



May 2019

# THE MID-SOUTH FLYER



Entering a New Decade of Service

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

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**Next Chapter Meeting — May 18, 2019, at 2:00 p.m.  
Historic Leeds Depot**

**May Program — *THE TRANSCONTINENTAL RAILROAD***

The May Program will feature the 150th anniversary of the driving of the Golden Spike completing the first transcontinental railroad at Promontory Summit, Utah. The official ceremony in Utah will have taken place the week before our meeting, and we plan to show a recent video of traveling the entire route of the transcontinental railroad across the United States.

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## MAY PROGRAM

*THE TRANSCONTINENTAL RAILROAD*

Exploring the rich history of railroads in the USA, this DVD episode takes us on an incredible 3,000-mile journey across America. Traveling from the Atlantic to the Pacific, through four time zones and 12 states, we experience some of the most epic landscapes and stunning scenery that North America has to offer. From the very earliest steam locomotives in the 1830s, railroads have fundamentally shaped the USA as we know it today, enabling trade, spreading ideas, and facilitating mass migration and settlement across the country.

This episode takes on one of the greatest engineering feats of the 19th century – the Transcontinental Railroad, a monumental line that united the country and changed the history of America forever.

The start of this adventure transports us back in time and immerses our intrepid traveler Zay Harding in the romantic world of steam locomotives. After looking at some of the oldest engines in America at the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Museum, Zay travels to Strasburg where he is allowed to get hands-on and to learn how these magnificent machines work. Shoveling coal, checking pressure gauges, and eventually taking the driving seat himself, Zay realizes a childhood dream and is allowed to truly let off some steam.



Heading up the coast on the first of many rail journeys, the next stop is America's largest city, New York, where we take a behind the scenes tour of Grand Central Terminal, the biggest and busiest train station in the world. Following that, we head to Chicago, the freight capital of the USA, where we discover the crucial role the railroads played in the Civil War and jump aboard Amtrak's California Zephyr, a route that will take us all the way to California. Heading west, we stop briefly at Omaha to see where the Union Pacific started its transcontinental dreams before traveling to Denver where we step into the Wild West. Zay gets the opportunity to visit one of America's last remaining mining railroads and learns how the railways affected the Native American communities living on the plains.



Leaving Denver, we experience one of the most unforgettable and spectacular rail journeys in the world as the train carves its way through the peaks

of the snow-capped Rockies and into the deserts of Utah. After seven years of grueling work laying tracks through some of the toughest terrain in the country, the transcontinental line was made a reality in 1869, and in Utah we visit the historic spot where the railroad was completed. Our next destination is Truckee in the heart of the Sierra Nevada Mountains where Zay takes a look at the toughest parts of construction and finds out about the dangerous work carried out by

Chinese laborers blasting their way through some of the hardest granite in the world. Zay's final train journey takes him to Sacramento, the home of the Central Pacific, where he catches a boat to sunny San Francisco and the Pacific Ocean.

**Editor's Note:** The first transcontinental railroad is one of America's most celebrated and historic achievements, and today it is one of the greatest rail journeys in the world.

# CHAPTER NEWS

## Membership Report

*Warren Jones*

The demographics of the Mid-South Chapter membership might surprise you. Our 75 members reside in 15 states that span the nation from California in the west to Massachusetts in the east. Forty percent live outside Alabama.

Distribution of membership by state: Alabama (45), California (2), Florida (1), Georgia (8), Illinois (1), Indiana (2), Maryland (1), Massachusetts (1), New Jersey (1), New York (1), Pennsylvania (2), South Carolina (2), Tennessee (6), Texas (1), Virginia (1).

Twenty-one percent of our members live outside the Mid-South Chapter Region, which is defined by four states and parts of two others with the following distribution: Alabama (45), Louisiana (0), Mississippi (0), northwest Florida (1), Tennessee (6), West Georgia (7).

**Data Source:** RLHS February 2019 end of month membership report for the Mid-South Chapter.

### 2019 Chapter Program Meetings

May 18, 2019, at 2:00 p.m.

July 20, 2019, PICNIC,  
beginning at 12:00 Noon  
and program afterward.

September 14, 2019, at 2:00 p.m.

November 16, 2019, at 2:00 p.m.

### MID-SOUTH FLYER

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 \$50 annually and include subscriptions to the Society's twice-yearly magazine Railroad History, quarterly newsletter, and the chapter's e-newsletter, the *MID-SOUTH FLYER*. Contributions, article ideas and reader comments are welcome.

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## PRESIDENT'S UPDATE

*James Lowery*

### **150th Anniversary!!**

What were you doing on May 10, 2019? I hope you took a moment to remember and celebrate in your own way the 150th Anniversary of the driving of the Golden Spike joining the rails of the First Transcontinental Railroad across the United States connecting the Central Pacific and Union Pacific Railroads on May 10, 1869, at Promontory Summit, Utah Territory. The Mid-South Chapter Program Meeting will be a week later, and we will be featuring a video that follows the route of the building of that significant railroad.

### **Chapter Support of Local Walking Tours on Former Railroad Roadbed**

In support of the Vulcan Park and Museum and the Freshwater Land Trust, Chapter members led two guided hikes along the Kiwanis Vulcan Trail and provided interpretive information about the Historic Birmingham Mineral Railroad roadbed on which the trail is built, as well as information about the mines along the way. As part of those tours, Chapter members provided information and images for an interpretive brochure used during the hikes. Chapter members are encouraged to check out that walking trail, which begins below the Vulcan statue and extends for 2.1 miles along Red Mountain to Green Springs Highway. The trail was recently extended farther along the historic railroad roadbed past the paved portion and on to a second trailhead at Green Springs Highway. Contact James Lowery if you want to learn about the mining that occurred along that roadbed and the mining structures still remaining beside the trail.

