



The Mid-South Flyer

Winter 2015



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

Ardrey Exhibit, Birmingham Mineral RR Markers

Chapter projects move forward



Mid-South member James Lowery displays a sample of signage to identify former Birmingham Mineral RR sites

January Meeting Announcement

The Annual Membership Meeting of the Mid-South Chapter will be held Saturday, January 24 at 2 pm at the Historic Leeds Depot. The business meeting will include election of officers for the coming year and a discussion of options for enhancing and possibly restructuring the chapter and its programs. Your participation is encouraged.

After the close of the business meeting, Mid-South member Marvin Clemons will present a slide show featuring railroad images and video from his recent travels through England, Scotland and Wales, with a visit to the National Railroad Museum at York, England.

If you haven't yet renewed your R&LHS and chapter membership for 2015, you are invited to do so on-line at www.ribbonrail.com/RLHS/. Membership renewal forms will also be available at the January meeting.

A primary goal of the Mid-South Chapter is to recognize and promote the contribution of both railroads and railroaders to the legacy of Birmingham's railroad district. To that end, the Chapter has chosen to sponsor two very distinct projects—one promoting the former Birmingham Mineral Railroad, and another exhibiting the photography of the late Frank Ardrey.

Located in the original waiting room space at the Historic Leeds Depot, the Frank E. Ardrey Exhibit will feature a collection of the noted photographer's iconic black & white images from the post WWII-era. An audio-visual presentation will recall Ardrey's colorful railroad career and his contribution to the photographic record of southeastern railroad history.

Mid-South Chapter member James Lowery has created a signs project designating historical sites of the former Birmingham Mineral Railroad ("BMRR"). According to Lowery, the historical markers are intended to raise awareness of the importance of railroads, and particularly the Birmingham Mineral, to the industrial and commercial development of the Birmingham District. The markers will help form an "urban trail" along portions of the BMRR routes to allow motorists, bicyclers and urban hikers to learn about this important aspect of Birmingham's history. An interactive website will help to guide and educate users regarding the significance of different historical BMRR rail sites.

Lowery has completed surveys of several BMRR branches with detailed descriptions of points of interest. The Red Gap Branch is presented in this issue of the *Mid-South Flyer*, with others to follow in later editions.



The Frank Ardrey Exhibit will feature a display of Ardrey's iconic images and a video depicting his contribution to southeastern railroad photography.

Commentary



Thinking About Amtrak

By David C. Lester



I've recently been thinking about the approaching 44th anniversary of Amtrak. My interest in railroading began two years after Amtrak's inception in 1971. Although living "off-line" in Atlanta, Georgia, where Southern's *Piedmont* and *Southern Crescent* still provided excellent private rail passenger service, I followed Amtrak closely, and even occasionally saw a car with the "pointless arrow" on it in the consist of the *Southern Crescent*. I believe this car provided run-through service, but can't remember the details. Then in the late seventies, both Southern passenger trains serving Atlanta disappeared. The *Piedmont* was discontinued, and the *Southern Crescent* became the Amtrak *Crescent*.

I didn't have an opportunity to ride the Amtrak *Crescent*, or any other Amtrak service until many years later, and as I've posted in a couple of stories on my blog (davidlester.com), my experiences on Amtrak have been relatively good. In addition to riding the *Crescent* to both Washington and New Orleans several times, I've also enjoyed trips on the *California Zephyr*, the *Coast Starlight*, Amtrak California, the *Acela* and other trains on the Northeast Corridor. All of the trips were good, and some were outstanding.



*Southern Railway's "Southern Crescent" departing Atlanta's Brookwood Station in late 1970's
(Martin O'Toole photo)*



Amtrak's "California Zephyr" passing through western Colorado

tions people, and the executive suite includes some good folks who are working hard to make the best of what they have.

Now that I've established that I'm a fan of Amtrak, so what? Well, even though I'm a fan, I think back on the 43 years of Amtrak's existence, and all of the Congressional wrangling, politics, stress and angst that has kept the or-

Where am I going with all of this? Well, the first goal of this piece is to establish that I am a fan of Amtrak. In addition to the very good service I've experienced on most of my trips, I have several friends who either work for, or are retired from Amtrak, and some of these spent their entire railroad career at Amtrak. Amtrak is a serious organization, and is always represented at various rail engineering conferences by talented and capable individuals, just like the other railroads. Want to talk about railroad technology, engineering, maintenance-of-way and equipment performance? Tee up a conversation with members of Amtrak's engineering team, and you'll be talking to some of the best around.

