



# The Mid-South Flyer

March - April 2014



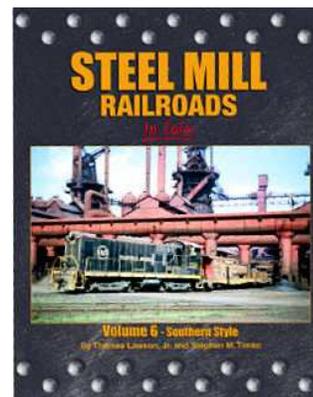
A Publication of the Mid-South Chapter of the Railway & Locomotive Historical Society, Inc

## March program

### **Chapter to host book signing by industrial RR expert Tom Lawson**

A book signing by industrial railroad expert Tom Lawson for his new book, *Steel Mill Railroads, Volume 6, Southern Style*, will highlight the March meeting of the Mid-South Chapter, R&LHS.

The book signing will be held **Saturday, March 8, at the regular 2:00 pm** Chapter meeting at the Historic Leeds Depot. Tom will be available to sign his new book and answer questions in a very informal setting.



Tom Lawson

Tom co-authored the new book with Steve Timko. The sixth in a series on industrial railroads by Morning Sun Books, the book was released on January 5, 2014. In addition to his latest work, Tom has authored several books under his own publishing label, Cabbage Stack, including *Logging Railroads of Alabama*, *Shay: The Supplement*, and *Locomotives of the Southern Iron and Equipment Company*.

According to Birmingham railroad historian and Mid-South member John Stewart, the book is a wonderful graphic catalogue of high quality color pictures of industrial locomotives from steel and steel-related industry around the southeastern United States. Each photo caption is highly detailed, and a number of picture sets and captions tell stories from Tom Lawson's extensive career dealing with and helping to operate industrial railroads.

If you are a railfan or a modeler with industrial sites on your railroad, you will enjoy the color photos of industrial locomotives on-the-job with informative captions provided by Tom. Filled with full size diesels as well as "critters" and some interesting one-of-a-kind rolling stock, you will get a behind-the-scenes and close-up look at what once many could only wish for looking "through the fence".

A limited quantity of Tom's books may be available for purchase at the signing for \$50.00 each. Copies may also be ordered at a discount (\$50.00 vs. retail \$59.95) through the Mid-South Chapter's company store.

## **ALL ABOARD!! LAST CALL FOR 2014 MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS!**

If you don't already have a ticket, it's time to hop on board and renew your membership in the Mid-South Chapter and R&LHS. Memberships run by calendar year and expire on December 31. The grace period for late renewal expires on March 31, after which time all member benefits and subscriptions to the national magazine *Railroad History* and the Chapter newsletter *MidSouth Flyer* will expire. If you haven't already done so, please consider renewing *now*. Print out and mail the membership form found on the web at [www.rlhs.org](http://www.rlhs.org) with payment, or renew on line with a credit card at [www.ribbonrail.com/rlhs](http://www.ribbonrail.com/rlhs). Continue the journey and renew today!



# By the Board

## Minutes from the February 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 February 22, 2014, at 10:09 a.m. in the baggage room at the Leeds Depot, Leeds, Alabama. Board members present were Natasha Bettis, John Browning, Lamont Downs, Larry Kelpke, James Lowery, Lee Singletary, Tim Smith, and Donnie Strickland. Absent were members Marvin Clemons, Hal Holley, Dr. Carl Marbury, and John Stewart. A quorum was present for the meeting.

**Treasurer's Report.** James Lowery presented the Treasurer's report for transactions covering the period January 1-February 6, 2014. The new projection screen has been entered under capital expenditures. All 2013 dues and advance on 2014 dues have been received. Our current balance is \$3539.06. Lamont Downs moved that the report be accepted by the Board. The motion was seconded and approved.

**Secretary's Report.** The Board agreed to dispense with the reading of the January 4 board meeting's minutes, and Lee Singletary moved that those minutes be approved. The motion was seconded and passed.

### Old Business

**Ardrey Exhibit Equipment Setup.** Browning reported that the equipment is being set up and tested; Marvin Clemons is preparing a digital slide show. The monitor still needs to be selected and purchased, followed by a kiosk to hold the equipment. Browning suggested an email vote on the monitor purchase once the equipment has been selected.

## *The Mid-South Flyer*

March-April 2014

*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](http://www.rlhs.org).*

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

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**Archive Committee Report.** A proposal, in the form of a Concept Paper, was distributed to members of the board prior to the meeting. Browning reported that Dr. Carl Marbury expects to present the proposal to the City of Leeds within the next few weeks. The space discussed in the proposal will not be available for several years until a new city library is built.

**Update on Chapter Roster and Dues.** Downs reported that as of the February 11 roster received from National we had 51 paid members and 25 who have not renewed yet from last year. A reminder email (or letter to those without email) was sent out on February 15. The URL for online renewal on National's PDF renewal form is now correct.

**Chapter Incorporation.** Lowery announced that incorporation of the chapter in the State of Alabama is complete. Info on the chapter is now available on the Alabama Secretary of State's web site.