### **New Chapter Affiliation Agreement Signed**

As part of being a chapter of the national Railway & Locomotive Historical Society (R&LHS), the Mid-South Chapter has signed a new affiliation agreement between the chapter and national R&LHS. Your Chapter President was part of the work that resulted in the new affiliation agreement, and, of most consequence to the Mid-South Chapter, national provided the chapter with its own IRS 501(c)(3) tax exempt status which we now have. In a lot of ways, the new affiliation agreement reflects current practice and will have no effect on our chapter's current organization nor work; it mainly firms-up the legal aspects of the relationship between national and its chapters.

### **Remember to Renew Your Membership!**

If you have not yet renewed your membership in the Chapter and the national R&LHS, remember to do that soon since the new membership year began in January. We value your membership and know that you benefit greatly from being a member.

## CONSTRUCTION OF THE NEW BIRMINGHAM TERMINAL STATION!

Construction of a detailed model of Terminal Station is nearly complete. The model will serve as the centerpiece of the forthcoming exhibit "Terminal Station: Birmingham's Great Temple of Travel," opening May 17 at Vulcan Park & Museum's Linn-Henley Gallery.

The scale model replica of Birmingham's iconic railroad station is the handiwork of Mid-South Chapter member Gene Clements of Adamsville, Alabama. Gene is a retired railroad engineer with a basement full of trains. He's also a model railroad craftsman and an expert at constructing railroad buildings from scratch. Gene admits that Terminal Station, with its soaring arches, towers and grand dome, is one of the greatest modeling challenges he has tackled.

When completed, the station's finished "footprint" will extend almost 9 feet in length by more than 4-feet deep and will include a station platform and several tracks for displaying "O-scale" model trains that operated through the station.

Several activities are being planned by Vulcan Park in conjunction with the exhibit. Events include panel discussions by local historians on the impact of Terminal Station on Birmingham's development, a family day to acquaint young people with the station and Birmingham's railroad history, and a presentation and book signing by Marvin Clemons, author of "*Great Temple of Travel: A Pictorial History of Birmingham Terminal Station.*" Copies of the book are available at Vulcan's Anvil Gift Shop, or may be ordered on-line at [www.GreatTemple.net](http://www.GreatTemple.net).



# NORFOLK & WESTERN NO. 1218 AT THE SPECTACULAR LEEDS TRESTLE A PERSONAL RETROSPECTIVE

*Ken Boyd*



**Norfolk & Western No. 1218 on the Trestle at Leeds in 1990**

At the close of the steam era in the 1950s and 1960s, visionary railroads across the country preserved a few of their classic locomotives for historical display and possible future excursions and other programs. In 1966, Southern Railway launched one of the most popular and successful of these programs and continued steam operations for many years. When Southern merged with Norfolk & Western in 1982 to form Norfolk Southern, the program continued, running as many as 50 steam trips each year, mostly to benefit local historical railroad societies and as a promotional and marketing tool for the railroad. A number of different preserved locomotives were used over the

years as part of this program until steam operations were discontinued by the company in 1994.

My favorite locomotive from this program was the Norfolk & Western No. 1218, a magnificent 2-6-6-4, four-cylinder articulated Class A steam design that was for a time the most powerful operational steam locomotive in the world. It was built in 1943 at the Norfolk & Western Roanoke Shops as a fast freight locomotive and could carry 60,000 pounds of coal and 22,000 gallons of water on a set of 70-inch drivers. Today, the locomotive is owned by the O. Winston Link Museum and is on static display at the Virginia Museum of Transportation. Restoration of No. 1218 is a topic of constant discussion.

I had the privilege to experience and photograph the No. 1218 while it was operating on excursions in and out of Birmingham, Alabama, and I never missed an opportunity. One of my most popular images has long been a shot I did on the old Central of Georgia trestle in Leeds, Alabama, that I call "The No. 1218 at Leeds."

During my years of chasing steam trains, I learned the Leeds Trestle very well. This tall, long wooden bridge makes a curve as it turns south and uphill and crosses the Southern Railway mainline and U.S. Highway 78 just east of Birmingham in Leeds. Today, the wooden trestle has been replaced with a concrete structure as our classic wooden trestles continue to disappear from the landscape.

While the wooden trestle was still there, I photographed different parts of this expansive structure several times and with a variety of livery over a period of about a decade. (Significantly to me and my photographic collection, I also have several nice images of Southern Railway No. 2716 crossing this same trestle.)

In the morning air of November 1990, conditions were just right for a photograph, and the 1218 was headed east and south out of Birmingham for Opelika, Alabama, and Columbus, Georgia. I was out early to get a much-anticipated image. I knew the direction of the light at the trestle in November and I had previsualized the composition I wanted. I set up my tripod alongside the lower mainline looking straight into Leeds with the trestle crossing overhead. I was using my trusty old Hasselblad loaded with my favorite black & white film. I made a couple of test shots when the time got close to be sure everything was working and to avoid having the 1218 image as the first shot on the roll of film where it might be more easily damaged in handling and processing.

It was a busy morning in Leeds. After I set up the tripod, I watched constantly over my shoulder for incoming trains on the lower track near my tripod. I moved out of the way a couple of times to assure a safe distance from freighters, but they were moving very slowly and there was no real



**Southern Railway No. 2716 at Leeds in 1981**

danger. What I did not want was to have a “modern” train come through on the lower track just as the 1218 was passing overhead and force me to make a last-minute change in visual composition. I would get only one chance at this.

