



The Mid-South Flyer

May 2013



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

Mid-South Chapter hosts capacity crowd for Central of Georgia Historical Society outing

It was recently "standing room only" at the Historic Leeds Depot when a contingent of railroad enthusiasts and local history buffs gathered to celebrate the history of the former Central of Georgia Railway.

On a gorgeous Saturday in April (4/20), members of the Central of Georgia Railway Historical Society ("CGRHS") and the Mid-South Chapter of the Railway & Locomotive Historical Society assembled at the Historic Leeds Depot to learn first-hand about the history and operations of the "Central" in the Leeds and surrounding areas.

Following a welcome and introduction by CGRHS president Allen Tuten, the enthusiastic audience enjoyed a video presentation by CGRHS member and former Central employee Jamie Williams recalling operations in the Leeds area dating back to the 1950s. The presentation was originally recorded at the July 2010 meeting of the Mid-South Chapter. As a special treat, Jamie and his wife Susan were in attendance at the meeting.



Perhaps no single location in the Leeds area captured the essence of the former "Central" as did the impressive 665' timber trestle east of town. Built in 1888, the original trestle stood for 117 years before its aging structure was replaced in 2005 by a steel and concrete design. (Photo by Parker Lamb)

Spring Cookout set for May 11

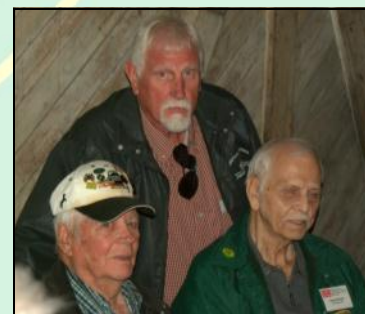
The Mid-South Chapter will host our annual Spring Cookout & Social on Saturday, May 11 at (where else?)

the Historic Leeds Depot. We'll kick off at 10 a.m. with train watching from the platform and eat around noon with hamburgers and hot dogs from the grill. Members are invited to bring a covered dish to share. Contact John Browning at 601-1975 or email at john@cvcslc.com for a list of needed food items and supplies.



At the conclusion of Jamie's remarks, fellow Central retiree and CGRHS member James Deason spoke about his experiences working on the Central in the Leeds area. Sharing in the "retiree roundtable" discussion was Leeds resident and retired Central Birmingham District trainmaster Harry Barnes.

Following a short break, CGRHS member (and past president of the Mid-South Chapter of the R&LHS) Marv Clemons presented a program of vintage and contemporary images of trains at many of the former Central locations included on the afternoon tour of historic rail sites. Marv also presented a general overview of Central operations in and around the Birmingham area from the 1950s until the merger with Southern Railway in 1963.



CofGa retirees Jamie Williams, Harry Barnes and James Deason

(Continued on page 2)

At the conclusion of the morning program, the meeting attendees boarded several vans for a guided tour of both active and abandoned Central locations. Following the former Central's "P-Line" (railroad shorthand for the Columbus, GA to Birmingham mainline) south from Leeds, the first stop was at Coosa Mountain Tunnel to view the west portal of the tunnel. Shortly after arriving, an empty eastbound Norfolk Southern "rock train" passed by on its way to Columbus and disappeared into the tunnel.

Leaving the tunnel, the group traveled west for a short distance to the east end of Winburn siding and the site of the Central's Winburn Yard.

A stop at the highway crossing provided a comparison view with a vintage photograph appearing in the recent issue of *The Right Way* showing a steam-powered train departing the yard for Columbus.



With lunchtime approaching, the group proceeded on to Irondale Cafe of "Fried Green Tomatoes" fame, which just happens to be located across the street from the entrance to Norris Yard. Following lunch at the well-known restaurant, members watched several trains entering and leaving the yard from Irondale's well-designed trackside platform, where everyone posed for a group photo. Departing Irondale "on the advertised," the group headed further west to Woodlawn Junction, former site of Woodlawn Jct. Tower where the Central's freight main diverged from the joint double track en route to East Thomas Yard in North Birmingham. As luck would have it, both an NS freight train and the eastbound Amtrak *Crescent* passed by during the stop at Woodlawn.

The remainder of the afternoon was spent retracing the remaining trackage and abandoned portions of the Central's roadbed between Woodlawn and Leeds. Returning to Irondale, the group picked up the recently restored section of double track from the west end of Norris Yard to Norris Junction and drove on to Weems, the site of the original connection between the joint Central and Southern mainlines. Although nothing remains of the original block office and signaling popularized by the photography of the late Frank Ardrey, Parker Lamb and David Salter, tour participants were able to view the former Seaboard Air Line trestle which crosses the Central/Southern trackage.



