



The Mid-South Flyer

September 2018



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

Mississippi Rails archivist David Price to bring multimedia program on steam shortlines and logging roads



David Price

Raillfanning in the South offers many advantages, from interesting locales and subject matter, to generally good year-round weather for train watching and photography. As a young rail fan growing up in Mississippi, David Price enjoyed chasing and photographing the abundant steam short line and logging railroads spread out over the pine forests.

In the 1940s and '50s, railroading in the backwoods of Mississippi was a whole other world, and Price will share his photos and some early steam recordings from those experiences with the MidSouth Chapter at our next meeting on Saturday, September 15th. (See announcement below).



Price in the cab of Mobile & Ohio #97

Like most rail fans, to support his hobby Price had a day job as a Methodist minister, which fortunately provided a flexible schedule for railfanning. He grew up admiring the "greats" of Southern rail photography, and he later developed a friendship with Alabama native Parker Lamb, whom David discovered through Lamb's photography of the Meridian & Bigbee RR. Lamb grew up just across the state line in Boligee and took a lot of photos in and around Meridian. Both photographers were interested in digital photography, and Lamb allowed David to scan his negative collection for use in historical society and other non-commercial publications.

Lamb's collection was one of the principal holdings that later became the foundation for the Mississippi Rails website archive, which was started by Price and Tony Howe, another Mississippi native who works as an engineer for Norfolk Southern. The two have amassed several thousand images from across Mississippi, extending into Louisiana and Alabama.

Price says the archive's goal is to present thumbnail histories, maps, and photos of railroads, including Class I, shortline, industrials, and logging roads. "The images are generally kept in low resolution on the website, in part to encourage those who want to use the image to request higher resolution scans so that with correct, imbedded historical information in each image," Price said. "Often, photographs become disconnected from their historic context in sharing...we want to minimize that."

Price and Howe are discussing placing the negatives and paper items in the McCain Archives at the University of Southern Mississippi for preservation and availability to future generations. They believe it wise to find a good archive for items that should be preserved, and to negotiate a solid, written contract for access, sharing and use, including a clause regarding possible future decisions to deaccess the items from Louisiana and Alabama to other archives.

Don't forget the date and time! The next meeting of the Midsouth Chapter will be at 2PM Saturday, September 15th at the historic Leeds Depot. Doors open at 1:30 and the train viewing platform is available before and after the meeting. Come early and mix with your fellow Chapter members!



Mid-South Chapter Update

Reported by James Lowery, Chapter President

New Depot Deck Celebrated

Anyone who has been to the Historic Leeds Depot in the past few years probably has noticed that the viewing platform (deck) had been in need of repair. Historically, when the Depot was in active service with trains stopping in Leeds, that platform was where people waited for, and boarded, the trains going east and west out of Leeds. Still today, the platform is used by people "watching the trains go by," and we often hear the engineer blow extra whistle blasts as a greeting to people watching from the platform.

The Leeds Historical Society and the Mid-South Chapter of the Railway & Locomotive Historical Society brought to the attention of the City of Leeds the significance of the platform part of the Depot and how valuable an asset it is for attendees at Depot events and for the



James Lowery (center) with the Mid-South Chapter of the Railway & Locomotive Historical Society attended the Leeds City Council meeting and formally recognized the City of Leeds, David Tice, Josh Tice, and Jeremy Deason in appreciation for complete replacement of the Leeds Depot platform. Photo by Dona Bonnett



Presentation plaque mounted on the depot deck (Photo by Tim Smith)

general public to be able to view

active trains up-close, but safely. The two societies also encouraged the City to find a way to have the viewing platform repaired or replaced.

The City of Leeds responded in a big way by funding, and contracting for, the complete replacement of the viewing platform! The contractors did a wonderful job of removing the old decking and footings and building an entirely new deck that will be enjoyed by visitors to the Depot for many years to come.