I also had about half a dozen of my students from a UAB photography class along for their first attempt at steam locomotive photography; they were asking a million questions! We spent our waiting time removing litter from the foreground to make the picture as pristine as possible and minimize print retouching in an era before Photoshop and the “clone tool” had been invented!

As time passed that morning and everyone chose a spot and settled in to wait for the locomotive, the sun continued to climb higher into the sky and make for a somewhat harsher lighting situation but brighter conditions for faster shutter speeds. I rechecked my handheld exposure meter frequently. Also, I could tell that the sky was a little hazy off to the south or left of the image and that might require attention later in print-making. But, overall, it was a manageable setup photographically speaking and a lovely morning to be out enjoying the fall air. Most, or almost all, of the students and other observers and photographers there that delightful morning were well off to the south where the trestle is higher and where it crosses U.S. Highway 78; I recorded my image of No. 2716 there almost a decade earlier. Others wanted to remain near the highway in hopes of chasing the train in their vehicles and getting more shots further down the line toward Columbus.

After about a 45-minute wait that seemed like hours, I could hear a whistle in the distance! People began to scurry. I was set and I was planning for one good, carefully timed shot. The Hasselblad was slow to operate, so the best option was to wait for one good shot and not try for a series of shots as with a motor-driven film

camera of that era or a modern digital DSLR. I had been through the routine many times with the camera, and I had triple checked to be sure that nothing I could control had been overlooked. With this camera and lens and the film I was using, the image should be superb in quality.

Before long I could see the high plume of smoke and steam and hear the rumble and clatter of the big engine! The 1218 was close and everything would be over in a matter of minutes. My heart began to race a little as I stepped into my shooting stance behind the tripod.

The Leeds trestle was certainly photogenic and it was also conducive to steam locomotive photography because of the uphill trestle heading south and the curve in the track, which required the train to slow down somewhat and then pull up the trestle. The 1218 could chug out a head of steam and smoke that was unrivaled at that time and in a hard-pulling situation the crew really knew how to create a spectacular image. I could see the puffs of the plume clearly now, rising high into the morning light. The train was moving at a fairly slow rate of speed and I knew I wanted the front tip of the locomotive to be compositionally just over two thirds of the way through my square camera frame, without waiting so long that I would cut off the front of the engine. I had done similar shots enough that I was fairly cool about the process, but still anxious. I took up the slack in my cable release.

The train came through very deliberately and in magnificent fashion. I pressed the button on the cable release, felt and heard the shutter actuate, and then watched the event unfold as the long procession of passenger cars and other rolling stock passed. When it was over, I thought I got the image I wanted, but I could not be sure until the film was processed. Although I had instructed the students about what to expect, they were flurrying around almost in shock and laughing and exchanging stories as they tried to take it all in and review the experience!

From there as others jumped into vehicles for the chase down the line, I headed home for the next step – processing of the film. The negative turned out clean, well exposed and with good contrast for the sunny morning. This is a negative that has since been printed many times in my darkroom and even used to prepare a set of enlarged, pin-registered separations negatives. Years later, I carefully scanned the same negative and retouched the image on my computer to create the picture reproduced here and as appears in both my locomotive books.

With such a classically beautiful locomotive and the trestle, this was just about the perfect setting for an almost timeless image! I have other images of the Norfolk & Western No. 1218 with different backgrounds, including one or two at historic Sloss Furnaces near downtown Birmingham and even on other trestles, but this image at Leeds is one I will always treasure.



**Norfolk & Western No. 1218 at Trussville**

**Editor's Note:** As a closing note, in 2010, the Norfolk Southern steam excursion program was restarted, but this time as a more limited program. At this point, the No. 1218 would require a major investment and considerable restoration work to join the operating fleet. At the time the original steam program ended in 1994, the locomotive was partially disassembled for restoration and maintenance work in the shop at Irondale. When the announcement was made that the program was over, my understanding is that the team at Irondale just buttoned the engine back up and it went to Roanoke for display but not in operable condition. Today, the locomotive is in beautiful display condition, but the cab clearly needs work.