On-board service personnel are very hard working, and all of the ones I've met have done a very good to excellent job under often trying circumstances. The organization also fields some excellent operations

ganization floating along from year to year, with the annual appropriation always under threat of being cut. The whole situation makes me nauseated. Amtrak deserves a lot better than it's getting from Congress. The hard-working people at Amtrak deserve a lot better than what they're getting from Congress. While there are some bright spots of Amtrak support in Congress, as well in some states that are sharing in the support of Amtrak operations at home, the overall history of Congressional "support" is dismal.

While this is certainly not breaking news, after nearly 44 years, this model has grown really tiresome. It is ridiculous that we're having essentially the same Amtrak debates in Congress and elsewhere that we did in 1970, in 1980, in 1990, in 2000, and again in 2010. What should be done? Well, I'm not sure. The only conclusion I can come to is that adequate (or maybe more than adequate) funding and a long-term mandate from Congress are needed. I don't like to raise problems then not propose solutions, but the options for addressing the situation are filled with lots of questions and approaches for doing things. Questions like, "How efficiently are Amtrak operations being managed?" and, "How is Amtrak's money being spent, and could it be spent more effectively?" are among those that must be asked and documented, and I don't have the answers to them. Obviously, we shouldn't blindly throw money at Amtrak that could be wasted.

Some propose privatization of various components of Amtrak, such as the NEC. I'm in favor of privatizing business when practical, but having part of Amtrak run privately and the rest of it run publicly could create a lot of disjointed problems for the organization. And, the minute things go sour financially, the private operator is out, which is fair, since a private operator cannot be expected to operate at a loss every year. However, Amtrak would be left holding the bag, and would have to go back to the Congressional well.

The bottom-line message here is that we need to get serious about Amtrak, and stop stringing it along. There are many reasons why we need a strong national rail passenger system, but I won't go into them here. Give the organization the funding it needs, and stop with the silly discussion of things like cutting meal service.

The Mid-South Flyer

Winter 2015

The Mid-South Flyer is published bimonthly 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. Article ideas and reader comments are invited and may be emailed to:

*Marvin Clemons, Editor
Email: mclemonsjr@gmail.com*

*David Lester, Contributing Editor
Email: davidclester@comcast.net*

*John Stewart, Contributing Editor
Email: bhamrails@gmail.com*

Some say that we should properly fund Amtrak, make it robust, or drop it altogether. I can't bring myself to say that dropping it should be an option, but I certainly understand the sentiment of those who do. The political and financial games that have been rained down on Amtrak by Congress for nearly half a century must stop. Failure to do so is disrespectful and insensitive to those who rely on rail passenger service for transportation, those who could rely on it more, Amtrak's employees, and, frankly, the American people.



Will Amtrak survive or just fade away?



By the Board

Minutes from the January 2015 Board of Directors Meeting

A meeting of the Board of Directors of the Mid-South Chapter was called to order by John Browning on January 10, 2015, at 10:11 a.m. in the baggage room of the Leeds Depot.

Board of Directors members present: Natasha Bettis, John Browning, Marvin Clemons, Lamont Downs, Hal Holley, Larry Kelpke, James Lowery, Tim Smith, Donnie Strickland

Board of Directors members absent: Dr. Carl Marbury, Lee Singletary, John Stewart

Guests (non-voting): Pat Honsa

Quorum: A quorum was present for the meeting.

Treasurer's Report

James Lowery presented a financial statement for the calendar year 2014. At year's end some funds were transferred to the general fund as agreed to by the Board in October. John Browning asked how many members have paid their dues for 2015; Lamont Downs reported that as of December 15 there were 22 paid-up members. Downs moved that the treasurer's report be approved as presented. The motion was seconded and passed.

Secretary's Report

Lowery moved that the minutes from the October 25, 2014 meeting be approved. The motion was seconded and passed. Marvin Clemons moved that the minutes from the November 15, 2014 meeting be approved. The motion was seconded and passed. Downs asked for corrections to the final events calendar for 2014.