The Mid-South Chapter of the Railway & Locomotive Historical Society wanted to show its appreciation to everyone involved in the re-building of the viewing platform, so the Chapter installed two appreciation plaques at the viewing platform and expressed its appreciation at a recent Leeds City Council meeting.



Speaking of the Mississippi Rails archive, it proudly holds a large selection of original scans from Parker Lamb's large format negatives. As most of his fans know, Parker took photos all over Mississippi, especially around Meridian and along the Gulf Coast. Here's a good example of Parker's work, revealing detail that only a large format negative can hold. We're looking at Southern #48, the northbound *Southerner*, nearing Enterprise, Mississippi, just south of Meridian, on a bright December morning in 1954. Oh, to be trackside again and hear those E8's chanting through the cut!

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Editor's Corner with Marvin Clemons

Summer's over and fall is just around the corner, and with comes some of the best train-watching weather of the year. And what better place to relax and enjoy the parade of trains than the newly replaced viewing platform at Leeds depot.

As you'll read in the President's update that follows, the platform has been completely replaced with new decking and handrails, plus the added feature of lighting for night viewing. The MidSouth Chapter is greatly indebted to the City of Leeds for the platform replacement, which will hopefully draw more visitors to the depot to learn about its heritage.

The chapter's board has adopted the motto to "preserve, protect, and promote" the depot. With the platform finally in good repair, we can now turn our attention to much needed minor repairs to the building. Let's get to work!



Marvin Clemons

Personal Remembrance

A glass of lemonade with Mr. Dillard

By Marvin Clemons

As a teenage railfan growing up in the '60s in Birmingham, Alabama, you might say I had it made. Being an impetuous kid, I managed to weasel my way into just about every railroad yard, operator's office, and interlocking tower in town. Once inside, I was usually invited to "sit a spell," and more often than not was welcome to "come back anytime."

It really didn't matter which railroad office I happened to visit, most railroaders kindly took me in. Many were old enough to be my father, and several would eventually become father figures. Yet no matter how busy they were, or how distracting my presence could be, they would usually find time to answer my many questions and share their knowledge of railroading. That's just how it worked "back in the day." If you wanted to work for the railroad, you'd just make a pest of yourself until you were old enough to be hired, or they ran you off for good!

Those of us fortunate enough to have grown up during that era can usually recall one or two occasions when a railroader made us feel particularly welcomed. One such occasion I'll always remember was the time a true railroad veteran made a green kid feel really special.

It was in August of 1963, and I was training for the first trick operator-towerman job at Birmingham Terminal Station. One morning we received a call from Jack Huey, chief dispatcher for the Central of Georgia's Columbus Division, saying he had a message for Central's president, Mr. W. E. Dillard, who was visiting town on his office car *Savannah*. It was the daily operations report, which was customarily sent by the local superintendent to Mr. Dillard whenever he was out on the road.

The regular tower operator and my instructor, Albert Murray, was busy copying train orders, so with trembling hand I grabbed some message paper and carbons and fumbled them into the old manual typewriter. Then, as if the voice of God were speaking over the message phone, I nervously copied a detailed two-page message for the president of the railroad. It could just as well have been the President of the United States!

With the message copied and repeated for correctness, someone had to deliver it to Mr. Dillard's office car parked in the station's office car track. "No problem," I eagerly volunteered, "I'll run it down!" Before Mr. Murray could say anything, I disappeared down the stairs from the tower and through the long station concourse to the Pullman yard, where I found Mr. Dillard's car, the *Savannah*, parked against the bumper post. I stepped up onto the car platform and nervously knocked on the door -- or was that the sound of my knees knocking? Shortly the door opened, and a white-coated porter greeted me. "Yes sir, may I help you?" he politely asked. Feeling some self-importance, I said I had a message for Mr. Dillard from Superintendent Bishop, and he invited me inside.

Stepping out of the humid 95 degree heat into the carpeted sanctuary of the office car, I was suddenly enveloped in the coolest, most rarified air imaginable. The car had the smell of pure comfort and luxury, a scent unlike anything I had known. As I stood taking it all in, a rather tall and very dignified gentleman in a dark suit rose from his chair to shake my hand and introduce himself as Mr. Dillard. I introduced myself and handed him the message. Taking it, he asked me if I would join him and Mrs.