# ALABAMA FUEL & IRON COMPANY PART III – OVERTON MINES

John Stewart

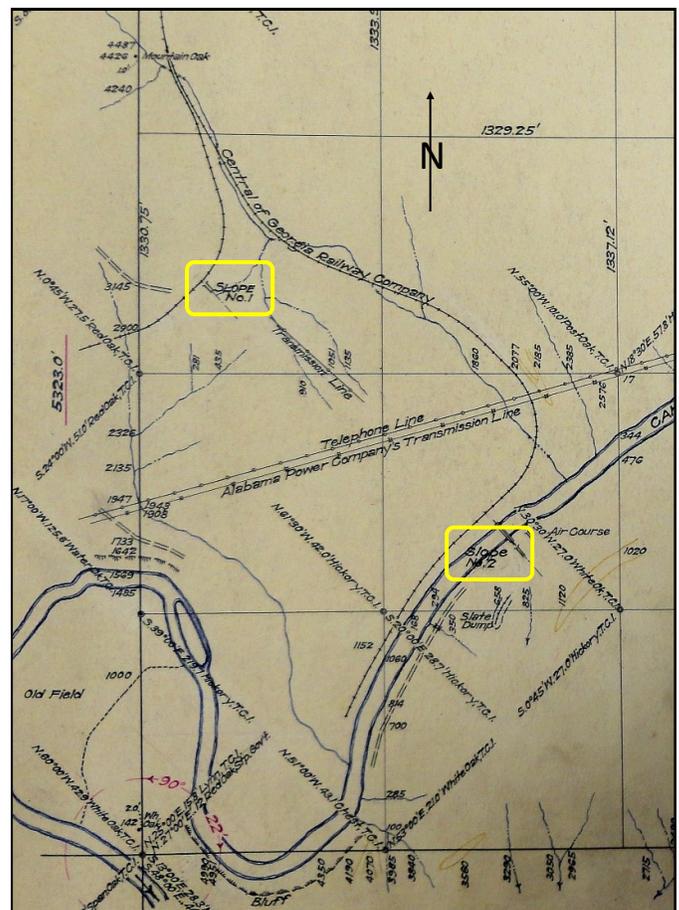
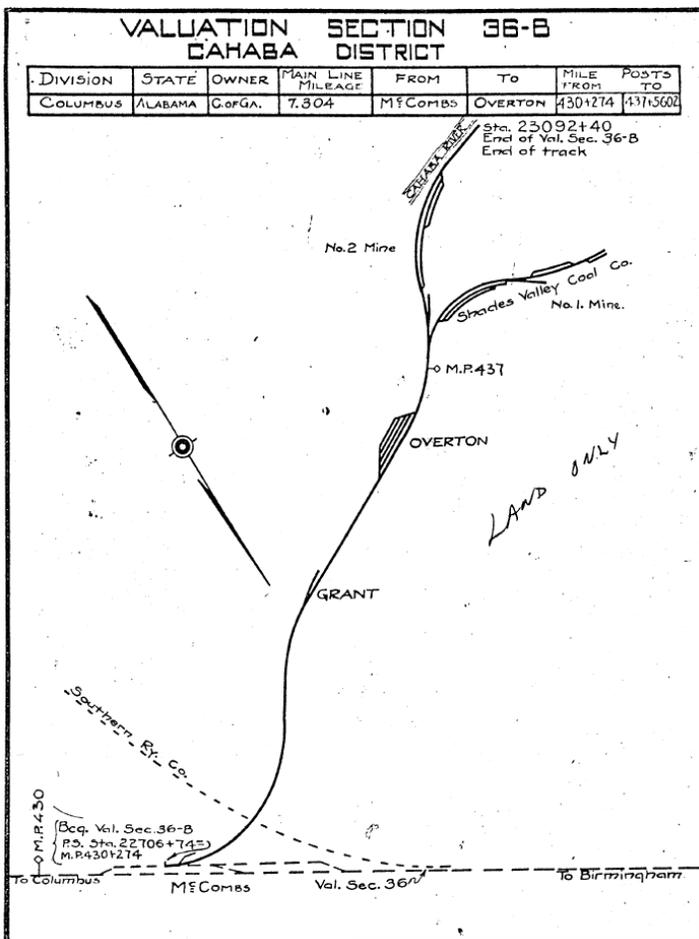
Nashville Banker Jesse Maxwell Overton (1863-1922) was a financial backer and served as President of Alabama Fuel & Iron Company (AF&ICo) beginning in 1908. The extended Overton family had ties to other mining and railroad interests. The Overton name is still prominent in Nashville history. Jesse Overton was killed December 16, 1922, in Nashville in a traffic accident between a taxi in which he was a passenger and a streetcar. After Overton's death, Charles F. DeBardeleben became the president of AF&ICo.



As noted in Part 2, the Acton properties were beginning to play out by 1920 and another site for development was desired, even though the Margaret and Acmar properties were clearly the anchor of the business in terms of volume. The new property would be named Overton.

According to the Shareholder reports (Hoole) for the year 1920, AF&ICo succeeded in getting the Central of Georgia Railway to build a 7 1/2-mile spur to the leased property that would become the Overton Mines. The spur followed a line that today is I-459 until turning south toward the Cahaba River on the Company property. There it split with the northern spur serving the No. 1 tiple and the southern leg serving the No. 2 tiple adjacent to the river. The Val Map below left is courtesy of Marvin Clemons and the Plat below is courtesy of RGGGS Minerals.

The Excavating Engineer, June, 1921, (Denney) reported that the spur was built by Wright & Nave Company of Ashville, North Carolina. The work involved some 300,000 cubic yards of excavation which was performed by a Bucyrus 70-C steam shovel and a smaller Bucyrus 14-B shovel. The 70-C was a self-propelled rail-mounted steam shovel while the 14-B was likely mounted on steel wheels and was a revolving shovel.



The development mined both the Glass Seam (upper Nunnally), Slope No. 2, as well as the Bragg Seam (lower Nunnally), Slope No. 1. Although accessing leased land, it is noted that the company also purchased 739 acres of surface rights for \$37,000 (figures rounded) for the camp.

It was noted that the location of Overton would be only 10 miles from Birmingham, which would help attract labor. In addition, it planned to power the site from the Company's Colgate Power Plant by extending a 14-mile transmission line from the Acmar/Margaret property, at a cost of about \$3,500 per mile. (This plant powered Acmar, Colgate and Margaret.)

The report to shareholders was optimistic about the new property noting that although the current market was "dull," it was expected that when conditions improve, Overton might produce 1600 to 2000 tons per day.

The Report to Shareholders for 1921 (Hoole) reports progress in the development of the mines at Overton. Both slopes had been driven about 1500 feet with several headings being started. It was noted that three drifts were being driven in addition to the No. 2 Slope and connected to the No. 2 workings. These drift openings were west of the Slope.

Plans for Slope No. 1 includes a completed tippie, a washer in progress, as well as hoisting equipment underway. No. 2 Plant included a steel tippie "spanning the river" with a start on the tippie, hoist, and washer. The rail spur "was completed within a mile of No. 1 tippie, and all rail work on site was expected to be completed "within two months." The 14-mile power line

from Colgate had been completed. Some 75 houses had been built with large yards for gardens and to prevent spread of fires. Streets were provided with houses on both sides. The images here are from the Alabama Coal Institute 1922-23 report, Smithsonian Museum. (author's collection).