Old Business

Hal Holley asked if there would be a Leeds Festival this year; currently there is no information yet. Lowery reported that the Leeds Historical Commission is interested in becoming more involved in the railroad history of the area.

Lowery displayed a sample of the Birmingham Mineral Line site signs. 24 have been produced so far. Permission has already been obtained to place a number of these. Some will have to be produced without a crossbuck symbol for legal reasons. Downs asked about physical placement. Lowery will be ordering a posthole digger; some signs will be set in cement. Signs may be sprayed with a teflon coating to make removal of graffiti easier.

New Business

Nominations and structure. Clemons reported that three people have submitted nominations. John Troulias has offered to serve on the board, but not as an officer at this time.

Lowery said that he strongly felt that we are a strong active chapter and that all organizations go through a period of difficulty finding leadership. Lowery is willing to serve as acting president until a president is found. He felt that we have a good membership base, good programming opportunities, and a good board. He felt that sufficient good programming was available to cover the coming year, and asked if Downs was willing to send out notices of programs and if someone could serve as a moderator and provide a laptop on occasions when he was not able to attend. Downs agreed to the former and Browning to the latter.

Lowery also emphasized the need to have a closer connection with the historical society, meeting with them if possible. He is in favor of continuing the current board.

Larry Kelpke suggested contacting the organization working on the revitalization of downtown Leeds. Holley added that we need greater visibility within the community.

Downs asked Browning how he felt about continuing as president if some of his duties were delegated to others as proposed by Lowery. Browning expressed concerns about the need to restructure meetings to make participation easier. Scheduling conflicts between different organizations is a continuing problem. Downs suggested having a business meeting at every chapter meeting.

Clemons stated that he is considering relinquishing the newsletter as there is no chapter news to report on.

Downs asked for suggestions as to what our primary purpose is, and said that for him it would be presenting programming of historical interest to the membership. Several members suggesting preservation of the Depot as another, again emphasizing the need to involve the Leeds Historical Society. Natasha Bettis asked if we should be attending other organizations' meetings.

Clemons emphasized that we need to reserve the Depot a minimum of 2-3 months in advance of each meeting. Downs said that program events need to be scheduled at least two months in advance in any case so that adequate notice can be given to membership. Downs said that we need to gather as much information as possible on dates of possibly conflicting events before setting an annual schedule.

Clemons suggested quarterly meetings, which would also mean only four board meetings per year. Tim Smith suggested interspersing quarterly meetings with less formal events, such as "hanging out at the Depot" days. Lowery suggested holding some meetings elsewhere, such as an informal "Mid-South Day" at the Helena museum. Browning pointed out that this would also free us from liability issues. Clemons suggested having work days at the Depot. Browning suggested having some events at the Heart of Dixie Museum. Discussion ensued about the Heart of Dixie and last year's railfan conference. Browning expressed his feeling that the current number of meetings was excessive.

Lowery pointed out the potential of projects like the Mineral Line signage project to reach the general public. The possibility of various organizations creating trail projects and gradually linking them into a unified whole was discussed. Downs said that the Mineral Line project was an example of a third purpose of the organization, to provide a support system for individuals to carry out projects of historical value.

Clemons emphasized the need for a strong program base to bring in new members, and his feeling that membership recruitment needs to start in Leeds.

The pros and cons of Facebook vs. Yahoo Groups vs. a web page were discussed, as was the possibility of setting up our own web site.

The pros and cons of having a board versus working with the membership through the chapter meetings were discussed.

Lowery urged that our primary purpose for this year should be to continue our educational programming for the membership. Lowery provided a different perspective on board membership, in which the purpose of board membership was the contribution of multiple viewpoints and ideas. Clemons asked if we should maintain the same level of board membership, reduce it, or eliminate it.

Downs proposed that "board" meetings consist of officers and committee chairs, rather than an elected board, allowing the "board" to grow and shrink as needed.

Clemons moved that

- The elected officers will comprise the Chapter Executive Council, and will be solely responsible for managing the affairs of the chapter.
- The Board of Directors will be abolished and all currently assigned board functions not specifically reserved

- by the Executive Council will be transferred to the membership at large, to be performed on a voluntary basis.**
- **The Executive will create a list of essential Chapter functions and specify which functions are to be performed by the** Executive Council, with the remaining functions to be performed by member volunteers. Those functions for which no member (or members) volunteer may either be assumed by the Executive Council, or relinquished until assumed by a member volunteer or volunteers.
 - The chapter will host a quarterly program in January, April, July and October, with specific dates and times to be coordinated so as not to conflict with other known railfan/sports activities or holiday weekends. Informal off-month programs and/or activities may be planned and coordinated at will by any member or group of members.

