



# Mid-South News Bulletin

March 2009



A publication of the Mid-South Chapter of the Railway and Locomotive Historical Society

## Chapter Newsletter Launched!

Welcome to the *Mid-South News Bulletin*, the official newsletter of the Mid-South Chapter, R&LHS!

This is the first issue of a new bi-monthly publication featuring chapter news and articles on railroads and railroad history from the mid-South region. We are grateful to chapter member James Simms (aka "Tuscaloosa Guy") for taking on the editorial responsibilities of the *Bulletin*. James is a sparkplug of energy and ideas, and he will develop a first-class publication worthy of your support.

Speaking of support, a newsletter is only as good as its content, and we will rely on your contributions. If you have anything of interest to share—a news item, a short article on a favorite railroad, or a railroad-related anecdote—please email it to James at [jbsimms@comcast.net](mailto:jbsimms@comcast.net).

To jumpstart member involvement, we're announcing a "Name the Newsletter" contest. We recognize "News Bulletin" isn't very sexy, and we're looking for a banner that captures the "flavor" of our chapter. An ad hoc awards committee will select the winner to be announced in the May issue. The winner will also receive an all-expense paid...oops, wrong contest!...make that, will receive appropriate recognition at the May meeting.

## March program to feature presentation on Red Mountain ore mines and railroads

Our next program on Saturday, March 14 will feature a presentation by Eric McFerrin, noted expert on the ore mines and railroad lines that once operated along Birmingham's Red Mountain.

Although Eric's professional background is in aviation, a change in his company's ownership provided him with a new career opportunity. For the past 15 years, Eric has been an avid explorer of Red Mountain and has performed an in-depth study of Birmingham's coal, iron and railroad history. His expertise led to his being named the first park ranger for the new Red Mountain Park. With funding from a grant, Eric is currently photographing and clearing historic mine sites, leading public tours, and continuing to research ore mining history on the mountain.

In addition to a quick rundown of proposed plans for Red Mountain Park, Eric's program will cover the history of the mines of Redding, Alabama, and their connection to the L&N. In addition to his slide

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presentation, Eric will display historical resources maps and photo albums depicting findings from his extensive research. Anyone interested in Birmingham's historic connection between railroads in the Birmingham district and ore mining will not want to miss this presentation.

The depot meeting room opens at 1:30 p.m. for socializing and the meeting will start promptly at 2. Please plan to attend and bring a guest or two for what promises to be a very interesting program.

## Depot Workgroup outlines plans for rail exhibits

Another sign of progress for the Mid-South Chapter occurred on Saturday, February 7, with the first gathering of volunteers for the Depot Workgroup.

A group of MSC members assembled for coffee and donuts to discuss plans for developing a permanent railroad exhibit at the depot and adjoining grounds. Present were David Coombs, Tim Smith, James Simms, Bill Battle, Ron Mele, Stan Burnett, Eddie Cook, and Marvin Clemons. Sitting in as guests were Doug McWhorter, a retired Southern engineer, and Jack Gillespie, a retired Southern operator who also worked at the Leeds depot in the early 1960's.



The group's discussion focused on ideas for developing three separate exhibit areas, each offering a unique view of local railroad history. The proposed centerpiece for the exhibit would be the agent-operator's office, featuring working telegraph and signal communications from the depot's last years of operation. Also included would be artifacts typically found in small-town depots, such as the agent's safe, a standardized wall clock, and timetable rack.

Adjacent to the agent's office, a former waiting room was proposed for a display of local railroad history. The group suggested naming the display area as "The John Henry Room" in honor of the legendary folk hero of local fame.

A permanent exhibit would tell the story of how John Henry came to be the "steel-drivin' man" who "beat the steam drill down" at a nearby tunnel on the former Central of Georgia Railway. The display area would also include a rotating exhibit of railroad artifacts featuring different aspects of railroad history.

Finally, the group proposed utilizing the Southern caboose for an exhibit depicting different aspects of train operations, including railroad lanterns and other pieces of railroad operating equipment. To add realism, different types of operating railroad signals could also be installed in the area next to the caboose.

Now that the group has an outline for the proposed exhibits, the next step will be to develop a blueprint and timetable for each area, and assign specific responsibilities for the plan's implementation. Anyone wishing to be a part of this exciting project should plan to attend the next Depot Workgroup meeting at the Leeds depot on **Saturday, April 4, at 9:30 a.m.** For more information, please contact Marvin Clemons at [mclemons@bham.rr.com](mailto:mclemons@bham.rr.com) or call 205-836-3457.



## Program lineup announced for 2009

Program Chair Ron Mele has lined up an interesting slate of programs and speakers for the remainder of 2009.