It is interesting to note that the report points out that the camp was near the river and



upstream of the water intake for the City of Birmingham. The AF&ICo went to "considerable expense in caring for the sanitation of the town, all of which were met with the approval of the Water Works Company."

In closing the report for 1921, management expected Overton to be "one of the most attractive camps in the Birmingham District," producing the cheapest coal in the company's operations.

It was planned that Overton would become "headquarters" for the General Superintendent and Chief Electrician, as well as the relay station for a new telephone system connecting all of the operations with the offices in downtown Birmingham.

It was also noted that a piped water supply supplied by an artesian well would be installed to protect against contaminated wells at multiple sites.

The Shareholders Report for 1922 [Hoole] noted that both slopes were operating and coal had been shipping by rail since June (1922). Total capacity was noted at 1700 tons per day.

The report stated "We have at this operation one of the most up-to-date mining camps, including mine equipment, of any mine I know of in the Birmingham District, and its accessibility to Birmingham, together



with the good work, has given us an abundance of labor, which is a great factor in favor of this operation.”

“I anticipate that this operation will be the largest revenue producer this year of any we have, and notwithstanding we have spent a great deal more money in developing and equipping these mines than any other plants we have, the money has been well expended and will bring a very handsome return.”

The year 1922 marked the death of Jesse Maxwell Overton, as noted at the beginning of this article. With his death, Charles F. DeBardeleben became the President and General Manager of AF&ICo.

The Shareholders Report for **1923** was somewhat abbreviated, without the typical summary of operations by location in narrative. It noted that Overton provided a profit of \$153,000 (rounded) out of a total of \$580,000 for all operations for a contribution of 26 percent of total. Of the \$580,000 total profit, 71 percent was from sale of coal, 18 percent from commissary sales, 4 percent from rents and 7 percent from other sources.

The Report to Shareholders for the year **1924** indicated that the market slump reported for the second half of 1923 continued into the first half of 1924, and total profits were reduced to \$430,000, consisting of coal at 61 percent, commissary at 19 percent, rents at 9 percent and other sources 11 percent.

The report indicated that the slump in shipments bottomed out in April and then improved to maximum contract amounts being called for by customers before year's end. Total shipments for the year amounted to 979,000 tons (rounded).

At Overton, it was reported that new “Deister Vibrating Tables” were being installed in order to wash minus 1/4-inch coal and improve the quality by reducing ash content. It states that if this is successful, it will be added at other plants.

A charge of \$5,200 was noted for the cost of installation of “Electric Cap Lamps” at Overton No. 1 mine. Electric lights eliminated open flame lamps to reduce the risk of explosion after the Acton disaster. Mules were subsequently provided lamps as well.

The Shareholder's Report for the year **1925** noted that the total coal production was 1,262,358 tons, the largest production (to date) in the history of the company. Profits were somewhat larger than previous years results at \$450,000, based on coal (61 percent), commissary (27 percent), rents (8 percent) and other items (4 percent).

Perhaps the most significant event for **1925** was the mine ex-

plosion at Overton No 2. The total loss of life was 53, and the cause was suggested as a “windy shot” or a possible lighting of a match by a careless employee, although it was stated that the cause would likely never be known. News accounts at the time indicate that the Overton mines were considered to be among the best equipped in the state in terms of safety. The official explosion report (Denney) indicated that miners may not have followed all the safety procedures.

Among the new efforts to improve safety noted in the shareholders report was the use of rock dusting equipment and installation of rock dust barriers in the mines, intended to limit and localize explosions.

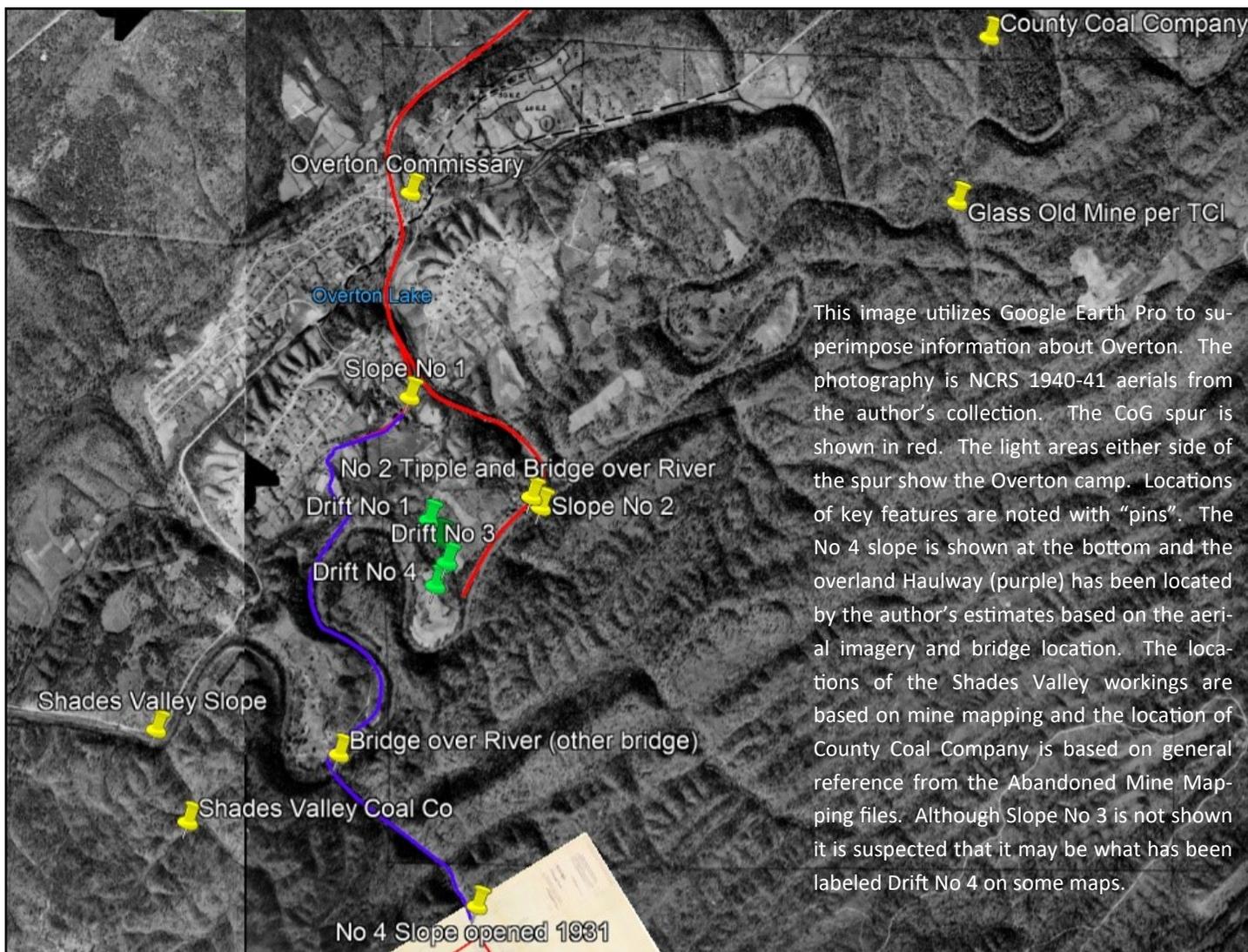
Steps were also taken to allow only designated employees (“shot firers”) to prepare and shoot explosives in the mining operations. This would be done when only minimal numbers of miners were in the mine to limit potential injuries and loss of life by explosions.