Lowery pointed out that the proposal eliminated the wide feedback from board members of various backgrounds. Lengthy discussion ensued. Clemons provided some background on the initial evolution of the organization. Lowery and Clemons debated the pros and cons of board vs. direct membership involvement. Browning shared some comments sent in by Larry Goolsby and Daniel Gray. Clemons withdrew his motion pending final resolution of the board's structure at the next board meeting.

Clemons suggested that we take these issues to the membership meeting on January 24th. Following the January meeting but not later than four weeks prior to the next chapter meeting, the current board as constituted should meet to resolve outstanding issues.

Clemons summarized the proposed slate of nominees for the forthcoming election as follows:

**James Lowery as Acting President (there is currently no candidate for President);
Dr. Carl Marbury (incumbent) as Vice President (Clemons will confirm with Dr. Marbury);
James Lowery (incumbent) as Treasurer;
Lamont Downs (incumbent) as Secretary.**

John Browning will remain on the board as Immediate Past President.

Lowery mentioned the possibility of the Executive Committee meeting without the full board, and including the board members when appropriate.

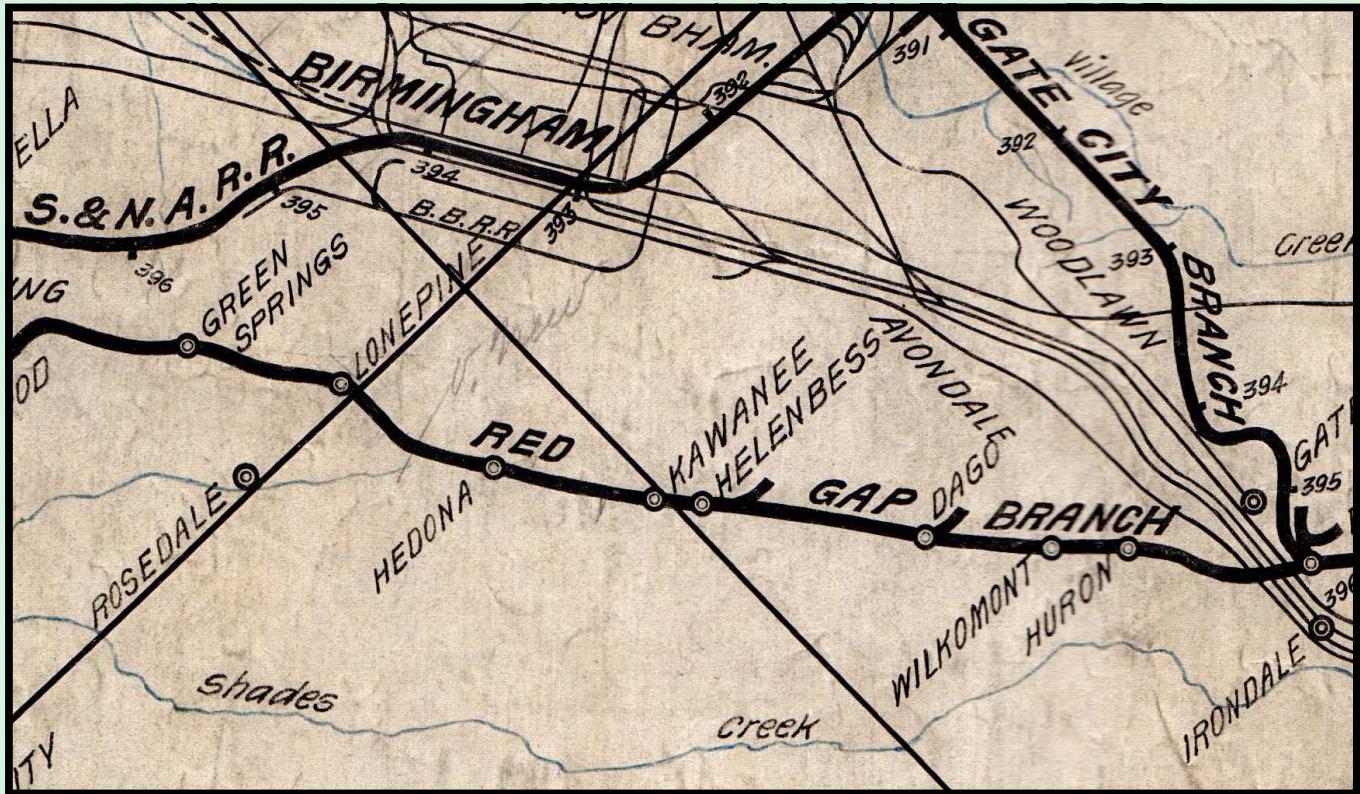
Clemons suggested that the first order of business at the Jan. 24 chapter meeting be the election, followed by a presentation by Lowery of his general proposals and ideas. Clemons asked that an agenda for the chapter meeting be sent out beforehand. Lowery suggested that Downs pass around a pad of paper and a pen on which visitors could write their names and email addresses. Clemons offered to provide a sign-in form used previously at chapter meetings. Browning suggested circulating a survey asking for interest in various project and suggestions for new projects; the idea met with general approval.