**Other Old Business:** Larry Kelpke reported that the caboose platform repairs, including safety railings, have been completed.

Singletary presented a written agreement with the Louisville & Nashville Historical Society to include their logo on the proposed Mineral Line historical markers. Lowery moved that the Board approve the Chapter's handling the use of the L&N logo on Mineral Line markers and that John Browning sign the proposed agreement on behalf of the Chapter. The motion was seconded and passed. Various possible locations for the markers were discussed, as well as pricing.

*(Continued on page 3)*



# By the Board

## Minutes from the February 2014 Board of Directors Meeting

### New Business

**March Meeting Plans.** Browning described plans for the Tom Lawson book signing and Q&A program.

**Chapter Collection of Sales Tax - Business Licenses.** Lowery reported that we should have been collecting and reporting sales tax all along. With incorporation this is a good time for us to begin doing so. Sales taxes would apply to any sales made by the Chapter. Lowery will handle all reporting and submission of tax revenues, as well as the accounting involved.

Browning asked about the possible need for multiple licenses. Lowery stated that in most cases sales can be considered as being from the Depot. We will need county and city licenses. The county does not charge non-profit organizations for licenses, but the City of Leeds would require a license fee of \$110. Lowery will ask Dr. Marbury to look into this. Various options were discussed, including acquiring 501(c)(3) status from the IRS.

Lowery moved that we apply to the IRS for an Employer Identification Number for the Chapter. The motion was seconded and passed. Lowery moved that after we obtain an EIN we change the Employer Identification Number on the Chapter's bank account from National's to ours. The motion was seconded and passed.

**Helena Train Show.** Browning asked if we would be participating. Singletary does not expect that we will, nor Coosa Valley (Gadsden).

**Other new business.** Downs asked how mail arriving via the Depot is being handled and how mail addressed to him as Chapter representative with the State of Alabama can be passed along. Kelpke will ask Dr. Marbury if the Historical Society checks the mail and how it can be routed.

Kelpke reported that Clemons contacted him about an individual who wants to donate a baggage cart from Birmingham Terminal Station, and passed around photos of the cart. Kelpke currently has it at his home. The donor would like to have a plaque placed on the cart showing it was donated by his parents. Kelpke does not want to restore it if it will be kept outdoors, and possible locations were discussed. Natasha Bettis moved that we buy a plaque to place on the baggage cart. The motion was seconded and passed.

Smith reported on the possible donation of two cast lions' heads from Birmingham Terminal Station. Negotiations are still ongoing, as the potential donor is currently involved in other projects.

Browning reported that the Internet service to the Depot is now up and running. The next step is to connect the CTC display to the Internet. Donnie Strickland will meet with John Peterson to provide access to the Depot for setup.

Downs asked about the status of the phone service and voice mail. Browning said it should now be up and running, but he needs to obtain access information. Lowery mentioned that the current Windstream invoice did not have the \$20 credit that the past two invoices had contained. That credit had brought the invoice price in line with the bundle discount we should be getting. Browning asked Lowery to send him a copy of the latest invoice, and he would check on why the \$20 credit ceased to be included.

Browning reported that the company providing our alarm monitoring service has changed, but that it should not affect us, and that the access code has not changed.

Lowery asked about the deterioration of the baggage room ceiling. Kelpke announced that repairs are scheduled for Monday, as well as some mold remediation.

Singletary brought up the issue of the annual cookout. Browning suggested May 10. Various plans were discussed, but as no one volunteered to coordinate the cookout at this point no definite plans were made.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:43 am.

*Minutes prepared by Lamont Downs, Secretary*

# Down at the Depot

*A review of events in and around Leeds Depot*



## **Frank Ardrey exhibit moves forward** - John Stewart, Exhibits Committee

In 2013 the Mid-South Chapter applied for and received a grant from the “Friends of R&LHS” for a permanent electronic exhibit featuring the works of noted railroad photographer and Mid-South member Frank Ardrey. The grant is being used to purchase a digital display device and monitor to show a video that can be started “on demand” by a visitor with the push of a button. To accomplish this, our first purchase was a solid state programmable memory device. This device will record and play video clips at high definition quality. Multiple videos may be stored and recalled, and in the future we plan to add other video subjects to the exhibit.

A setup using the programmable device and monitor has been successfully field tested using a video slide show produced by Mid-South member Marv Clemons. The final video production will feature a short biography of Mr. Ardrey and a selection of his photographs from the Mid-South Chapter’s archive. The next task for the Exhibit Committee will be to obtain a suitable high-definition monitor for use as the display “venue.” A display case will be purchased or constructed to contain the electronics and monitor, similar to displays found in other museum exhibits. The committee is working with Vulcan Park to take advantage of their experience and contacts for this next step. We expect to engage an experienced display consultant to advise our committee on the method to economically obtain our display cabinetry. This may be contracted or we may seek experienced volunteer cabinet makers when we have an appropriate design in hand.