The Report of **1926** refers back to the effects of the explosion at Overton No. 2 mine, stating that it had a “demoralizing effect” which effected production, as well as being reflected in additional focus on safety:

“Every effort has been put forth during the year 1926 in the prevention of accidents, sparing no expense in perfecting all safety measures. This necessitated additional expense for the year amounting to at least \$25,000 in the matter of rock dusting the mines, buying the necessary equipment to apply this dust, and additional men in the way of inspectors, shot firers and gas examiners. We changed entirely our method of shooting the coal, and now instead of allowing each individual miner to do his own shooting we have what we term shot firers to do the shooting after all the men have left the mines; so in the event there is any trouble in reference to any particular shot a very extreme minimum of lives will be subjected in place of having the entire force.”

In addition, the company implemented accident and death insurance for all employees. It was noted that this was well received by the employees and that several had already benefited from it.

In **1926**, an adjacent mining operation northeast of Overton, **County Coal Company**, was purchased in bankruptcy court for \$70,000, in order to avoid the “nuisance value” of an “unscrupulous operator.” This property was located NW of Overton and coal would be mined through the Overton No. 1 mines. Equipment acquired was moved to other locations and some houses were able to be used for Overton employees.



This image utilizes Google Earth Pro to superimpose information about Overton. The photography is NCRS 1940-41 aerials from the author's collection. The CoG spur is shown in red. The light areas either side of the spur show the Overton camp. Locations of key features are noted with "pins". The No 4 slope is shown at the bottom and the overland Haulway (purple) has been located by the author's estimates based on the aerial imagery and bridge location. The locations of the Shades Valley workings are based on mine mapping and the location of County Coal Company is based on general reference from the Abandoned Mine Mapping files. Although Slope No 3 is not shown it is suspected that it may be what has been labeled Drift No 4 on some maps.

The report noted that the year finished with a strong market, expected to continue into 1927, and that the relationships with primary railroad customers were very strong, especially the Central of Georgia.

The Shareholder Report for **1927** indicated it was not a good year, after the first two months. Mines were on partial time much of the year and total shipments were 1.1 million tons (1927) vs. 1.2 million (1926).

It was noted that the company added the Atlanta, Birmingham & Coast to its list of major railroad clients which included Central of Georgia, Ocean Steamship, Wrightsville & Tennille, Atlantic Coast Line, Seaboard, Western Railway of Alabama, and the Savannah & Statesboro. All of these companies were noted as operating east of the Birmingham District and that AF&ICo did not serve any railroads operating west of the District. Thus, it was clear that the company's operations in the Cahaba Field did tend to give it a very strong position east of Birmingham.

It was noted earlier that Overton Mines was served by a trans-

mission line from the company power plant at Colgate, 14 miles away. This report indicated that Colgate's capacity had been reached so that an arrangement was made with Alabama Power to buy additional electricity when the company's generating capacity was reached. The contract with Alabama Power called for a minimum of \$400 per month purchased and additional at prevailing rates as needed.

Another operation, southwest of Overton, **Shades Valley Mine**, was purchased for \$35,000 in **1927**. Like County Coal, equipment was relocated to be used at other locations. Shades Valley coal was mined and hauled through the Overton No. 1 mine underground with an electric locomotive using No. 1 heading 5 right. This eliminated another competitor and also opened access through the Shades Valley workings to a section of Company property blocked by Shades Valley property.

In closing the year, it is noted that Charles F. DeBardleben, Jr., vice president, (the president's son) has resigned from AF&ICo to pursue development of a mine of his own. The

arrangement was made that AF&ICo would sell any coal mined at a set price to eliminate competition.