Downs appealed to the board to send him any information available on dates of potentially conflicting events, so that he could begin work on an events calendar.

Downs asked about the provision of refreshments using the dollar-a-month club fund. The general response was negative, with attendees in the past not particularly interested. Bettis, however, expressed her approval.

Clemons thanked Lowery for his willingness to step up and lead the group during the present time of uncertainty. Several members expressed their support. Clemons stressed the importance of publicity and the involvement of local media and organizations.

Adjournment. Clemons moved for adjournment. The motion was seconded and passed. The meeting was adjourned at 12:36 pm. (Minutes recorded by Lamont Downs, Secretary)



Historic Birmingham Mineral Railroad (BMRR)

“Driving and Walking Tour” – Publicly Accessible Locations of Old Roadbed In Some of the Eastern and Southern Areas

RED GAP BRANCH – Irondale to Greensprings Highway

As of December 20, 2014

NOTE: Locations mentioned here use current designations and names, some of which did not exist during the 1884-1988 era of the BMRR.

NOTE: Only publicly accessible locations are included here. Private property should not be entered without express permission of the owner.

Background: The Red Gap Branch of the BMRR came from the Irondale area then ran between Eastwood Village and Century Plaza, turned to go along Cresthill Road, continued along Montclair Road, crossed Montclair Road at Country Club Road (at Ramsay Park), continued between Sterling Road and Carlisle Road (where it was the boundary between the city limits of Birmingham and Mountain Brook), went through English Village and continued out of English Village down Red Mountain Lane, ran along the south face of Red Mountain above and behind the houses on 20th Avenue South (above “Diaper Row”), then (using a bridge) crossed over Richard Arrington Jr. Boulevard (formerly Montgomery Highway and Highway 31). Here the BMRR crossed over to the north face of Red Mountain, ran along the mountain below Vulcan Park and The Club where the Vulcan Trail now uses the old roadbed as the trail, continued across Greensprings Highway (crossing back to the south side of Red Mountain), and headed out to Red Mountain Park.

What To Look For: In many cases, the former BMRR roadbed will be a flat place in the street, often in the middle of a

block with a slope leading up to the flattened area, the flattened area of the street (usually about 50 to 75 feet of street), then a slope continuing up the street. In other cases such as where the BMRR roadbed was on the side of the mountain and not crossing a street, often the hill or mountainside slopes up to the roadbed, there is a flat spot (the BMRR roadbed), then the hill or mountainside continues upward. Good examples of this second type of area are the Vulcan Trail and the walking trail below Trinity Hospital.

Locations Where the Old Roadbed Can Be Seen or Now Is Part of Other Structures:

Irondale:

16th Street North, Georgia Road, and Ruffner Road – The Red Gap Branch began in this area and is named for “Red Gap” that is the gap in the ridge where this part of present-day Georgia Road is located. (There is a geological fault under this gap, and, in 1916, a 5.1 magnitude earthquake epicenter was located below this point. As of 1916, it was the largest earthquake known to have occurred in Alabama and is known as the “Red Gap Earthquake.”)