## **Terminal Station baggage cart restoration** - Larry Kelpke, Depot Committee

Another prized Terminal Station artifact will soon be restored and displayed at the depot. Joining the ticket office safe already on exhibit will be an authentic steel baggage cart from the early 20th century. The remains of the cart had been stored at a Birmingham residence since the 1970s, and was offered to the chapter by Heart of Dixie Chapter member Alan Dismukes on behalf of the owner, Lewis Armstrong. Mid-South members Larry Kelpke, Donnie Strickland, Eddie Cook and Marv Clemons rescued the cart and moved it to Larry’s shop for a thorough cleaning. Larry and Eddie are heading up the restoration with plans to have the like-new baggage cart on permanent display in the depot meeting room sometime this year.





## Railroad History

# Rising to the Occasion: *The Birmingham Railroad Grade Separation Project*

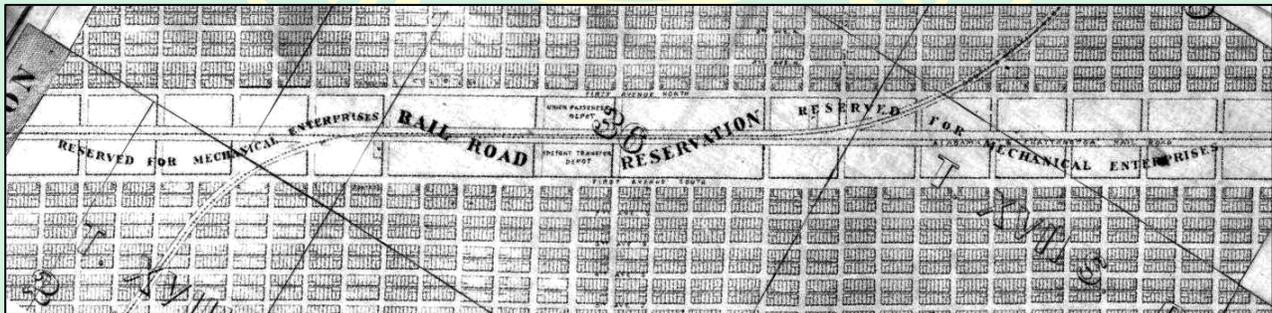
*By John Stewart*

### Introduction

When I moved to Birmingham in 1992 on a corporate transfer, I discovered three very interesting things relating to railroads. One was the Southern Railway's steam excursion program, one was the steel industry, and the third was the fact that the mainline railroads through the heart of downtown had clearly been raised. As a civil engineer, I had worked on a couple of grade separation projects and knew that the railroads are not quick to adjust the grade of a mainline track, especially if it increases the grade. I also knew that in order to perform such a project, it would be very tough to maintain rail traffic throughout construction. So, right off the bat, I was hooked on Birmingham's interesting railroad and industrial history. I wanted to know the story of the grade separation, and how it was accomplished. What I found over time was that the grade separation project was politically and legally complex. If you know Birmingham, you know that the US-280 highway project has been the subject of great debate. Well, it turns out that US-280 has nothing on the Grade Separation project which was debated over for over 30 years and went to all the way to the Alabama Supreme Court.

### Background

As most familiar with the district's railroads will likely know, Birmingham was founded in 1871 at the crossing of what became the Louisville & Nashville ("L&N") and the Alabama Great Southern ("AGS"), today's CSX and Norfolk Southern respectively. And you likely know that Birmingham was a land development scheme, promoted by interests that supported the South and North RR, later to become part of the L&N, as a tool to exploit vast mineral resources. The land development scheme included over 4,000 acres of land on both sides of the two railroad mainlines, which ran together for a bit over a mile before the L&N crossed over and turned away from the AGS. The City was developed by the Elyton Land Company and they led every aspect of Birmingham's early development.



The land developers knew that Birmingham had potential for industrial development of a grand scale, especially in the context of the post-Civil War South. So, they set aside parcels on both sides of the two railroad lines as "The Railroad Reservation – Reserved for Mechanical Enterprises" as shown in this 1880 map. Unlike many cities, Birmingham was not founded upon a river, but, if you will, upon a "river" of (potential) commerce. It would turn out that one river would be no easier to cross than the other!

The beginnings of Birmingham's commercial development were slow from 1871 to about 1885. There was a financial panic and a cholera epidemic. Chattanooga was the talk of the southern iron trade and there is little if any mention of Birmingham until the mid 1880's. In any case, the railroads enabled the development of Birmingham – there would have been no city of industry without the railroads.

But like many things, when development occurs, directions change, and so do expectations. So it was with the Railroad Reservation. One end of the Reservation was anchored by the Alice Furnace and the other end by Sloss Furnace. Along with these were the Birmingham Rolling Mill and Linn Iron Works plus other businesses as shown in this hand drawn aerial view dated 1885.



The Elyton Land Company developed the utilities and ran the early politics of the City in order to protect their investment. They selected mayors, built the water works, the streetcar system and the first power house, as well as recruited industry. By the late 1880s the Railroad Reservation was a busy place and included the first railroad station. There were businesses as well as residential development on both sides of the tracks. The early streetcar system clearly needed a viaduct over the railroad lines for safety and to maintain schedules, and the land company built one in 1885. Each railroad that arrived in Birmingham needed a freight station and yard downtown. With continued growth, further congestion was inevitable.