Empty "P-Line" ballast train heading for the tunnel at Coosa Mountain



Southbound AGS freight at Woodlawn Jct

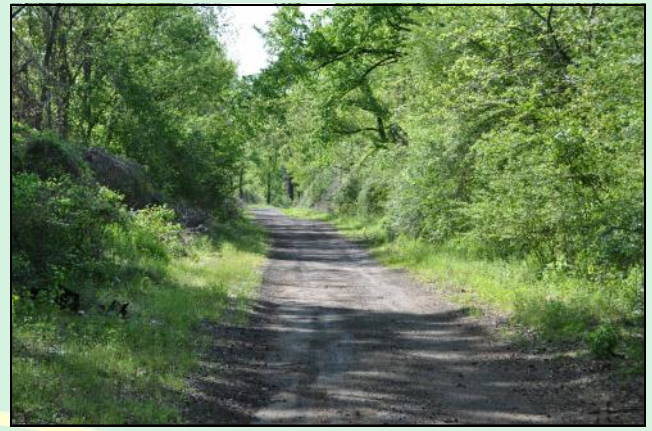


Former (now abandoned) CofGa roadbed (seen at right) diverged from the Southern at Lovick. Former Southern (current NS) mainline is seen bearing off to the left towards Leeds

Following the Southern's takeover of the Central, the Central's mainline from what is now called Central Junction to the site where the Central and Southern lines began running parallel west of McCombs, was removed from of service. A crossover was installed connecting the two mains and given the name of Lovick. Both Central and Southern trains then used the Southern mainline between those two points. The former Central line was used for engineer training for a short time before it was eventually abandoned and the rail removed.

A stop was made at the former site of McCombs, where the Central's Cahaba District left the now-abandoned mainline, passing under a high fill on Southern's main on its way to the Overton mines. The area has been developed as an industrial park and little remains of Central's roadbed. A photo stop was made along the ridge at the east end of the industrial area, providing a panoramic view of the Central's abandoned roadbed as it turned off from the Southern, as well as the Overton line passing under the high fill and bridge. Once again the train gods smiled as an eastbound NS intermodal passed over the fill just in time for a quick photo.

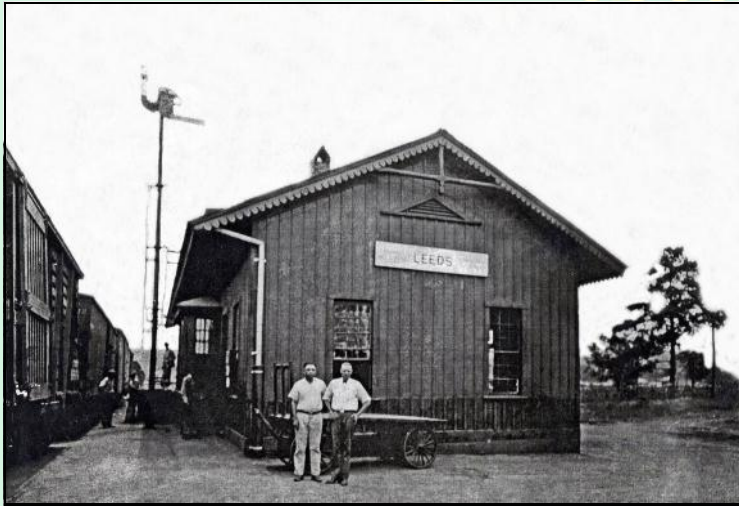
Heading back to Leeds, the caravan passed through Henry



Abandoned Central roadbed at Henry Ellen

Ellen with a stop at a former road crossing to view a section of the abandoned Central mainline as it approached Leeds from the west. Even though the line had been abandoned for more than 30 years, cross ties were still apparent at the road crossing that once saw the Central's crack *City of Miami* and *Seminole* passenger trains. A final stop was made at the site of the Central's Leeds Depot, where only a short team track and remnants of the house track remain.

Arriving back at the former Southern Railway depot "on time" at 4:30 p.m., the congenial group said their goodbyes and headed for home with cherished memories and renewed interest in "The Right Way," the time-honored Central of Georgia Railway. (Editor's note: A special thanks to contributors Allen Tuten for text and John Browning, Ken Smith, Tim Smith for photos)



Mid-South member and life-long Leeds resident Hal Holley provided this rare photo of the Central's Leeds depot. The depot was removed following merger with Southern in 1963.



And a good time was had by all!



By the Board

Minutes from the April 2013 Board Meeting

A meeting of the Board of Directors of the Mid-South Chapter was called to order by John Browning on April 27, 2013, at 10:06 a.m. at the Leeds Depot, Leeds, Alabama. 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:

Natasha Bettis
John Browning
Lamont Downs
Hal Holley
Larry Kelpke
James Lowery
Dr. Carl Marbury
Lee Singletary
Tim Smith

Board of Directors members absent:

Marvin Clemons
John Stewart

Guests (non-voting):

Pat Honsa

Quorum

A quorum was present for the meeting.

Treasurer's Report

James Lowery distributed the Treasurer's report for the period January 1-April 22, 2013. The response to the format was very positive. Our current balance is \$4514.85. Lamont Downs moved that the Board accept the Treasurer's Report as presented. The motion was seconded and passed.