The May 9 meeting will feature a presentation by Alan Tuten, president of the Central of Georgia Historical Society, on the history of one of Leeds' two major railroads.

On July 11, John Stewart, webmaster of the popular BirminghamRails.com website, will bring a program on the Louisville & Nashville Railroad.

In preparation for September's Leeds Folk Festival and John Henry Days celebration on September 19-20, Ron is planning an interesting program on September 12 on John Henry, the legendary steel driver of local fame.

The November 14 program hasn't been confirmed at press time, but Ron reports having some interesting prospects. He welcomes your ideas and suggestions for additional programs and speakers. You can contact Ron at [rmeg12@charter.net](mailto:rmeg12@charter.net) or at 205-681-2553.

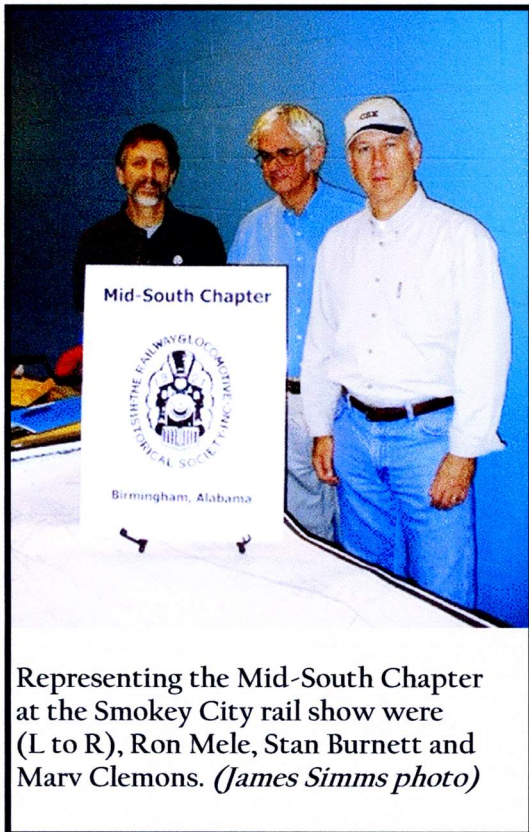


## Birmingham rail show hosts Mid-South Chapter

Rail enthusiasts and modelers share an endless curiosity regarding all aspects of railroading, past and present. Drop in on the conversation at any rail show and you'll pick up on a wide range of topics, from steam and diesel nomenclature, to signaling, to passenger trains.

The Mid-South Chapter recently joined that conversation at the Smokey City Model Railroad Club's annual Birmingham rail show on Saturday, February 28. Members Marv Clemons, Stan Burnett and Ron Mele were on hand to introduce show visitors to the newly formed R&LHS chapter. A lot of new friends were made for the chapter, and at least three new members new members were recruited on the spot. We'd like to welcome Lee Singletary, Greg Owings and John Watson to the Mid-South Chapter!

Rails shows are just one of a number of good venues for chapter publicity and recruiting. If you know of another rail show, rail group or historical society that might host a chapter table or presentation, please contact Marv Clemons.



Representing the Mid-South Chapter at the Smokey City rail show were (L to R), Ron Mele, Stan Burnett and Marv Clemons. *(James Simms photo)*



## Bi-Monthly Membership Report

(submitted by Stan Burnett, Membership Chair)

As of the end of February, the Mid-South Chapter had 22 paid members for 2009. Thanks to all who've submitted the new chapter one-page chapter application with your dues. For those who have not yet sent in your application form, a copy is included with this newsletter.

A member roster has been compiled and will be available for distribution at the meeting on March 14. The roster will include the name, address, phone number and e-mail address for all current members. If you do not want your contact information listed on the roster, please phone me by Friday, March 13. at 205-625-6891, otherwise the information will be included with the roster.

Finally, a reminder that 2009 chapter and R&LHS dues are due and payable by **March 31**. If you have not yet paid for 2009, please remit your dues as soon as possible. Remember, that national and chapter dues are paid separately. Thank you!



### Where Are We?

No, we're really not *that* confused, just asking where you think the above photograph was taken. Bring your best guess to the March meeting and find out! (*HINT: Somewhere in the Birmingham District*). Our thanks to Charlie Caster, long-time L&N public relations director, for the idea. In each issue, the L&N Magazine featured a photo of a "mystery location" somewhere on the L&N and challenged readers to guess the identity. The feature was wildly popular, and we hope it will catch on with our audience.

→ DON'T  
FORGET!

**What:** March Meeting of the Mid-South Chapter, R&LHS

**Program:** Red Mountain Ore Mines & Railroads

**When:** Saturday, March 14, at 2 p.m.

**Where:** Historic Leeds Depot

**Who:** You and your guests!