Central of Georgia President W.E. Dillard on the steps of his office car. Dillard rose through the ranks, from clerk to dispatcher to superintendent of the Columbus Division, before being elected president in 1954. Photo courtesy of Central of Georgia Railway Historical Society.

Dillard for a glass of fresh lemonade and offered me a seat. I took my place in a thickly upholstered chair sitting across from the couple. I vividly recall them as presenting a picture of Southern gentility and charm.

The porter brought the lemonade and quietly withdrew. And there I sat dumbfounded, with the president of the Central of Georgia Railway and his wife in their private car, sipping lemonade. Wishing to put me at ease, Mr. Dillard began a casual conversation by asking about my interest in railroads. I blurted out whatever came to mind about my job and love for trains, while Mr. and Mrs. Dillard smiled in warm bemusement.

I have no idea how long the visit lasted, since time stood still from the moment I entered the office car. My lemonade finished, Mr. Dillard rose again to shake my hand and thank me for delivering the message. Stepping away from the car's cool comfort back out into noise and grit of the station, I was quickly brought back to reality. I recall passing the rest of the day in a state of mild euphoria.

Much has changed about railroads and railroading since that memorable day more than 50 years ago. Knowing what I know, were I a young man starting out today, what I would miss most would be those kind and patient railroaders at the stations and towers, yard offices and crew rooms – and yes, once even a railroad president -- who befriended a green kid with a love for trains.



Terminal Station's operator-towerman's office was located above Track One. In the above photo, Senior Towerman Albert Murray is working the station's interlocking while Superintendent C. L. Bradford checks the daily train report. The old manual typewriter used to type out the message to Mr. Dillard sits at left.



Railroad office cars visiting Terminal Station were conveniently parked next to the paved entrance to the "Pullman yard." On the day of the author's visit, Mr. Dillard's car *Savannah* was parked at the above location and nearest to the station. (Photo by Jim Thorington)

Regional History

Last Steam on the Alabama Central

By Tom Lawson

*Editor's note: The following article by Tom Lawson first appeared in the February 1967 edition of **Steam Locomotive & Railroad Tradition**, republished with permission. Tom affectionately tells the story of the Alabama Central, a colorful Alabama steam shortline. More history can be found on the website at <http://www.alabamacentralrailroad.com/home/>.*

On May 26, 1961, a 2-8-0 numbered 29 pulled into Jasper, Ala. , the county seat of Walker County , and 55 years of service on the Alabama Central Railroad came to an end. Coal, the only reason for the railroad's existence, was no longer king in Walker County .

Coal, however, was not the reason for the Alabama Central ' s incorporation on May 19, 1906. Originally built to serve a lumber mill at Manchester , 6 miles north of Jasper, the road reached a maximum of 15 miles of track in 1921 after extensions had been opened to two mines. Early motive power included a Shay, and a 2-6-2 built new for the road in 1914. Locomotives of Manchester Saw Mills also ran occasionally on the Alabama Central, but such power disappeared as logging declined, and the 2-6-2, No. 2, was sold in the late 1920's. Two 4-6-0' s, Nos. 34 and 36, handled all work during the Depression.

With the advent of heavier coal cars came a need for bigger power. No. 810, an old slide-valve Dickson 2-8-0 from the Frisco, was purchased about 1942 and served adequately until 1950, when, to avoid costly repairs, the Central acquired another Frisco locomotive, 4-6-0 No. 698.

Coal traffic had declined somewhat but was still good when two heavier steamers became available early in 1955. A slump in coal business had already hit Tennessee ' s Oneida & Western Railway, and that road quit in September, 1954, leaving two 2-8-0's of about 100 tons, Nos. 28 and 29, looking for a new home. C. A. Lee, Jr., president of the Alabama Central, lost no time in buying them, since the 698 was due for tubes.