The President's Report to Shareholders for **1928** indicated business was in a continued slump. Competition was strong, and the company lost two railroad customers, Atlanta, Birmingham and Coast and the Atlantic Coast Line. The competition was willing to sell coal to these railroads at prices below what AF&ICo was willing to meet. All mine operations were run at less than capacity, and several mines were idled. Total coal shipments were below 1.1 million tons. Nonetheless, all efforts were made to maintain mines and plant in the best shape.

During this year, the Company wired and lighted all company housing as well as providing street lights in all the camps. Employees were charged for this "below the standard charge throughout the district."

This report continued the trend of focusing on safety and the company's efforts in this regard. The company employed its own mine inspector, as well as fire bosses and safety men. No miner was allowed to enter a mine where gas was present until it had been cleared.

Regular safety and welfare society meetings were held throughout the camps which included miners and management. In addition, monthly staff meetings were held, rotating between the camps so that company matters might be discussed by senior management and supervisors so that they were informed and able to carry the information to the miners and other employees.

The overall company experienced five fatal accidents in **1928**, although the cause was attributed to the carelessness of the miners. It appeared in this report that the company had become self insured in terms of routine claims, based on the costs previously charged by an outside carrier. Catastrophic insurance was still held with an outside insurer.

Finally it was noted that a new vice president of Sales, H. M. Brooks had been hired. The president noted that "it is my hope that I can now become the official loafer of the Company, and I am going to be careful that no one intrudes on my rights in this connection."

The Report for **1929** started with a statement that the coal industry had a very bad year. A fundamental problem was said to be over-production across the state, without thought of adjusting production to market and price. This led to the loss of another railroad coal contract. It was noted that the sales department responded with an increase in smaller customers. It was also noted that domestic markets were im-

proved by price adjustments that were enabled by the practices of competitors.

The Company also focused operations on the best producing mines and idling others. This enabled employees to have higher working time rather than having a larger number of mines on partial production.

Taken together, the company shipped less than 1.0 million tons, versus less than 1.1 million the previous year. Overton amounted to 24 percent of this production against Acmar, Margaret and New Acton.

It is noted that only Overton No. 1 was active with No. 2 and No. 3 being idled to focus production at the most productive mines. The report noted that management believed that the workforce was both satisfied and loyal, notwithstanding an expectation of organizing efforts elsewhere in the district. [Note: No. 3 slope was part of No. 2 mine.]

Housing was being maintained in good condition, employees were encouraged to garden and farm for their own benefit to save money as well as to have pride in "their" property. Safety, welfare and communication were stressed in ongoing monthly meetings.

**1930** was the first year of the Depression and the report to shareholders reflected that condition. As the overall business climate declined, the coal business went with it, driven by declining rail and industrial activity in general. Bank failures occurred and unemployment increased.

AF&ICo was able to maintain wages, although many in the Birmingham District began to reduce wages. The President noted "Labor is having a hard time living now on the short time work, and a [wage] reduction will not increase the working time or create any additional tonnage of coal consumed. On the other hand, it will convince labor that their helplessness is being taken advantage of and as soon as they are in a position to defend themselves they will certainly do so." In other words, wage reductions would not benefit the company or labor under the overall depression conditions.

At Overton, only No. 1 mine was active while Nos. 2 and 3 were idle, as was the case in the previous year. Production at Overton decreased from 1929 to 1930, as was the case at New Acton and Margaret; the exception being Acmar.

Comparing income of the three active Divisions (New Acton being considered part of Acmar), Overton contributed only 16 percent, Margaret 26 percent and Acmar/New Acton 48 percent and miscellaneous income being the remaining 10 percent. Total coal production for 1930 was 900,000 tons, down 90,000 from 1929. At this point, it seems significant to note that Over-

ton No. 1 represented one of eight mines operating. Yet the Company's financial position was still sound, but the worst was yet to come.

The Report for **1931** reflected the worsening of the national business situation in the Great Depression. Not only was demand for coal decreasing but market prices were still going down. Commercial contract quantities were not being required and domestic coal prices were hammered as small operators opened wagon mines and sold coal at "ridiculously low prices."

A review of production figures reflected a comparison of Alabama State production decreases vs. AF&ICo production decreases. This comparison began in 1930 and would be repeated each year. AF&ICo production was lowest since 1919 while the state's was lowest since 1908. Nevertheless, AF&ICo produced 853,000 tons, down 5 percent from 1930; state production was down 27 percent.

The Company reduced wages 10 percent starting in August 1930. Wage reductions did not significantly help the bottom line as demand and production fell which was offset by the cost of production.

A comparison of prices vs. cost for 1931 back to 1925 showed that Overton had been losing money since 1928, and by 1931, the loss was 5 cents per ton; New Acton and Margaret, by comparison were earning over 30 cents profit per ton on coal produced.

Again, a presentation was made by the three main divisions of earnings less depreciation, which showed that Overton contributed 7 percent, Margaret 41 percent, Acmar 44 percent and miscellaneous income 8 percent. Realize that although Overton lost money on coal, it made money on income

from commissary, rent and electric service, and showed a net positive amount.

A new development occurred at Overton in **1931** which was the development of Mine No. 4. It was reported that the No. 1 slope had reached a fault that limited the extent of the mine to the south. For this reason a new No. 4 slope was opened on the

same seam at an outcrop south of the fault. In order to reach the No. 1 tippie an outside electric rail line was built overland from No. 4 slope to the No. 1 tippie, a distance of 1 3/4 miles.

In addition a rock tunnel was extended from the No. 1 workings up to a point along the new electric haulage from No. 4 to No. 1 tippie. It is not clear how this tunnel was to be used, but it appears that it would have provided a potential for coal from No. 1 right heading(s) to be moved to the overland haulage without going through the No. 1 mine.