Lowery distributed an asset inventory for the chapter, and mentioned the need for additions that will reflect what currently is in the Depot and caboose (if applicable). The status of ownership of the caboose may need to be included. Fixed assets need to be added. The possibility of making inventory a combined duty of the archivist (if the position is created) and the treasurer was discussed, with the treasurer notifying the archivist of purchased assets. Larry Kelpke offered to update the inventory with what currently is in the Depot and caboose (if applicable).

Secretary's Report

The Board agreed to dispense with the reading of the February 23 meeting's minutes. Lee Singletary moved that the minutes be approved, and the motion was passed.

Old Business

Status of Caboose Repairs. Kelpke reported that he has Plexiglas for the caboose windows and will install it next weekend. Dr. Carl Marbury reported on the status of the caboose steps repairs, which have been delayed due to rain, etc. He has been assured that the work will be done this spring. Tim Smith expressed concerns with the in-

sects (especially wasps) in the caboose. Kelpke also mentioned that the remaining exterior painting on the Depot still needs to be done.

Bylaws Revision and Tax-Exempt Status. John Browning reported that the bylaws revisions have been approved by National. Browning asked about our coverage under National's 501(c)(3) status. Lowery is working with National about extending their 501(c)(3) status to the chapters. We could also apply for our own 501(c)(3) status. Marvin Clemons is representing the chapter at the R&LHS National Convention in May, and Browning will ask him to bring the issue up at their board meeting. The Board was in general agreement that acquiring this status for the Chapter would be desirable, particularly if it could be done through National. In the meantime we must be careful not to state to anyone that their donations are tax deductible.

Central of Georgia Railroad Historical Society Leeds meeting, April 20, 2013. Browning reported on the CGRHS meeting held here the previous week. The CGRHS members were very pleased with the event, and will be sending a donation to the Leeds Historical Society for the use of the Depot. Lowery commended the organization for its attention to being conscious of not trespassing on private property.

Newsletter Electronic Archive by R&LHS. Browning reported that our newsletters are already in digital format thanks to Clemons; they have been sent to National and are being converted to their searchable format and will be returned to us in the near future.

Frank Ardrey Exhibit. Browning asked about the status of this project. Smith said that he needs to prepare drawings of some of our facilities for planning purposes. A different use of the alcove in the agent's office was discussed; the request would probably have to go through the Leeds Historical Society. Dr. Marbury will check with the Society about this. Lowery suggested a configuration that would be more in harmony with the overall time period being represented. Browning asked about the exhibition of prints, since so much of the discussion has focused on electronic exhibits. Singletary suggested that much of the current store could be reduced to a relatively small footprint with the freed space available for exhibits. The possibility of opening a door between the two former waiting rooms was also mentioned.

Chapter Website. Smith will be having updates posted in the near future. Apparently National's webmaster is very cooperative. The possibility of purchasing a domain name which could be used to point to our website was raised. Smith asked if the chapter Facebook page could be used to ask about availability of a train order signal for the Depot. Browning did not think an informal request for information would be a problem. Lowery advised that we should not use the word "donate" on Facebook, instead using "acquire."

Other Old Business: none.

New Business

Chapter Archivist Position. Browning reported that Clemons will be meeting with David Coombs on May 2 to discuss setting up chapter archives. The creation of an archivist position was discussed. "Archivist" would not be a paid position; Clemons has volunteered to be the first occupant of such a position. Downs and Lowery asked if creation of this position would require another revision of the bylaws. Apparently it would require a board resolution to create the position, but might require bylaws revision unless we instead establish a committee with Clemons as chair.

Singletary moved that we establish either a standing or ad-hoc Archives Committee dependent on review of the bylaws concerning establishment of another office position or a committee. The motion was seconded and passed. (Secretary's note: Subsequent review of the Mid-South Bylaws indicated that the Bylaws are silent concerning creation of a committee; therefore, Roberts Rules of Order were followed as the Board of Directors exercised its authority in creating an Archives Committee as a standing committee.)

Lowery moved that Clemons be established as chair of the Archives Committee. The motion was seconded

and passed.

Chapter Cookout on May 11. Browning reported that Dale Burns will be grillmaster, with Smith as back-up. Sam Ferris can't coordinate this year's cookout due to other commitments. Browning distributed a list of who brought what last year, and will send out an email to the membership. Lowery will be out of town for the cookout and requested that people purchasing supplies for the cookout keep their receipts for reimbursement.

Downs asked about the time of the cookout. Smith suggested determining a "gathering time"; 10:30 am was mentioned as a possibility. (Secretary's note: A final time of 10 am-3 pm was later announced). Browning said that Clemons was going to invite some Norfolk Southern officials and suggested that Dr. Marbury invite some Leeds government officials. Downs asked about the availability of the Depot, and Browning responded that the Depot should already be reserved for all dates on this year's events schedule. Dr. Marbury offered to verify that the Depot is reserved for our use that day.