Alabama Central 2-8-0 #29 tied up in Jasper, Alabama, 1961

These were the Central's last two engines, and they had impressive histories. No. 28 was Pittsburgh & Lake Erie No. 9329 before going to the Oneida & Western. She handled the dismantling train on the Tennessee road and was last used on the Central in 1957 before the time expired on tubes rolled in by the O&W in May, 1953. No. 28 sat stripped and rusting at the Marigold mine tippie from 1958 until she was cut up in January, 1962.

No. 29 was a real boomer. Alco's Richmond Works built the 2-8-0 in 1923 for another Alabama short line, the Birmingham Southern Railroad. As Birmingham Southern No. 35, she was bumped by diesels in 1937. By way of Birmingham Rail & Locomotive Company, the engine then went to the Chattahoochee Valley Railway, an eastern Alabama short line with shops and offices at West Point , Ga. , as their No. 35. Diesel power took over on the Chattahoochee Valley in 1947 and

the

35 moved on to the Oneida & Western as their No. 29, until abandonment sent her back to Alabama and the Alabama Central. After the Central itself quit, Jasper's Jaycees bought No. 29, intending to display the engine.

Under local ownership, and with tonnage up substantially from that of the Depression years, the Central ended a long period of deficit operation and made some money during the Forties and Fifties. From 1958 to 1960, however, the annual traffic slipped from 131,804 to 93,703 tons and the company again went into the red. A trickle of material hauled for a dam being constructed nearby was not enough to offset the loss of coal traffic. On Apr. 17, 1960, with a return to profitable operation apparently not likely, President Lee applied to the I.C.C. for permission to abandon the entire 9.96-mile line. Besides the loss of traffic, the 75-pound rail leased from the Illinois Central was overdue for replacement and No. 29 was due for tubes that November. In fact, a Federal inspector had red-tagged her once in 1959 for defective running gear, but pilot wheels and rods from the Illinois Central at Memphis had put her back in order. Permission to abandon was received Aug. 31, 1960, after the road had unsuccessfully tried to buy a serviceable 2-8-0 from a steel mill in Birmingham. Then Mr. Lee asked for and received a six-month extension on the 29's tubes. This gave the road life until the following May.

The train ran three days a week, and the crew—Lawrence Maxwell, engineer; Joe Estes, fireman; Basil O' Rear, conductor; and J. C. Gilmore, brakeman—customarily reported for work at 5:00 A.M. By 6:45 the engine was hot, switching at Jasper with the connecting Illinois Central, Frisco, and Southern was complete, and the train—running caboose-first with the engine backing—was on its way to the other end of the line, the Marigold Coal Mining Company tipple at Marigold. If all went well, the train arrived at Marigold by 8:15 A.M. The caboose and empties were set out on a spur, the engine was cut off and spotted to take coal, and the crew settled down for the six-hour wait until the start of the return trip.

The tipple quit loading at 3:00, and by 3:30 the train was made up and heading for home, crossing several country roads and the front lawn of a high school on the way. Its slow journey over the lightly graded line was through a gently rolling countryside scattered with second-growth pine and deciduous trees. The only stop was at Manchester to take water and, by local legend, to see if the high wooden trestle a few feet on down the line was still standing. State Highway 5 was crossed a mile north of Jasper. Then the train passed over several grade crossings in Jasper, turned down a tree-lined avenue, and finally tied up at the Alabama Central depot behind the Greyhound bus station around 5:00 P.M.

After the line quit in May, 1961, the 29 sat in the usual parking spot for several months. The only caboose the Central ever had—it came from the Southern—was given to the company's general manager, Miss Mabel Deavours, and trucked to her home to be displayed on its wheels.

The rails were sold to Southeastern Metal Company of Charleston, S. C., in October, 1961, and pulled up that month, but not before the Jaycees fired up No. 29 and ran her half-a-mile back up the track to await display. Because the Alabama Central no longer existed as a common carrier, the 29 could be moved without a Federal inspection. Title to the engine later passed to Jasper's Kiwanis Club. The job of restoration has never been carried out, and recently there has been talk of scrapping No. 29 or turning her over to other parties for removal and preservation elsewhere.