Lion Park – The BMRR Red Gap Branch roadbed exits Red Gap and runs through the woods on the west side of Lion Park at the end of YMCA Way (listed on most maps as Lion Park Drive). The BMRR roadbed can be accessed and walked from the following two places in the upper wooded portion of the park:

Unimproved (dirt) road to the left just after entering the park – This road can be walked up the hill to the chain link fence. The chain link fence is located in the middle of the BMRR roadbed, and the roadbed can be walked along the fence, or one can walk along the unimproved road which has turned to go along the slope and which parallels the BMRR roadbed. Through the chain link fence, the wall of rock can be seen which was cut into the hillside to make the flat area for the BMRR roadbed. At the other (north) end of the BMRR roadbed, there are piles of approximately 37 big cut stones that were part of the bridge (trestle) footing taking the BMRR above the other tracks in Red Gap. (Take some time to explore these great cut stones and to enjoy their “massiveness,” realizing that they are over 100 years old.) The BMRR roadbed can be exited at this end by walking down the unimproved road to the picnic table area in the park. (Note the pieces of blast furnace slag on the ground as you walk down from the piles of stones and out of the wooded area.)

Unimproved (dirt) road entered from the picnic table area and beside the brick bar-b-q grill – This road can be walked up the hill to the chain link fence that runs parallel to the upper unimproved (dirt) road. The chain link fence that parallels the upper unimproved (dirt) road is located in the middle of the BMRR roadbed. At this (north) end of the BMRR roadbed, there are piles of approximately 37 big cut stones that were part of the bridge (trestle) footing taking the BMRR above the other tracks in Red Gap. (Take some time to explore these great cut stones and to enjoy their “massiveness,” realizing that they are over 100 years old. Note the pieces of blast furnace slag on the ground as you walk up from the picnic table area to the piles of big cut stones.) From this end, the BMRR roadbed can be walked along the upper chain link fence, or one can walk along the unimproved road which has turned to go along the slope and which parallels the BMRR roadbed. Through the chain link fence, the wall of rock can be seen which was cut into the hillside to make the flat area for the BMRR roadbed.

Laurence (Lawrence) Avenue between Montevallo Road and Duke Avenue – Flat portion of street halfway up the hill is the BMRR roadbed. This end of the BMRR roadbed has come out of the woods at the upper edge of Lion Park on its way through this residential area. A house on the north side of Laurence (Lawrence) Avenue has been built on the former BMRR roadbed. On the south side of Laurence (Lawrence) Avenue, the roadbed can be seen as a wider than normal side yard between two of the houses.

Birmingham:

Oporto-Madrid Boulevard between Crestwood Boulevard and Ludington Lane – BMRR crossed here, but evidence of the roadbed is no longer visible. There is a photograph of a BMRR steam locomotive on a bridge going over Oporto-Madrid Boulevard which was a dirt street at that time and was named “Oporto Road.”

Crestwood Boulevard at entrance to Aldi (and former rear entrance to Century Plaza parking lot) – The BMRR turned in this area to cross Crestwood Boulevard (Highway 78) and

head toward Montclair Road.

Cresthill Road – The BMRR paralleled Cresthill Road in the woods behind the houses on the northwest side of Cresthill Road.

Montclair Road at intersection with Cresthill Road – BMRR continued by paralleling Montclair Road.

Walking trail below Trinity Hospital -- The upper portion of the trail that runs beside the two ponds is the old BMRR roadbed, and, on the lower trail, two original square culverts built of stone can be seen with the upper trail (roadbed) on top of them. Those original stone culverts are over 100 years old and still serve as outlets for the water from the ponds above! A great piece of history easily seen and enjoyed.

Behind Levite Jewish Community Center – The beginning portion of the walking trail behind the main building is the BMRR roadbed.

Morningside Drive – As you drive up the hill on Morningside Drive beside the Crestline Post Office, the street slopes up, flattens out just past the back of the Post Office, then continues the slope up the mountain. That flat spot is the BMRR roadbed.

Montclair Road at intersection with Country Club Road – BMRR turned here and went across Montclair Road (across the street from Ramsay Park) as it entered the Mountain Brook area.