From 14th Street to 24th Street, every through street in the growing central city had to cross the railroads. In addition, the L&N lines curved north at Sloss Furnace, and the rail traffic at Sloss was significant, as it was around Alice Furnace where the L&N curved south. In short, traffic congestion of wagons, pedestrians and streetcars began to compete with the railroads, and commercial development began to compete with the very railroads that enabled them to be there in the first place.

By the beginning of the 1890's, it was clear that Birmingham was destined for great growth. It was determined that steel could be made from Birmingham iron which led to the development of the Ensley Steel works. This added fuel to the fires of commerce, and the accelerated growth earned Birmingham the nickname "Magic City". By 1900 the single railroad station at 20th Street was already serving seven trunk lines, and by 1907 the Seaboard Air Line and the Atlanta, Birmingham and Coast had arrived to make a total of nine railroads serving the Birmingham district.

At about the same time, public sentiment began to turn against the railroads, and the major industries also began to chafe regarding railroad rates. The honeymoon was over and the bloom was off the rose regarding the public's tolerance for the congestion and the real dangers associated with crossing the Railroad Reservation at grade.

## *Something Must Be Done – But What?*

By the early 1900s, it was clear that something needed to be done to address traffic congestion and the public safety issue in and around the Reservation. There were two viaducts in place at 21st and 22nd streets, but one was made of wood and was already approaching 20 years old. Streetcar tracks crossed the railroads at 20th Street, which also provided primary access to the railroad passenger station. Terminal Station had not yet been built, and Union Station, at the site of today's Amtrak Station, was very overcrowded serving all of Birmingham's passenger trains.

The Birmingham Central Business District was literally surrounded by railroad tracks on four sides. Each railroad had its own facilities connected by the Birmingham Belt RR. Access across the railroads was an issue in every direction, but the Railroad Reservation was at the heart of the controversy. Numerous issues were raised regarding possible remedies and their impact to relieve the unrelenting congestion, as follows:

- Should the railroad be raised, or the streets lowered?
- Should viaducts (bridges) be built, or “subways” (tunnels) be built to carry roadways?
- Should the railroad be lowered below street level?
- Who should pay what share for the improvements - the railroads, the City or businesses?
- How should pedestrians be accommodated on bridges and tunnels?
- What should the width of the bridges be? (Remember that motor vehicles were new, and most folks rode the streetcar, horses, and wagons or walked.)
- How should a business address the raising or lowering of the street at its location? Should damages be paid, and by whom?
- If the railroad were raised or lowered, how would the businesses and freight houses be accommodated that were located along and in the railroad right of way?
- What would happen to the existing railroad station, and who should pay for changes?

Like other major civil projects, this project would be expensive and everyone wanted someone else to pay for it. Each side believed that the other side “caused the problem” – so they should pay for it. The “players” in this debate became the City of Birmingham, the Chamber of Commerce, the various railroads, and the impacted business owners. It is ironic that in the early days all of these folks were on the same side as the City of Birmingham struggled to be born and to grow. Originally, the railroads and the City's developers were literally the same group, and in fact railroads enabled the City to exist as an industrial center. But all that had changed as sentiments grew against the congestion and safety issues.



*This early view is looking north along 20th Street with two streetcar tracks passing the L&N Station at left. Birmingham Public Library*

The structures and crossings in question were numerous. The 1885 viaduct at 22nd Street needed to be replaced for streetcars, pedestrians and vehicles. The 21st Street viaduct would need to be replaced in a few years. A viaduct was needed for 1st Avenue North to get over the railroad tracks curving north from the Reservation as well as all the switching traffic that served Sloss Furnace. A crossing would be needed to the east if a new station were to be built there, most likely 5th Avenue North. A new crossing was needed at 24th Street which was not a through street at the time. New crossings were also needed at 14th, 18th, and 20th Streets which were through streets at the time.

The City of Birmingham had a competent city engineer as well as a city attorney. The city's staff could develop a viable engineering solution as well as viable legal reasons for cost sharing, particularly by the railroads. The railroads had engineering departments and attorneys as well who could defend their employer's claim that no changes were needed or even feasible. Following are some of the pertinent factors relevant then as now regarding how to separate railroad and street traffic:

- Railroads cannot tolerate changes in grade (steepness or slope) of tracks as easily as vehicle traffic. Railroads needed to be less than 1% grade; roadways might go to 4% or even 6%
- Clearance over roadways was 14 feet, but a railroad required 22 feet minimum (at that time).
- Highway bridges can generally be a "shallower structure" than a railroad bridge, since rail loads are generally heavier than roadway loads. That is, the beams tend to be deeper for railroads.
- Any roadway or railroad that was lowered would have to address drainage of ground water and rainwater. Birmingham is built over numerous streams, springs and creeks.
- Both streets and railroads must be maintained for traffic during construction. Roadways are detoured more easily than railroads, although both sides required that traffic flow be uninterrupted.
- The Powell Avenue Generating Plant and railroad freight houses must stay open and be served by rail during and after construction; other businesses must be served by roadway traffic at grade.