Downs asked about preparation of the building if we are going to host special visitors at the cookout. Dr. Marbury said that the LHS takes care of the outside grounds, and it was agreed that the interior of the building seems ready for such an event. Downs also asked Browning about distributing the minutes of the preceding membership meeting with the invitation to the cookout, and Browning agreed to do so.

Voice Mail/Internet Access. Browning has contacted Windstream. A DSL Internet connection for the Depot would cost \$49.95/month; voice mail would be \$9.95/month. All functions would be externally available and all equipment would be at Windstream; there would be no answering machine as such in the Depot. The Internet connection would allow exterior access to the CTC board in the agent's office; John Peterson will set up Internet access to the CTC board if we get an account. Smith also mentioned the possibility of webcams for the station. Lowery asked about installation fees, which Browning will look into. Dr. Marbury suggested using the chapter website to provide railroad information for visitors to the area.

Downs asked whether our finances could cover a monthly outlay of this kind. Lowery responded that he has no clear feeling for a historical view of our finances and income. Dr. Marbury asked about possible advantages to the Internet connection. Browning discussed the positive publicity that voice mail and access to our CTC board might provide. Downs mentioned the possibility of interactive exhibits for the Depot via Internet access to our or other websites.

Holley asked about the length of the Internet contract and the possibility of soliciting contributions from the membership to cover Internet costs. This may depend upon what Clemons finds out about 501(c)(3) status.

Possible Exhibits for Loan. Holley asked about the availability of a welder. He has a 3-way switch stand that was broken in delivery. If it can be repaired he offered to loan it to the chapter. He also has a rail drill that he could loan to the chapter. Some possibilities were discussed. Holley may also have some other equipment for loan. Dr. Marbury suggested discussing space needs for exhibits with city officials. Preservation of some or all of the old section houses as exhibit venues was discussed.

Return to Discussion of Previous Business. Holley moved that we proceed with establishing Internet and voice mail accounts. The motion was seconded and passed.

Next Board Meeting. The next meeting of the Board will be on June 29, 2013, at 10 am unless otherwise announced.

Adjournment. Holley moved for adjournment. The motion was seconded and passed. The meeting was adjourned at 11:32 am.

(Draft minutes submitted by Lamont Downs, Secretary, subject to adoption by the Board of Directors)

Regional History

Southern Railway's Northern Alabama Railroad

Text and Photos by Jim Sims

While researching the history of the Northern Alabama Railroad, I quickly discovered that the beginnings of this railroad is clouded in a mist of confusion that is as convoluted as the curves in the railroad itself.

Today, the Northern Alabama, or the "NA" as it is still called by veteran railroaders, serves as the Norfolk Southern line connecting Birmingham and Sheffield, AL, and will figure prominently in the Norfolk Southern's "Crescent Corridor" plans. The line was originally chartered as the Birmingham, Sheffield & Tennessee River Railroad ("BS&TR") built for the purpose of hauling coal and iron ore from the mines in Franklin, Winston, and Walker counties, to the rapidly expanding Sheffield Industrial District's namesake city, Sheffield, AL, during the first thirty years of its existence. This line extended to Jasper, AL, with an interchange with the St. Louis and San Francisco Railway ("Frisco") and subsequently was extended to Parrish, AL, where it interchanged with the Southern Railway's former Georgia Pacific line that connected Atlanta, GA with Columbus, MS, through Birmingham. The line to Columbus was abandoned west of Berry, AL, some time in the mid-1990s and the NA is now a major connection between Birmingham and Sheffield.