Mountain Brook:

Public right-of-way and private park in triangle at intersection of Montclair Road and Country Club Road (across the street from Ramsay Park) – Homeowners at 3612 Country Club Road have made a nice wooded park out of the BMRR roadbed at this location in the sharp angle of the Country Club Road intersection. One can park at Ramsay Park, walk across the street, remain on public right-of-way before the brick entrance pillars with “3612” on them, and see (and walk on) the raised roadbed of the BMRR. The roadbed is covered with “red rock” gravel that is shale which was super-heated (“cooked”) deep underground before it was uplifted and became part of local coal mining operations – generally not liked by coal miners during the era of the BMRR due to its hardness but today used for road material and landscaping. Plant fossils often can be found in this material.

Oxford Road between Carlisle Road and Sterling Road – The BMRR roadbed is very apparent here in the middle of the block. Driving up from Sterling Road, the street slopes uphill, flattens out for a few feet in the middle of the block, then continues the slope up to Carlisle Road. Standing on the flat spot and looking west, one can readily see the wide area (the BMRR roadbed) between the backyards of the houses that front on Sterling Road and Carlisle Road. At the same place, looking east, the roadbed is not evident because, as has happened in a lot of places along here, the BMRR roadbed has been incorporated into the backyards of the houses, generally through a process called “quit claim deeds.”

Mountain Brook/ Birmingham:

In the Woods Paralleling Carlisle Road – From the Montclair Road intersection with Country Club Road, the BMRR roadbed is the dividing line for the Mountain Brook and Birmingham city limits. Carlisle Road follows the route of the BMRR, but the roadbed cannot generally be seen well along here because it is in the woods down the slope and behind the houses on Carlisle Road, especially on its way to English Village.

Hedona Mine – On the upper side of Carlisle Road (and below Argyle Road) at the deadend of Berwick Road was the Hedona Mine which moved its iron ore down the ravine and onto the BMRR. This area originally was referred to as “Hedona.”

English Village – The BMRR roadbed enters English Village at the Birmingham/Mountain Brook city limits, crosses Cahaba Road at Henhouse Antiques, then continues west on Red Mountain Lane. As far as we can tell, there was not a passenger “station” in English Village, but Hedona was a “whistle stop” on the BMRR. There was a loud and dusty loading facility in what became English Village not far from where the Henhouse Antiques building is now. Part of the reason the railroad was finally taken out was complaints by the neighbors about the noise and disruption of the train and the loading facility. There is a photograph from March 1954 of the BMRR tracks in English Village about 4 months before they were removed.

Red Mountain Lane – This street uses the BMRR roadbed. If one drives to the end of the street, just past the condominiums (which are built on the roadbed) the flat area in the woods

is the continuation of the BMRR roadbed. A few years ago this wooded area of the BMRR roadbed could be walked all the way to the Elton B. Stephens Expressway – see next item for current status.

Birmingham:

22nd Street South – Recently, two houses have been built on the roadbed next to the Elton B. Stephens Expressway at the very end of 22nd Street South. Driving up to those two houses will put you on the BMRR roadbed.

20th Street South – This street crosses the BMRR roadbed as it comes down the hill from Woodcrest Road, but the roadbed is not very evident, probably due to grading for the slope of the street.

Richard Arrington Jr. Boulevard South (formerly known as Montgomery Highway and Highway 31) – The BMRR crossed above this major street and above the streetcar tracks leading into Homewood. To get over the street and the streetcar tracks, the BMRR used a railroad trestle/bridge that curved as it came from the south face of Red Mountain (below Warwick Court South and Warwick Drive South) to the north face of Red Mountain. Tall stone abutments related to the cut in the mountain for the bridge are still visible on the east side of Richard Arrington Jr. Boulevard. On the west side of the street, the stone steps lead up to the elevated portion of the BMRR as it continued below Vulcan Park and has become the Vulcan Trail. In Vulcan Park, there is an interpretive sign at the top of the sidewalk in Vulcan Park overlooking Richard Arrington Jr. Boulevard which mentions the BMRR and its crossing there.

Vulcan Trail -- The Vulcan Trail is built on the BMRR roadbed, and along here (next to The Club) it hauled the iron ore extracted from the Valley View Mine. Remains of concrete loading structures can still be seen beside the trail. When you walk the Vulcan Trail, be sure to turn and walk on the trail from the trailhead below the Vulcan statue back toward Richard Arrington Jr. Boulevard to the top of the stone steps in order to see the elevation of the BMRR bridge and roadbed as it crossed Richard Arrington Jr. Boulevard. The western end of the Vulcan Trail terminates before it reaches Greensprings Highway, so that part of the roadbed cannot be walked at the present time. The City of Birmingham is hoping to complete that trail on the BMRR roadbed as it goes west to Greensprings Highway. (The western end of the Vulcan Trail can be accessed from Penthouse Drive near its intersection with 11th Place South.)

