slate of officers for the annual election at the January membership meeting.

Member Spotlight

Pennsylvania native finds much to love about “Pittsburg of the South”

There's an old saying that you can take the boy out of the South, but you can't take the South out of the boy. If that is true, and every true Southerner would agree that it is, then the corollary should also apply.

Pennsylvania native Ron Mele is a ‘Northerner’ through and through (it's not good Southern manners to call people you like a “Yankee”), but ask him and he'll tell you that he's found quite a bit to like about living in the “Pittsburg of the South.”

Ron grew up in New Kensington, PA, a suburb of Pittsburg, and developed an avid interest in his hometown Pennsylvania Railroad and the Bessemer & Lake Erie, a line where his uncle also worked. Ron graduated from Indiana University of Pennsylvania in 1973 with a B.A. in Geography. He later took additional course work in engineering and industrial design. He has worked in the engineering/construction field for the past 31 years as a draftsman and electrical estimator, the position he now holds with KRB, Inc., formerly BE&K of Birmingham.

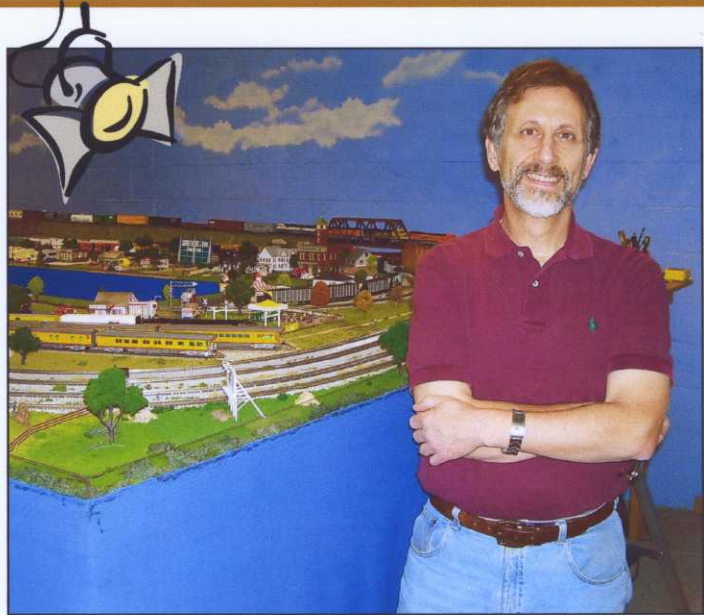
Ron's introduction to Alabama railroads began in the mid-1980s when a job opportunity brought him to Montgomery and later to Birmingham. Coming from an industrial background, Ron became keenly interested in Birmingham's extensive industrial railroads and the Birmingham Southern Railroad (BSRR) in particular. This interest prompted him to write a feature article about the BSRR which appeared in the February, 1994 issue of *TRAINS Magazine*.

While researching information for the magazine article, Ron noted that the BSRR would be celebrating its centennial in 1999 and offered his services to research and write a book to mark the occasion. Thanks to the efforts of several key people in the BSRR organization, Ron was able to author a book which he titled *Birmingham Southern Railroad Company-The First Century* (copies available at a steep discount to chapter members). In addition, Ron has had numerous other articles and photographs published in *TRAINS*, *Railfan & Railroad*, *Rails Northeast*, *Railpace*, and *The Railroad Press*.

Besides enjoying prototype railroading and photography, Ron is also an avid HO model railroader, modeling a portion of the Western Maryland Railway in his basement.

Ron's organizational skills and railroad interests have been put to good use as vice chairman and board member of the Mid-South Chapter of R&LHS. As the chapter's program chair, Ron has brought many interesting speakers and programs to our meetings. If there's something going on down at the depot, you can bet Ron will be there lending a hand.

Ron makes his home in the suburb of Pinson with his wife Marilyn and daughters Erin and Gerrilyn. We're delighted to have Ron and his family as part of the Mid-South family!



When not hard at work, you'll find Ron at play with a camera or enjoying model trains. That's board member Dan Ferris' layout in the background. *Photo courtesy of Tim Smith*

A grand opening!

Chapter hosts first Open House at Leeds Depot

The rains came down and the floods came up, but that didn't deter the dedicated from hosting the Mid-South Chapter's first open house on September 17 & 18. The open house was part of the annual Leeds Folk Festival and John Henry Days featuring live plays, folk art, and street vendors. A highlight of the two-day celebration was a chapter-sponsored lecture by Georgia folklorist Dr. John Garth, who presented his latest research evidence on the legendary John Henry's involvement in the construction of nearby Coosa and Oak Mountain railroad tunnels. While the wet weather may have dampened the turnout, the Mid-South Chapter made many new acquaintances who learned about our programs and preservation work at the depot. Thanks to members Bryan Schaffer, Ron Mele, Dan & Sam Ferris, Tim Smith, Ken Smith, Eddie Cook and Marvin Clemons for pitching in and making our first open house a success. Next year will be even better, and hopefully, a whole lot drier!