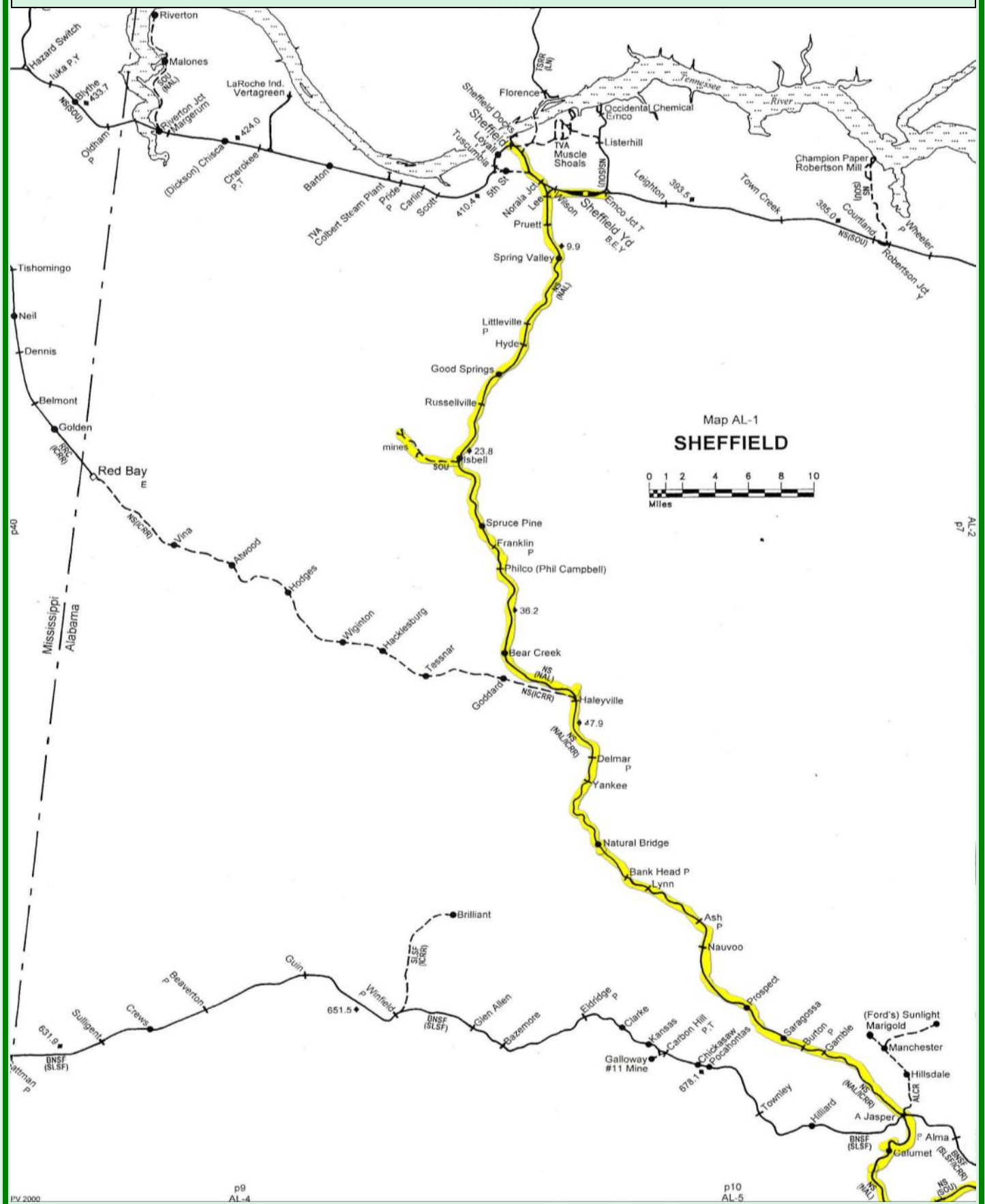
BNSF #7586, an ES44DC, with Norfolk Southern #8445, a D8-40CW, and GMTX #9043, an SD60, grind up a 1.51% grade with a mixed freight on Tuscumba Mountain. The train is about a half mile north of the Summit, at Littleville, AL.

By the end of the Civil War in 1865, Alabama and the other former Confederate states were left decimated and in ruins. There was no state government, no law and order, and the economy was in shambles. The term "reconstruction" implied the re-establishment of state government and a return of law and order, and had nothing to do with rebuilding the Alabama's infrastructure. That task would take many years.

Most railroads built during and shortly after the South's Reconstruction period were constructed with insufficient funds and without the luxury of modern earth-moving equipment. Other than the Louisville & Nashville's North & South Alabama Division, which underwent major rebuilding and realignment in the early 1900s, the BS&TR and other railroads in Alabama were not built with generous funding and, consequently, pretty much followed the lay of the land. The BS&TR was plagued with steep grades on Colbert and Russellville mountains, and south of Haleyville, the line becomes a lengthy slalom of sharp reverse curves.

With all its negative issues, the BS&TR was a vital artery to the Tri-Cities and the Sheffield Industrial District, supplying the raw materials to both the Sheffield and Birmingham industrial districts. Today it continues to serve an important route for intermodal traffic and general freight.

Map showing the present-day "NA" District of the Norfolk Southern's Alabama Division between Jasper and Sheffield. The line continues south to Parrish and east to Birmingham (not shown).



Part 1 - The Beginning

In 1815 Joseph Heslip, an iron maker, constructed Alabama's first blast furnace about three miles southwest of Russellville. A cholera outbreak, however, ended production and there was no more mention of Joseph Heslip after about 1820. Others tried to revive the furnace a few years later but the difficulties in transporting ore to the site brought closure and abandonment, and the natural treasure of brown ore lay untouched for more than fifty years. By the mid-1880s the Louisville & Nashville, Alabama Great Southern, and the Georgia Pacific had already staked their claim in Birmingham, and an opportunistic Enoch Ensley would soon turn his attention to the abundant untapped natural resources in northwest Alabama.