Greensprings Highway – The BMRR crossed Greensprings Highway near the crest of Red Mountain on its way to the mines in the Oxmoor Valley area and Red Mountain Park. The specific crossing at Greensprings Highway is not currently apparent, but, if the Vulcan Trail is completed in the future to Greensprings Highway, the location of the crossing will align with that trail terminus. After crossing Greensprings Highway, the BMRR crossed from the north face of Red Mountain back to the south side of Red Mountain.

Ongoing Research

Further exploration and research may result in additional locations being added to this list, especially for portions of this branch as it headed from Greensprings Highway to Red Mountain Park.

Additions to these driving/walking tours may be made in the future as the BMRR is researched further and as additional locations are found where the BMRR roadbed can be seen. Updated versions will be issued incorporating such additional locations.

Acknowledgments

These driving/walking tours would not have been possible without the assistance of local historians who have studied the history of the BMRR and its routes throughout the Birmingham area. I am grateful to the following people for providing their knowledge and expertise about routes of the various BMRR branches and for researching locations included in these driving/walking tours: Marty Schulman, Bob Yuill, Jeff Newman, Donnie Strickland, and John Stewart. I also greatly appreciate the input from other individuals who have mentioned a site, who have shown me a site such as the BMRR roadbed in their backyards (often with the old BMRR crossties still in place), or who have helped me find a site.

Golden Era Winter Classics



Photographs of railroad snow scenes are relatively rare in the Birmingham District, owing to the scarcity of significant snow. We did manage to turn up the above example taken along the Seaboard Air Line east of Irondale. Reaching a little further out, we located another example of a snow-covered right of way. And where, you might wonder, are we? No, not north Alabama, not even north of Alabama, but way down south in Wiregrass country during the winter storm of February 2010. Imagine, if you will, a late-running *Floridian* kicking up the snow as she rounds this S-curve along the old Atlantic Coast line near Dothan, Alabama .





From the Observation Platform

By John Browning, Mid-South Chapter President



Dear friends and fellow Mid-South Chapter members,

It's hard to believe that we are already in the last half of January! I hope that each of you had a great Christmas and a Happy New Year!

As you are probably aware from reading the last newsletter, our chapter officers and board members have been looking at the structure of our group and trying to find ways to improve it and hopefully grow it. We seem to be facing the same struggles with membership and member involvement that other rail fan and rail history groups are facing. Many of today's rail fans do not seem to be interested in participating in a highly structured environment. Most seem to share information, plan impromptu events and communicate with each other via social media and email. This is not necessarily a bad thing, it is just a new way of doing things.

Please make plans to attend our Chapter's annual meeting on Saturday, January 24th at 2:00PM. We will hold the meeting in the freight room of the Leeds Depot at usual. The officers and board will be presenting several ideas for changes as well as trying to gauge interest in member participation. If there is a rail history related project that you have an interest in working on, now is the time to step up and get involved. After the chapter business meeting, we are all looking forward to a great presentation from Marvin Clemons on his recent trip to Great Britain.

Thank you for allowing me to serve as your chapter president these past two years. I have enjoyed getting to know many of you and learning more about your rail related interests. I look forward to seeing all of you at Saturday's meeting. Please remember, your ideas and input are very important. Until Saturday....

John Browning

6th Annual Membership Meeting of the Mid-South Chapter, R&LHS 2:00PM January 24, 1915

Meeting Agenda

- President's Greeting and Annual Report to the Membership
- Treasurer's Report
- Membership Secretary's Report
- Project Reports -- Archives (Clemons), Exhibits (Stewart), and Birmingham Mineral RR Historical Markers (Lowery)
- Election of Officers (board election suspended pending further board action)
- Member Feedback (moderated by James Lowery)
- Program Presentation: "By Rail through England, Scotland and Wales" -- Marvin Clemons, presenter
- Drawing for Door Prizes
- Wrapup and Adjournment