In December, Southeastern Metal was awarded the contract to scrap the remains of engine No. 28, which was sitting at Marigold sans pilot wheels on the only section of rails still owned by the railroad, and the half-dozen or so hopper cars that Marigold Coal Mining had bought from the Lackawanna several years previously for on-line use. The cars had been resting in mud since October, when the rails had been yanked from under them.



Alabama Central's caboose was formerly Southern Railway

When the scrappers left, memories lingered. Someone recalled that the train crew had completed a total of 85 years of service, and that in 55 years the Alabama Central never had a fatal accident.

Regional History

1950s Birmingham in black & white

A Photo Album by Matt Lawson

In the last issue, we presented an album of black & white photos taken in the 1960s around Birmingham by railroader Bill McCoy. This month we're stepping back a decade into the early 1950s, marking the end of steam and heralding the diesel age. Deceased MidSouth member Matt Lawson captured a representative sample of both steam and diesel action around the District, including early streamlined passenger train action around Terminal and L&N stations. Matt was kind to donate his collection of Birmingham images to the MidSouth Chapter archive, and we are happy to present a sampling of them for your enjoyment.



Seaboard's Terminal Station switcher drags the *Silver Comet's* consist to 32nd Yard for cleaning and servicing.



Trailing Seaboard passenger units bring up the rear of the *Silver Comet* consist en route to 32nd Street yard



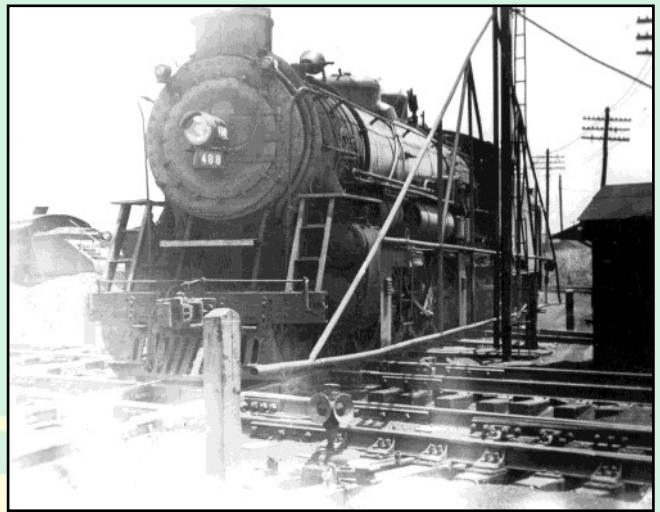
Southern's #47, the southbound *Southerner* is passing through Phenixville just north of Bessemer



Seaboard light Mikado #373 rests at 32nd Street yard



Frisco's little 0-6-6 switcher was assigned to switch Terminal Station and worked the Birmingham Belt Railroad