Southern Ry Tuscumbia Depot, built in 1888, by predecessor Memphis and Charleston Railroad. Northern Alabama passenger trains made a stop here after departing the station in Sheffield. The Tuscumbia depot is owned by the City of Tuscumbia and is the home of the Memphis & Charleston Railroad Historical Society, an NRHS Chapter. You can visit the society's website at: <http://www.mcrrhs.org/index.htm>

The site where the city of Sheffield would rise was previously the site of a planned town, laid out by Andrew Jackson in 1820 and named York's Bluff. It was located on the south side of the Tennessee River, across the river from the city of Florence and located half way between that city and Tuscumbia. However, the planned town never made it beyond the paper stage. But the dreams of a new city of industry and commerce was sparked by progress being made on the construction of a new Muscle Shoals canal, being built by the U.S. Corps of Engineers (the first canal was constructed in the 1830s but never advanced beyond the town of Tuscumbia). The Sheffield Land, Iron, and Coal Company was incorporated on December 6, 1883, for the purpose of acquiring land and laying out the streets, locating probable sites for public buildings and industry for the new city. The City of Sheffield was founded

on November 30, 1883 by Alfred H. Moses and Walter S. Gordon, and was incorporated February 17, 1885.

The Sheffield Furnace Company began construction on a 125-ton blast furnace. In 1887, the Alabama and Tennessee Iron and Coal Company, led by Colonel E.W. Cole of Nashville and former President of the Nashville & Chattanooga Railway, made the decision to headquarter his company in Sheffield and let contracts for three 150-ton blast furnaces.

After the last of the four blast furnaces at Ensley was completed and blown in, Enoch Ensley resigned from the Tennessee Company in 1889, and formed the Lady Ensley Furnace Company in Sheffield. He promptly began construction on its first furnace named the *Lady*. Sadly, Enoch Ensley would die suddenly before the end of his first year in Sheffield.

The BS&TR was originally constructed to supply raw materials to the blast furnaces operating in Florence and the newly founded city of Sheffield. A total of five blast furnaces were operating in Sheffield and one blast Furnace was operating in Florence. Ethel Armes book, *The Story of Coal and Iron in Alabama*, dates this railroad's completion shortly after the completion of the Kansas City, Memphis & Birmingham Railroad (later the St. Louis & San Francisco Railroad), in 1889; however, there are varying accounts of its start of construction. One book, *Sheffield, the City on the Bluff* published by Friends of Sheffield Public Library in 1985 states, "Early in 1883 a group of Nashville and New York interests incorporated the Alabama Improvement Company. Enoch Ensley and others in Memphis later joined this firm which had a particular interest in building a railroad from Sheffield through Frank-

lin County, to Jasper to connect via rail interchange into Birmingham.” This book goes on to say the railroad (no name given) was not completed but it did transport iron ore from Franklin County to the blast furnaces in Sheffield. According to Wayne Cline’s book, *Alabama Railroads*, the BS&TR was chartered in 1886 to construct a railroad from Sheffield to Birmingham.

On April 18, 1908, the Illinois Central completed a new eighty-mile line from Corinth, MS, to Haleyville, AL. The IC obtained trackage rights from the Southern Railway to use the NA from Haleyville to Jasper, thereby gaining access to Birmingham via further trackage rights over the St. Louis & San Francisco (“Frisco”). The IC was also granted trackage rights over the Mobile & Ohio Railroad from Jackson to Corinth. This completed the route to Birmingham from Jackson, TN, a total of 216 miles.

Speaking of Haleyville, if you’ll permit me a personal anecdote: When I was very young, perhaps four or five, my dad would take me to visit the Illinois Central shops during our visits to my maternal grand parent’s home in Haleyville. Those visits made an indelible impression on me. Mr. Grady Horne lived next door to my grand parents and worked at the IC shops. He would always take the time to show us around, and I will never forget one memorable occasion when Mr. Horne invited us up into the cab of a huge 2400-series Mountain type steam locomotive. Mr. Horne explained the workings inside the cab and asked me if I would like to run the engine up to the water tank to put water in the tender. I don’t think I was given a chance to answer before I was swooped up on to the engineer’s seat box. Mr. Horne then had me release the brakes and push the power reverse quadrant all the way forward (to tell the truth, I just remember Mr. Horne telling me to do things and he, no doubt, reached over and manipulated the controls). Once the tank was full, Mr. Horne informed me that I had to back the monstrous engine down to the original spot! All I remember was his telling me to watch the man on the ground. Well, all I could see was the end of the shop building but I knew there was another engine parked somewhere behind us. Terrified, I ran crying to my dad. Mr. Horne and my dad couldn’t help but laugh at my reaction!

Returning to the BS&TR, were it not for an unlikely meeting in 1894 the road might not have become a Southern property, or possibly not have survived at all. As the dawn of the Twentieth century approached, many railroads in Alabama were in trouble. The Alabama legislature doled out railroad charters with little regard to their viability. As a result, much of the land grant money was squandered by companies that were more interested in the cash than in building a railroad. The state paid these companies on the basis of the number of miles of railroad constructed that each company reported, and not surprisingly a few of these companies reported far more mileage than was actually constructed. Consequently the Federal money ran out and many new railroads, short of funds, were vulnerable to takeover at best, and closure at worst. L&N President Milton Smith was so incensed over the situation that he referred to these poorly thought out railroads as “abortions.”