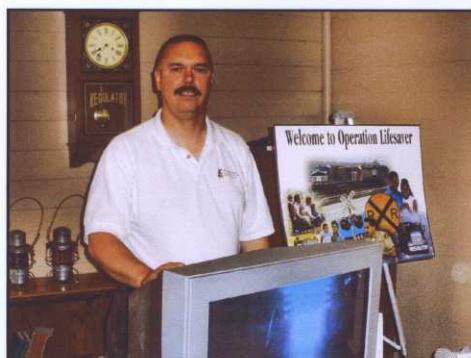


↑ *Sign in, please!* Oneonta resident Marvette Burnett signs the visitor register during her stop by the depot open house

→ *Stop, look & listen* — Open house volunteer Tim Smith takes in a videotape on crossing safety at the Operation Lifesaver display in the agent's office



◀ *Folklorist meets John Henry* — Leeds Councilman Kenneth Washington (left) poses with Dr. John Garth, Georgia folklorist and guest lecturer whose research places the legendary figure at the construction site of nearby Oak Mountain Tunnel on the former Central of Georgia Railway. Washington played the lead role in the locally produced play, "Listen To That Cold Steel Ring" as part of the John Henry Days Celebration held during the Leeds Folk Festival



Greetings with a smile — Welcoming visitors to the open house is Bryan Schaffer, a special security agent for BNSF Railway. Bryan also manned the Operation Lifesaver exhibit



Admiring the handiwork — Mr. & Mrs. Vince Oliver look over the scale replica of the Leeds depot, presently undergoing restoration for permanent display in the Exhibit Room

Golden Era Classic



Steam comes calling at Leeds— Were it not for a few minor details, one might imagine a Southern Railway light Pacific stopped in front of Leeds depot for a crew inspection sometime in the 1940's. Actually, the year is 1967, and S&A #750 is on her initial shake-down run after overhaul at the Southern Steam Shop at Norris Yard. My, what we'd give to see her standing by the platform one more time! *Stan Burnett photo*

Restoration update

Preliminary design presented for depot Exhibit Room

The first design sketch for the depot Exhibit Room was unveiled at the November board of directors meeting. Board member and exhibit chairman Tim Smith presented illustrations of each of the four walls in the Exhibit Room, originally used as one of the depot's two waiting rooms.

As conceived by Smith, each wall will carry a railroad theme representing a significant historical aspect of the Birmingham Railroad District. Upon entering the room, visitors would be greeted on the facing (west) wall by a mural depicting John Henry and his contest with the steam drill. Below the mural would be a series of panels illustrating different scenes from the legendary contest. The wall to the right (north wall) would hold a video screen showing revolving audio-visual productions on the life of John Henry and railroading in the Leeds area and Birmingham District. Surrounding the screen would be railroad art and photos primarily related to the Leeds area. Mounted on a pedestal in front of the wall would rest a scale model of the Leeds Depot under a lighted glass case, with lighted switch lamps on either side. Along the south wall opposite the video screen would be a row of theatre seats surrounded by artwork and photos of railroads from the Birmingham District. Lastly, along the wall adjacent to the doorway (east wall) would be a model of Birmingham Terminal Station mounted on a foundation of original bricks salvaged from the demolition of Terminal Station, surrounded by a display of photos and artifacts related to passenger rail travel and Terminal Station.

The proposed designs will be on display at the November 14 chapter meeting, and Tim will gladly answer your questions and take your comments following the program.

From the Observation Platform by Marvin Clemons, Chairman

My how time flies! It's remarkable when you consider it was only a year ago this November that the Mid-South Chapter received our charter from the Railway & Locomotive Historical Society. A lot has happened since then, and as we celebrate our chapter's first anniversary let's pause a moment to briefly consider where we've come from and what we've accomplished during our first year. Starting out with just a few friends and an idea, we:

- Formed the first chapter of the R&LHS located in the South's heartland and quickly recruited 30 members to our cause
- Established our home in the historical Leeds Depot, thanks to the gracious generosity of the Leeds Historical Society and city of Leeds
- Attracted a half dozen knowledgeable speakers to present on a broad variety of historical and contemporary railroad subjects of interest to our members and guests
- Hosted our first open house and welcomed our families and neighbors to enjoy a day of food and fellowship at our first summer cookout
- Initiated a long-term restoration project for the depot, including an exhibit of local railroad artifacts and a one-of-a-kind educational exhibit featuring local legend John Henry of "steel-driving" fame.
- Published an informative bi-monthly newsletter and produced an attractive chapter brochure
- Created a strong board of directors to guide our chapter's activities and future development

Not bad for our first year, but next year should be even better. We'll need everyone's help to make a successful run, so stay on board and enjoy the ride. Better yet, grab the throttle and help us make the grade!



Where Are We?



"Too easy" was the consensus regarding our last "where are we" photo of the single tunnel at Ivalee on L&N's former Alabama Mineral line between Birmingham and Gadsden. OK, we got the message, no more easy guesses, starting now! This month we're somewhere on the Seaboard, no doubt. That's a GP30 so it must be a freight, right? Actually, it's extra power leading a first section of the *Silver Comet* on a bitterly cold and snowy day in February 1966. Credit member Stan Burnett for braving the elements to catch the *Comet* at this location somewhere east of Birmingham. So, Seaboard fans, where are we?



What? November Chapter Meeting featuring a video presentation on the relocation of Frisco #4108 to Sloss Furnace

When? Saturday, November 14 at 2 p.m.

Where? The Historic Leeds Depot at Leeds, Alabama

Who? You and your guests. Hot cocoa and cookies for everyone!