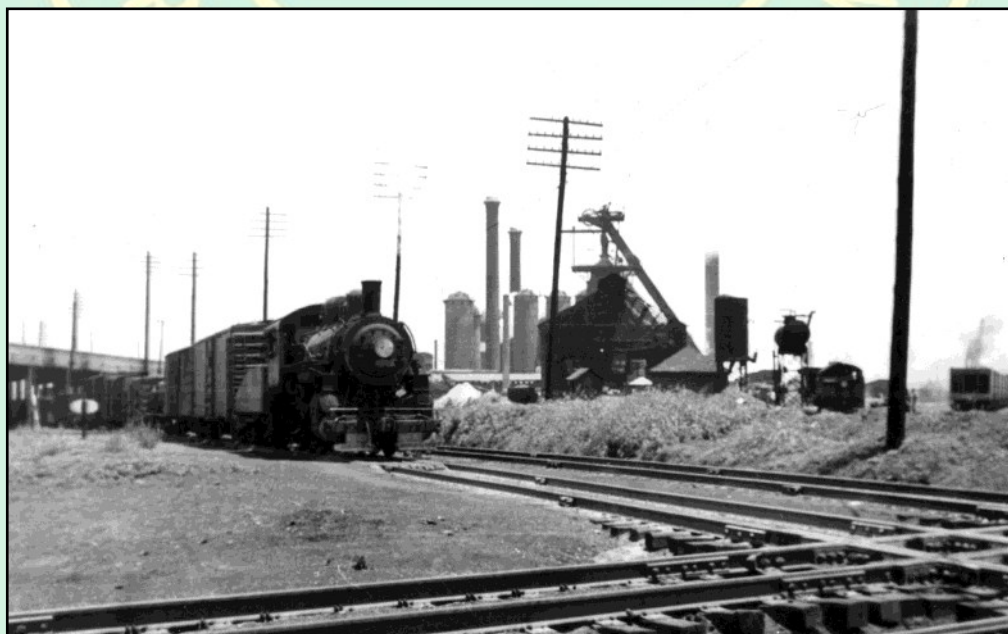
Central of Georgia #9, the "Seminole," passing 27th Street crossing en route to Terminal Station



Southern's diesel motorcar *The Goldenrod* arriving in Bessemer en route from Mobile to Birmingham



Southern Birmingham Division freight with new matched set of FT units arriving from Atlanta en route to Finley Yard



L&N switch engine passing Sloss Furnace with a cut of cars for downtown



Two of the editor's favorite Matt Lawson photographs show (above) the L&N Red Gap turn crossing over the Southern and Central of Georgia main lines en route from Irondale to English Village. Below, the Red Gap local is sauntering along the Red Gap Branch crossing a short trestle over the site of Oporto Road. Note the conductor and flagman out on the caboose platform just enjoying the ride. Rail photography doesn't get any more "local" than this, folks.



Golden Era Classic



One of the more enjoyable activities associated with editing a railroad publication is the occasional opportunity to assist a fellow editor in identifying the subject matter of a particular photograph. It typically calls for piecing together what you may already know with what you can discover from research, or from asking the help of others hopefully more knowledgeable on the subject. For example, we recently received a request from fellow editor Bill Schafer with the Southern Railway Historical Association, asking for help with identifying the location of the above photo. Bill initially received the request from John Gruber with the Center for Railroad Photography and Art. John is co-editor of a new book featuring the photography of Lucius Beebe and Charles Clegg, whose photography included a good sampling of Southern locations. However, several of Clegg's photos, such as this one showing an L&N freight, weren't adequately captioned.

So any idea where this might be, Bill asked. We could spot only one helpful clue, that being the bridge superstructure appearing in the background. Apparently, the train is coming off of a bridge...somewhere. But there's something familiar about this particular bridge. Hmmm, where had we seen it before? Then we remembered an early Parker lamb shot showing the Alabama Mineral local passenger train coming off of the bridge onto a long elevated approach crossing the Coosa River in Gadsden. But this photo shows a paved street. Hmmm some more. Looking closer at the photo, there appears to be some elevation going away from the bridge in the other direction. We found Parker's Gadsden photo for comparison, and sure enough, the bridge superstructure, including the communication wire supports along the top, appear identical. And the approach from the Gadsden side empties onto a street. So from all appearances, what we have here is a very rare, large format shot of a westbound Alabama Mineral freight entering Gadsden off of the Coosa River Bridge. Identification solved, we hope!

For those who might be interested in seeing more of their Southern works, *Beebe and Clegg: Their Enduring Photographic Legacy*, is a new 224-page book from the Center for Railroad Photography and Art. It tells about how partners Lucius Beebe and Charles Clegg introduced railroad photography and the world of railroading to wide popular audiences. The authors, John Gruber and John Ryan assisted by Mel Patrick, bring the best of their photographic work together in one book for the first time, using high quality duotone printing. Copies may be ordered on the Center's website (www.railphoto-art.org/books).