Milton Smith and Southern Railway’s Samuel Spencer had kept a close eye on this escalating economic drama. According to Maury Klein’s account in his *History of the Louisville & Nashville Railroad*: “After holding several preliminary discussions, Smith and Spencer arranged one of the most remarkable conferences in railroad history to resolve these issues. It was a summit meeting in every sense of the word: the two men convened in a railroad car at Kennesaw, Georgia, on October 18, 1894. The purpose of the conference was primarily to work out some concrete policy of cooperation between the two systems. This would involve a defining of their respective territories, an itemized listing of unattached roads in these territories, the position of both systems toward each of those roads, a statement on possible future extension and expansion, and an outline of procedures for preventing any disturbance of rates or the competitive situation. Hopefully, agreement on these points would lead to a discussion of specific independent roads and what (if anything) should be done with them in accordance with the general principles reached earlier. In short, they sought to define their mutual realms and impose their combined jurisdiction upon every line within them. If successful, their efforts would not only bring peace to the realm, it would also fend off intruders.”

Over twenty years later, Smith “hotly” denied any of the meetings and agreements made by him and Spencer, but later developments show an uncanny resemblance to the meetings that are described in Klein’s book. While Spencer purportedly resisted acquiring the BS&TR during these “alleged” negotiations with Smith, he did finally reconsider and acquire the line and renamed it the Northern Alabama Railroad. The operating features of the NA, along with the development of its line-side customers, will be the subject of the next installment in the *Mid-South Flyer*.

A Brief Review Of . . .

Steam Whistles in the Piney Woods, Vols. I & II by Gilbert H. Hoffman.

Volume I copyright 1998 by Gilbert H. Hoffman, and Vol. II Copyright 2002 by Gilbert H. Hoffman.

Among the many interesting things about the study of railroad history is the endless array of topics that have received thorough research, as well as those that are desperately in need of investigation and documentation. A dilemma for the rail historian is deciding whether to work on a new project, or to study the results of an interesting project someone completed long ago. Whatever one's preference, I believe it's important to do both.

This brief review focuses on a project that was completed eleven years ago, but I was not aware of it until I had a chance to spend some time in Laurel, Mississippi for a project in my previous career of healthcare information technology. And, I expect that many readers, particularly younger ones, may not be familiar with it either.

While reading about southern Mississippi history, I discovered that this region boasted a robust timber industry in the late nineteenth century until the Great Depression of the 1930's. Significant activity took place in Lamar and Forrest counties, and logging grew profoundly when the railroads entered the area, providing a strong transportation network for hauling the timber to national and international markets.

One of the best sources of information about logging railroads in southeastern Mississippi is Gilbert H. Hoffman's two-volume study, entitled *Steam Whistles in the Piney Woods*. The first volume was completed in 1998, and the second volume in 2002. As Hoffman says in the Acknowledgements to Volume II, the research for both books was done "concurrently between 1993 and 1996", but the two volumes "were published consecutively."

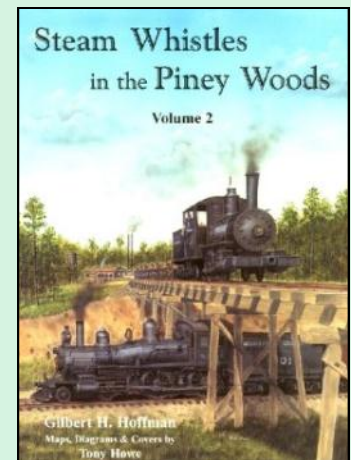
Both volumes focus on logging and logging railroads in Lamar and Forrest counties in southeastern Mississippi. Volume I details the history of the J.J. Newman Lumber Company, the Tatum Lumber Company, along with several mills in Lumberton, Mississippi, which was "founded in the mid-1880's by an energetic group of North Georgians who had come to South Mississippi to make their fortune." Volume II presents the history and operation of numerous mills that operated along three railroads – the New Orleans & Northeastern, the Gulf & Ship Island, which includes the mainline, along with the Columbia branch, and the Mississippi Central. Volume I is 294 pages, and Volume II is 262 pages.

Sadly, the history of logging and logging railroads in southeastern Mississippi does not have a happy ending. The use of "skidders" to haul logs out of the forest was an impediment to new growth, because this process destroyed young trees and plants along the path followed to move the logs. This, along with the strong pace of business, resulted in the eventual depletion of the timber, and efforts around reforestation were not successful.

The most significant strength of this work is the writing. Hoffman has done careful research through interviews of mill employee descendants, primary and secondary sources, and his writing style is superb. Complex material is distilled such that the reader can easily follow the evolution of the individual mills and railroads.

Both volumes contain many nicely printed photographs and maps to supplement the text. In addition, they each contain notes and locomotive rosters, and Volume II contains some updates and corrections for Volume I.