As one can see, it was not an easy problem to solve. Many ideas were tossed around and many plans were proposed. In part due to the financial panic in 1907, money to build the project didn't exist, and any suggestion of cost sharing was rejected out of hand by the railroads. In the meantime, the new Birmingham Terminal Station opened in 1909 moving trains away from the station at 20th Street, but aggravating crossing issues at the main east-west thoroughfare of 1st Avenue North. A "subway" (tunnel) for 5th Avenue North carried vehicular traffic, pedestrians and streetcars under the new station, though it wasn't long before that underpass began to flood in heavy rains, fueling the idea that tunnels/underpasses were not practical. As it turned out, the original pumps were not large enough to handle the volume of water.

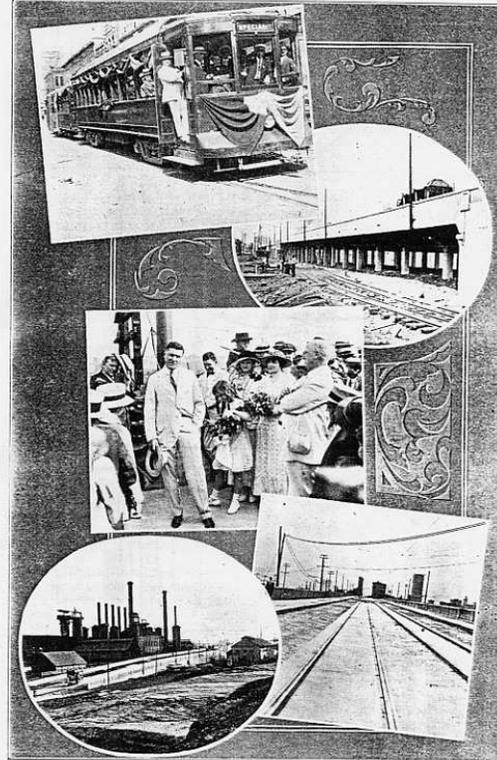


*Birmingham Public Library collection*

## Facts About Birmingham's New Viaduct

It is known as the Weatherly Viaduct.  
 Is 2632 feet long.  
 Is 60 feet wide.  
 Is 31 1-2 feet high.  
 Contains 1,718 tons of cement.  
 Contains 13,550 cubic yards of concrete.  
 Weighs about 30,000 tons, which would require a train over a half mile long to haul the material.  
 Was started July 1st, 1914.  
 Completed about October first.  
 Was to cost \$280,000.  
 Did cost about \$200,000.  
 Has two 10-foot sidewalks, 40-foot roadway and two street car tracks.  
 Is first permanent viaduct in Birmingham as result of movement to eliminate grade crossings started 27 years ago.  
 Next Viaduct to be constructed will be at 21st Street, between First Ave. and Ave. A.  
 The Viaduct was built by the Louisville & Nashville R. R. Co., The Southern Ry.; The Alabama Great Southern, The Sloss-Sheffield Company, The Birmingham Ry. Light. & Power Co., and the City, the latter paying 25 per cent.

*Birmingham Magazine, BPL Collection*



From top to bottom: Special Car taking City and Corporation Officials over the Viaduct on the first run. Underneath view of the Viaduct. J. P. H. DeWitt, speaking on the day the Viaduct was opened and dedicated. General views show size of the Viaduct.

Around 1910 the City Engineering staff began to develop a plan proposing tunnels at 14th, 18th and 20th Streets, viaducts at 21st, 22nd and 24th Streets and raising the railroad grade throughout the reservation. A viaduct was also proposed at 1st Avenue North. Named the Weatherly Viaduct after a city official, the new viaduct opened to great fanfare in 1915. This viaduct was part of an overall plan that was on paper at the start of WWI, though it would be 15 more years before that plan was actually put into place.

The rationale of the City's plan may have been under debate, but time proved it to be sound. At the end of WWI, the "Rainbow Viaduct" was built at 21st Street and named in honor of the Rainbow Division's return from France. The grades set for this viaduct, per the city staff's plan, fit with the scheme finally put into place years later.

In the meantime, the attorneys were busy as well. The City's attorneys proposed that the City could force the railroads to contribute to the cost of these improvements by utilizing the City's enforcement powers to protect the public's "health and welfare". The reasoning was that the City had an obligation to protect its citizens' safety. The railroad crossings were deemed dangerous, so the city could pass an ordinance compelling the railroads to assist in paying for the improvements. To show they were reasonable folks the



city only asked for 75% of the cost. The railroads shed this proposal as a duck sheds water. In fact, the railroads had participated in the Weatherly project, but this seems to have been forgotten.

World War I came and went and the 1920s began. In the beginning, this was a decade of postwar depression in some sectors, but as the economy began to pick up the era became popularly known as the Roaring Twenties. Birmingham continued to prosper, and Tennessee, Coal & Iron (“TCI”) had begun to develop the Fairfield Works to supplement the capacity of Ensley Works. The other three iron makers, Woodward, Sloss and Republic were generally showing good production in the mid ‘20s.

