



Mid-South News Bulletin

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May Program

Central of Georgia Ry historian to bring May 2 program

Allen Tuten, a founding member and current president of the Central of Georgia Railway Historical Society, will be guest speaker at the next meeting of the Mid-South Chapter on Saturday, May 2.

Tuten will present an illustrated history of the Central of Georgia Railway, from its beginnings in 1833 to its final merger into the Southern Railway System in 1971. His presentation will include historic maps, photographs, and drawings illustrating the Central's development into a major regional carrier. A short video featuring vintage scenes of Central passenger and freight operations from the 1950's will close out what promises to be a most interesting program on one of the two major railroads that helped establish Leeds' industry.

A native of Savannah, Georgia, Tuten grew up near the Central of Georgia (former Savannah & Atlanta) tracks close by the entrance to the Savannah State Docks. He is a life-long fan of the Central of Georgia and helped establish the Central of Georgia Railway Historical Society, serving as secretary/treasurer and most recently as the society's president. A music typesetter by profession, Tuten edits and produces the society's quarterly magazine, *The Right Way*, and is working on a book on the Central.

(Editor's Note: The date for the May meeting has moved to May 2. We will return to the regular "second Saturday" meeting schedule at our next bi-monthly meeting on Saturday, July 11).

Chapter pens agreement with Leeds Historical Society

The Mid-South Chapter and its host, the Leeds Historical Society, have set the course for the future development of the Historic Leeds Depot as a major regional attraction.

Representatives of the two groups recently signed a memorandum of understanding formalizing the relationship between the chapter and the historical society. Society President Frank Little and Chapter Chairman Marvin Clemons drafted the memorandum, which sets forth mutual responsibilities for the development and operation of the Leeds Depot.

"This agreement confirms our mutual desire to develop the depot as an authentic railroad exhibit," Clemons said. "We are greatly indebted to Frank and the board of the Leeds Historical Society for providing our chapter with a permanent home in such a historic railroad landmark."

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The two groups are developing plans for establishing a permanent railroad exhibit at the depot, including restoration of the agent-operator's office with authentic telegraph and telephone communications and an area dedicated to the memory of railroad laborer John Henry, the "steel-driving man" of local legend. Long-range plans also call for restoration of a Southern Railway caboose located on the depot grounds.

Exhibit project's first phase

Restoration of operator's desk, telegraph-telephone system proposed for agent-operator's office

Back in the days when trains regularly stopped at Leeds for passengers, mail and express, the depot was a one-man show. The agent-operator was busier than the proverbial "one-armed paper hanger," selling tickets, copying train orders, weighing Railway Express packages, and sending Western Union telegrams. Nearly every task depended on a reliable communications system, first the telegraph, then the telephone connecting the depot to the railroad and the outside world.

As a standard small-town depot, Leeds would have had at least two sets of telegraph and telephone circuits for communication with the dispatcher and other railroad and Western Union offices. The telegraph system included an elaborate array of apparatus, including telegraph keys, sounders, relays, resonators, and switchboard. The telephone system included a unique swing-out, gate-arm telephone transmitters with separate speaker box and ring set.

All of the depot's original communications and signal equipment was removed after the agency closed, and the operator's desk was taken out during the restoration in 1984. For a quarter of a century, the agent-operator's office has lain silent. But thanks to the efforts of two local craftsmen, along with some hopeful funding (*potential donors and benefactors, please take note!*), the now-quiet agent's office will soon be abuzz with the nostalgic sounds of the click-clack of the telegraph and the ringing of the dispatcher's phone.

Joe Christian, a retired electrician and an expert in telegraph and telephone communications, has proposed the restoration of a working telegraph/telephone system for the agent-operator's office. As the first of several educational exhibits planned for the depot, the proposal calls for a remote telegraph station for the transmission of live real-time telegraph messages between the agent's office and a second location. Visitors to the agent's office would be able to send and receive simulated "Western Union" telegraph messages, as well as listen in on telephone conversations between the operator and the dispatcher describing train movements through Leeds.

According to Christian, before work can begin on the telegraph/telephone system, the operator's desk must be restored to the bay window. The original desk was removed during the 1984 building re-design and replaced by a standard writing desk. Besides providing work space, the operator's desk



Reviewing plans for the installation of a new operator's desk in the depot agent's office are master carpenter Henry Johnson (left), and communications electrician Joe Christian.

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supports the telegraph and telephone equipment used by the operator. The desk is of a specific design, and would have to be built from scratch by an experienced carpenter.

Fortunately, Marie Cromer with the Leeds Historical Society recommended her good friend Henry Johnson for the job. Johnson is a retired furniture craftsman and has numerous historic projects to his credit, including a replica stagecoach and the well site located on the depot grounds. Johnson and Christian met recently to review plans for the desk and work is expected to begin in May.

Our thanks to Joe and Henry for the contribution of their time and talent towards making the agent-operator's exhibit a reality. Now all we need are the necessary funds to complete this first phase of our depot exhibit project. The total estimated cost is \$2,500. If you or anyone you know would like to donate to this important project, please contact Marvin Clemons at 335-3457 or mclemons@bham.rr.com.

The Roundhouse

Local Internet newsgroup keeps rail fans in the loop

(Editor's Note: This is the first installment in a new column we've entitled "The Roundhouse" featuring rail-related groups and activities that help to educate and inform regarding current and historic railroad operations in the Mid-South area. Our thanks to ALRails moderator Dale Burns for the following).

Rail fans have been around for many, many years. We are a diverse group, some with particular interests. Most just like to watch trains in action, not really caring where they're going or coming from or anything out of the ordinary about the train. But many others concentrate on more specific aspects of the hobby. What types of horns are on the engine, what is in each car, what types of trucks (wheels) are on the engine, special moves, or any other number of more specific, concentrated interests. The list could go on.

What's always been missing, though, has been a good, efficient way to spread knowledge in a very timely manner. That's where the Internet comes in. With the huge access to online services now, most everyone can send and receive information about anything very quickly, making it very easy for people to learn more about their interests. That's why I started an on-line discussion group covering railroading in our State, to have one central location for people to send and receive information.



The group we have now, ALrails (www.alrails.com) has grown from one person (myself) to, as of this writing, 373 members. The group started out sometime in 1997 or 1998. It was hosted by a now defunct Internet service. It was good, but somewhat limited on what could be posted. As I remember, no photos, no files, etc. could be sent out, just messages. When that host decided to shut the doors, it was suggested that I move the list over to what was then a relatively new service at Yahoo! called Yahoo Groups. The move was made in 2001, invitations were sent out to the very few folks from the old group to move memberships over, and on July 11, 2001, at 12:08 PM, David Kudrav sent out the very first message on the ALrails Yahoo! Group. It read:

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