Hoffman has made a significant and lasting contribution to railroad history with these books. Relative to the volume of material published on other aspects of rail history, the number of works on logging and logging railroads is modest. If you haven't been exposed to logging railroads in southeastern Mississippi, or to logging railroads in general, Hoffman's work is an excellent place to start. I plan to continue studying logging railroads in the Mid-South region, and will devote my next two or three columns in the *Mid-South Flyer* to this interesting and historic railroading. — **David C. Lester, Contributing Editor**



Golden Era Classics



Red Gap Redux — One of the most well-known railroad locales in the Birmingham District is the cut through Red Mountain near Irondale, frequently referred to by railroaders as Red Gap, or more locally as Gate City. No fewer than four of Birmingham's original rail lines — Alabama Great Southern, Georgia Pacific, Central of Georgia, and Seaboard Air Line — entered the Birmingham District via Red Gap. One other road, the Louisville & Nashville, spanned the gap with its Red Gap Branch to serve communities along the southern slope of Red Mountain and connect with its Birmingham Mineral lines to the south. Countless trains have been photographed at Red Gap, but rarely (never in your editor's experience) has a photographer captured an L&N train on the Red Gap Branch. So it was truly a special occasion when a package arrived with a packet of photos from former Birmingham resident (and new Mid-South Chapter member) Matt Lawson. Matt grew up in Birmingham in the 1940s and enjoyed taking pictures of trains, fortunately including an obscure little L&N local trundling its way along Red Mountain with the "English Village Turn," also seen below near English Village. According to Birmingham Mineral authority Lyle Key, Matt's photos are the first he's seen of a train on the Red Gap Branch. We are indeed privileged to publish them. (Photos by Matthew Lawson)





From the Observation Platform

Commentary by John Browning, Mid-South Chapter President

I hope that everyone is doing well and enjoying this nice spring weather. If the pollen doesn't bother you, it is a great time of year to get out and do a little train watching. We should have nice weather for our annual chapter cookout on May 11th. Please make plans now to attend and enjoy a time of food and fellowship with other chapter members and friends. If things go as they usually do, we should have several trains come by for your viewing pleasure during the cookout.

We had a great chapter meeting on March 9th. Chapter member and Secretary Lamont Downs gave a very interesting presentation on his recent rail travels in Japan. Lamont's program gave us a glimpse into the workings of a very sophisticated passenger and freight rail system on the other side of the world. Lamont also gave out copies of a DVD that he had produced on his travels in Japan. That's what I call going the extra mile! Thank you very much, Lamont.

Many of our members also participated in another event on April 20th. Our chapter hosted the spring meeting of the Central of Georgia Railway Historical Society at the Leeds depot. The Central of Georgia group graciously made all of their activities available to our chapter members. We watched a video recorded in 2010 of Jamie Williams reminiscing about his years as a Central of Georgia trainman. We also heard from a few others who had worked with the C of G in this area. After the program at the Depot, we boarded vans and visited the Coosa Tunnel and Winburn Yard. Then we all proceeded to the Irondale Cafe for a great lunch and time of train watching at the Irondale platform. After lunch, our group visited Woodlawn junction and followed the old Central of Georgia right of way (as much as possible without trespassing) back to Leeds. We wrapped up our trip with a stop at the site of the old Central of Georgia depot in Leeds. It appeared that everyone truly enjoyed the day.

At our July meeting, we are planning to have our annual calendar photo contest. Dig out your best shots of trains taken within our chapter area and submit them or bring them to the July meeting. We had some great submissions last year and should have more this year.

The chapter board of directors met on Saturday, April 27th. We had a very productive meeting (see "By The Board" for details) and are working on several things. Plans are being made to move forward with some new exhibits at the depot. We also voted to form an archive committee to catalog and preserve the photographs, books, paperwork and other valuable items that belong to the chapter. This committee will be headed up by our Chapter past president, Marvin Clemons.

Again, I am looking forward to seeing everyone at the spring cookout. We should have a great day of food, fun, fellowship and train watching! Until next time....

2013 Mid-South Chapter Meetings & Events

- Saturday, May 11 — Chapter Cookout & Social — Leeds Depot — 10AM to 3PM**
- Thursday, June 6 thru Sunday, June 9 — R&LHS Convention — Madison, WI**
- Saturday, June 29 — Mid South Chapter Board Meeting — Leeds Depot — 10AM**
- Saturday, July 13 — Mid-South Chapter Meeting — Leeds Depot — 2PM**
- Saturday, August 31 — Mid-South Chapter Board Meeting—Leeds Depot — 10AM**
- Saturday, September 14 — Mid-South Chapter Meeting — Leeds Depot — 2PM**
- Saturday & Sunday, September 21-22 — Chapter Open House & John Henry Celebration**
- Saturday, October 26—Mid-South Chapter Board Meeting — Leeds Depot — 10AM**
- Saturday, November 9 — Mid-South Chapter Meeting — Leeds Depot — 2PM**
- December (date & time TBA) — Mid-South Chapter Holiday Social — Leeds Depot**