So, with a generally good economy, the traffic along both the railroads and the streets continued to increase. Streetcar traffic grew as well as motor vehicle traffic. The problem continued to be debated and became a standoff between the railroads and the City on cost sharing and the doctrine of police powers. The Chamber of Commerce found itself at odds with the City politics and the railroads, as well as the commercial community who were going to be impacted by proposals to raise or lower streets. The public sentiment was frustration with all sides as noted in this *Age-Herald* cartoon (at right) from 1926, entitled “Still Waiting”. (To be continued in the next issue of *The Mid-South Flyer*).



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### **References:**

*Railway Age*, Aug 19, 1933 on microfilm at Birmingham Public Library (BPL)

*L&N Magazine* (Louisville and Nashville Employees Magazine) Jan, 1932 and May, 1933

Various issues of *Birmingham Magazine*, available at BPL

City of Birmingham Scrapbook, BPL Archives

### **Publicity Update**

## **Mid-South Chapter on the World Wide Web**

*Contributed by Tim Smith, Mid-South Publicity Chair*

Have you ever browsed the Railway & Locomotive Historical Society’s website? Or, did you know the Mid-South Chapter has its own Facebook page and YouTube channel? If not, you may be missing out on a car load of local and national rail news and current events of interest to Mid-South members.

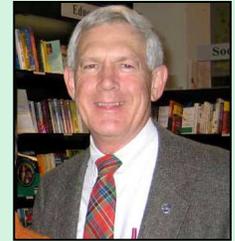
Begin your search with the national website at [www.rlhs.org](http://www.rlhs.org). There you will find exciting news from many chapters. At present you can find out about the “Big Boy” move from the Southern California Chapter, register for the national convention in Ely, Nevada, or search the archives. A wealth of railroad information awaits.

To view the various chapter websites, click on "Chapters" at the top of the screen and chose which chapter you'd like to view. Choosing "Mid-South" will take you to our web page. There you will find links to our Facebook page and our Youtube page. Facebook may require you to sign up in order to view content. The MidSouthRLHS Facebook page is updated for upcoming events and meetings, plus is also a great place for railroad related news. Our Youtube videos can be viewed by anyone without signing up.

Additionally, we have a nicely designed web site of our own, designed by former member Jeff Johnson. There is some great information and a large links section available to view. To view this page, go to <http://midsouth.rlhs.org/>. It should be noted that much of the information on our web pages has not been recently. If you'd be interested in helping us build a newer website that can be easily updated, please let myself or another board member know. We could use your help!

## Trip Report

# ACROSS CANADA IN MID-WINTER ABOARD VIA RAIL'S CANADIAN



*Text and photos by Lyle Key*

When Teddy Roosevelt took a late life adventure into a South American jungle, he commented that “This is my last chance to be a little boy.” I found that I had similar feelings about my mid-winter trip across Canada aboard Via Rail’s *Canadian*. There hopefully will be other opportunities in the future to rekindle the excitement of train travel during the bygone post-war era, but at least for now, the *Canadian* is the last surviving regularly scheduled streamliner with passenger cars that date back to the mid-‘50’s. No less than 63 people traveled to Vancouver, British Columbia to join Bill Schafer’s “Moonlighters” group for the *Canadian*’s January 10<sup>th</sup> departure for Toronto.

The *Canadian* has received some well-deserved positive press in recent months, and for additional information and photos, one can refer to Fred Frailey’s article entitled “Canada’s tousled SILVER LADY” on pages 38 – 47 of the January 2014 issue of *Trains* and to Don Phillip’s column entitled “The world’s finest train ride” on pages 12 – 13 of the February 2014 issue of *Trains*.

My journey began with a transcontinental flight from Jacksonville to Seattle on Thursday, January 9<sup>th</sup>, and the overnight layover in Seattle gave me an opportunity to ride the light rail line from the airport to my downtown hotel. After a good night’s sleep, I boarded the light rail line again for a quick trip to Amtrak’s beautifully renovated King Street Station. During the short walk to the train station, I noted that Seattle still used trackless trolleys, and later that day, I would see more of them in Vancouver. The waiting room of King Street Station must look like it did during the golden age of rail travel, but I boarded a brand new Talgo train for the ride to Vancouver. This was the first trip for this set of equipment, and two Talgo technicians rode the train to fix any bugs that developed. We left right on time at 7:40 am for a scenic trip along Puget Sound. It was fun to visit with several other Moonlighters aboard the train, and I had a nice breakfast of oatmeal, coffee, and a scone in the Bistro car. The train pulled into Vancouver’s Pacific Central Station on time at 11:40 am, and Canadian customs officials checked me into Canada in short order. **IMPORTANT TRAVEL TIP** – It once was possible to travel to Canada with just a driver’s license from a state in the United States, but a trip north of the border now requires a passport.



*Pacific Central train station, Vancouver, BC*

For the 3 day and 4 night journey to Toronto, I was in lower berth #1 on *Blair Manor*, a sleeper built by Budd with 4 sections (section #4 had been replaced with a shower), 6 double bedrooms, and 4 roomettes. The train left Vancouver at the scheduled time of 8:30 pm on Friday with two diesel units, one baggage car, coaches 8143 and 8130, Skyline Dome 8511, sleepers *Drummond Manor* (#8322), *Bliss Manor* (#8308), and *Christie Manor* (#8316), Skyline Dome 8502, dining car 8401, sleepers *Cabot Manor* (#8313), *Blair Manor* (#8307), and *Mackenzie Manor* (#8335), and finally, observation-dome-lounge-sleeper *Evangeline Park* (#8704). The *Manor* cars honored prominent Englishmen who migrated to Canada, and my sleeper was named for Andrew George Blair who lived from 1844 – 1907 and served as Premier of New Brunswick from 1883 – ‘96. He went on to several federal positions including the Chairmanship of the Board for the Railway Commission of Canada from 1904 – ‘07. Silver plates in each sleeper provided information about that car’s namesake in both English and French.

While I was sleeping, the relative warmth and rain around Vancouver changed to cold temperatures and snow, but by Canadian standards, the weather wasn't bad for mid-winter, and we didn't experience any sub-zero weather! I woke up at 4:45 am on Saturday as we sat on a passing track, and a few moments later, Via train #1, our westbound counterpart, rushed by on the mainline. My train pulled into Kamloops early and then waited until the scheduled departure time. After a shave and shower, I walked up to the dining car for a terrific breakfast of eggs, toast, hash browns, and sausage. The steward and the servers remembered the Moonlighters from previous years, and they seemed genuinely pleased and excited to have us back on board.



**The "Blair Manor" sleeping car section featured two facing seats for daytime travel that made down into an upper and lower berth at night.**

The dome of the *Park* car was fairly full of Moonlighters, but there were a few seats open from which one could observe the mountainous terrain and the evergreen trees laden with snow. East of Valemont, we came to a stop where there wasn't a side track, and before long, there was an update over the train's intercom. A freight had broken down up ahead, and we were going to back up and take an alternate route to Jasper on a more northerly line. Fortunately, the alternate line was well maintained and good for 60 mph, and we were able to leave Jasper just 1 hour and 25 minutes behind schedule. Not bad considering what had transpired. Via had equipment standing by in Jasper to wash the dome windows – and that was good – but the water quickly froze on the front windows of the domes and made them opaque! Thankfully, the ice slowly melted during the daylight hours on Sunday.



**"Evangeline Park" at Saskatoon, Saskatchewan shows the ice and snow that had accumulated underneath the car's skirt.**



**Forward view from the dome of observation car "Evangeline Park" after the eastbound "Canadian" met a westbound CN freight**

When I turned in for the night, the sleeping car attendant let me know that when I woke up on Sunday morning, a passenger getting on at Edmonton would be sleeping in the upper berth above me. I actually slept through Edmonton, but I was told that we had sat on the east side of town for two hours. As it turned out, we spent Sunday meeting what seemed like an endless parade of CN freights as we traversed the flat, snow-covered plains of Saskatchewan. After another good breakfast featuring pancakes, I tried out the Skyline dome ahead of the diner to watch us meet the plethora of freights headed west. As we neared Manitoba on Sunday afternoon, the *Canadian* pulled into a passing track behind an eastbound freight. After a bit of a wait, a westbound stack train roared past on the main line. We followed the eastbound freight ahead of us out onto the main, and when we got to the next passing track, that freight was in the "hole" waiting for us to run around it. Another eastbound

freight was tucked away on the next passing track, so the passenger train finally was able to make some good progress on its eastbound trek.

On Sunday night, I had another excellent meal that featured prime rib, and I bid adieu to our enthusiastic steward Barry and the three servers who would be relieved by a new crew in Winnipeg. The sleeping car attendant who covered *Blair Manor* also would be leaving us in Winnipeg. She also had been very personable and efficient, but I think she would have flunked a bed making test administered by a Pullman inspector because the sheets Via used were too small for the mattresses in the sections. Amtrak's sleeping car attendants seem to do a better job of tucking in the sheets on their berths although they admittedly aren't as big and as comfortable as the berths in a Via section.

It still was dark when I woke up at 6:25 on Monday morning – the third day out – and I soon found that the toilet wouldn't flush on the first try. Happily, it reset by itself and then worked fine. The shower that replaced section #4 initially leaked a little water into the section across the aisle from me, but that turned out to be a good thing because Via left that section vacant, and the four of us in sections 1 and 3 were able to use it for various purposes. On Monday morning, the shower leaked a little water into the aisle.



**Via Rail Canada served great meals on the Canadian's dining car, and there always was a different menu with new selections for lunch and dinner**



**A passenger sing-a-long led by guitarist Ed Ellis**

The train made a brief service stop at a snowy Sioux Lookout, and then we resumed our eastbound journey. Train #2 encountered very few freights as we rolled across the Canadian Shield at track speed, so we finally were chipping away at all the time we had lost. Up in the domes, one mostly saw lots of blowing snow while we were underway, but when we pulled onto a passing track for one of the few westbound freights we would encounter, we noted that it actually had a F-unit behind the first two diesels. One of the Moonlighters in the dome said that the F-unit was dead in tow.

For my final dinner on the *Canadian's* diner, I selected horseradish encrusted pickerel. The steward told us that the fish would be called "walleye" in the United States. The complementary meals and the service on the dining car were superb, and all of us agreed that no one should be hungry when he or she detrained in Toronto on Tuesday! After dinner, Iowa Pacific President Ed Ellis played his guitar and led a sing-along in the lounge of the observation car.

The sun was shining on Tuesday morning, and the surroundings exhibited increasing signs of civilization as we neared Toronto. We were rolling along on lots of tangent track, and we were told that we should arrive in Toronto Union Station by 10:30 am. That was great news for those of us who had booked flights from Toronto on the afternoon of January 14<sup>th</sup>! Going into Toronto, the *Canadian* passed a yard filled with green and white GO TRANSIT trains that weren't in service after the morning rush, and we pulled into Union Station at 10:20 am, just 50 minutes behind schedule! It's amazing how many people have a train trip across Canada on their "bucket lists," and you'll note that both of the *Trains'* articles about the *Canadian* that I mentioned earlier concluded with admonishments to ride the *Canadian* sooner rather than later. One hopes that this rolling time capsule will be around for many years to come, but Via is under even more political and financial pressure than Amtrak, and sadly, the *Canadian* could be here today and gone tomorrow.



# *From the Observation Platform*

*By John Browning, Mid-South Chapter President*

## **President's Annual Report to the Membership**

2013 was another great year for your chapter. We held a series of excellent meetings with several interesting programs. In January, our own Lamont Downs presented a program on the railroads of Japan and shared video footage of the trains that he saw during his trip. Lamont was even kind enough to bring along DVDs to give to those in attendance. We were scheduled to have our annual chapter cookout in May, but the threat of severe weather led to a cancellation. Due to the May cancellation, we held a picnic at our July meeting. After lunch we had awesome slide presentation from Marvin Clemons and then held our annual calendar photo contest. Eric McFerrin from Red Mountain Park presented a spectacular program on the history of the iron and steel industry in the Birmingham area and how it related to the development of many of railroads in this area.

In April, we helped host the spring meeting of the Central of Georgia Historical Society. The Central of Georgia group graciously made all of their activities available to our chapter members. Many of us had a great time visiting several historical C of G sites in this area and learning more about the history of this railroad.

The official chapter membership count for 2013 was 69. We are growing and doing well, but we always need new members.

As many of you might have noticed, we now have permanent wooden steps at each end of the caboose. This project was a joint venture between your chapter and the Leeds Historical Society.

2013 saw the formation of an official archive committee for our chapter. This new committee is currently being chaired by Marvin Clemons. This is the first step in establishing a permanent archive of rail history related material that comes into the possession of the chapter. This committee will be working on procedures and policies for handling collections of material that might be donated to the chapter in the future, as well as the handling of our existing materials and artifacts. There are many details still to be worked out, but I believe that this committee will bring together a chapter archive collection that we can all be proud of.

Our Exhibits committee has been working towards establishing a permanent exhibit of the Carl Ardrey photo collection. The chapter received money for the project through the Friends of the RLHS campaign. The purchase of some of the needed electronic display equipment has recently been completed and we hope to see the exhibit in place soon.

Our company store, headed by Lee Singletary continues to be a success and the chapter participated in several area train show in 2013.

I am sure that everyone enjoys our excellent chapter newsletter, "The Mid-South Flyer" which is edited and published every other month by Marvin Clemons. I believe that you would be hard pressed to find a better, more informative chapter newsletter anywhere.

The Mid-South Chapter is made up a group of individuals with a variety of back grounds. Some of our members are former railroad employees and some are rail fans who just have a deep interest in trains. Some of our members are interested in the rail history of certain areas while others are interested in the current day to day operations of the area's railroads. I believe that this wide variety of individuals makes our chapter

## *Golden Era Classics*



*Here's an unidentified 1950s photo from the archive that remains a mystery. The photographer is unknown, and we speculate that it was taken somewhere on the Central of Georgia between Birmingham and Columbus, GA. It appears to be an extra movement (displaying green flags) of solid reefers, probably loaded with Florida or South Georgia produce bound for the Midwest with Illinois Central power. The rider coach is likely for the required flag-man and conductor. It seems we've seen this magnificent old house in other photos along the CofG. Help, anyone?*

### *From the Observation Platform (continued)*

unique. We all seem to have a good time together and really enjoy the fellowship. I know that I learn something new every time I have a conversation with one of you. I hope that we will continue to grow as a chapter and be able to offer more benefits to you, our members.

The board of directors is currently working on several things that should improve our chapter. One of those items is filing for incorporation of the chapter in the State of Alabama. This will give our chapter a true legal identity. We are also working to provide the best possible membership programs at our meetings, as well as possibly facilitating some field trips or outside gatherings of a rail related nature.

I would like to thank all of the members of the board of directors, as well as other chapter members for their dedication and efforts. If you see a chapter activity that you would like to participate in, PLEASE let one of the board members know. Your help is always needed and welcomed. There is room for you...This is YOUR chapter. Thank you for allowing me to serve as your chapter president. I am looking forward to another great year and am very excited to see what 2014 will bring.

*John Browning*