It was stated that no significant new equipment was purchased for the No. 4 development. There was an existing 125-foot steel bridge over the river (not the No. 2 tippie structure) and an 8-ton electric locomotive and 200 tons of rail were acquired from existing idle developments.

It was noted that there were six fatalities at Overton in 1931, with five coming from one incident involving a gas explosion/fire caused by an incompetent fire boss.

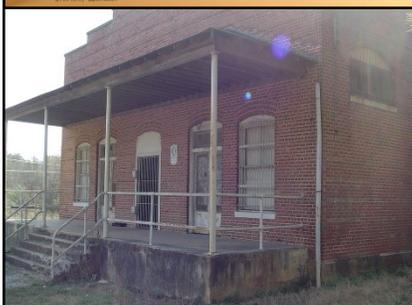
A final note of interest is that the Company hired an "expert agriculturalist" to assist miners and their families in growing gardens for raising food. This program would develop in significant fashion as the Depression deepened. The Company anticipated that mine families were likely to need assistance in the near future and they wanted to provide means for the employees to help themselves.

In hindsight we know that **1932** was worse than 1931. Imagine how it looked to a company that was experiencing the unfolding Depression day by day in business. Again the tabulations were presented comparing the Company's decline to the State's. AF&ICo production decreased from 865,000 tons in 1931 to 632,000 tons in 1932 (-27 percent) while the State's went from 12.1 million tons to 8.0 million (-34 percent).

Counting back to 1929, the State output decreased 56 percent while AF&ICo decreased 34 percent. And it was shown that the Company's portion of the state's total production actually improved from 5 percent in 1929 to 8 percent in 1932.

Those company mines which were active worked about one-third time, 112 days of the year. Wages were reduced 20 percent starting in May.

Overton coal production showed another loss which this year was not offset by lights, commissary and rents. Thus total earnings by the three main divisions were shown to be Overton (-2 percent), Acmar (7 percent), Margaret (74 percent) and miscellaneous (21 percent).



The effort to help the employees “help themselves” increased. The president noted “It would have been impossible for our employees to have sustained themselves on the limited working time given them at the reduced wage scale had they not been forced by the Company to engage in agricultural endeavors during their idle time.”

“As a result of our forcing them into this agricultural work there was under intensive cultivation practically 1,000 acres of the surface lands adjoining the camp of each operation, a large part of which was cleared of trees by the employees.”

The report showed the “astonishing results” of nearly 40,000 bushels of produce grown, 165,000 pounds of hog meat produced and 100,000 quarts of canned vegetables and fruit produced.

The company built a grist mill and provided materials for home corn cribs. The company advanced the employees the pigs, seed, fertilizer and canning supplies with nearly all of it paid back.

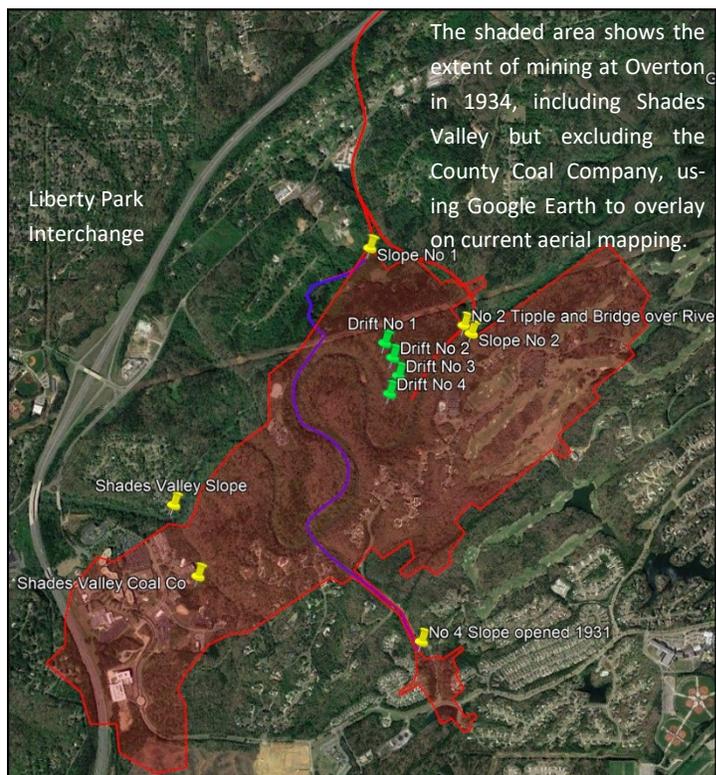
Although this approach on the part of the company has been criticized in the years since the Depression as plantation paternalism, it would seem that these employees were better off than others elsewhere.

The company continued its focus on safety and noted that the production of **1932** was achieved without a single fatality whereas the state averaged one death per 444,000 tons produced.

On the national scene, **1933** saw the passage of the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA). Among other things, the NIRA established wage scales which were higher than the prevailing wage scales, certainly in Alabama. Alabama’s operators lobbied hard in Washington, first to have an Alabama Code adopted, which failed, and then to have an Alabama wage scale adopted. The idea was that Alabama had unique conditions which warranted a lower-wage scale than other areas, particularly the northern coal fields.

The other outcome of this was the Company held a mass meeting to enable the employees to elect two representatives from each operating unit (one white and one colored) to meet with management and work out a contract to adopt hours of work and rates of pay in accordance with the new Federal regulations. This effectively formalized an AF&ICo “company union,” based on the ongoing welfare societies.

In addition the Company gave miners a 30-percent pay increase and dropped an 11<sup>th</sup> hour “donation” by the miners so that they officially would work a 10-hour day. This was done



before the code became effective, and another 8-percent increase came with implementation in October **1933**.

After the Code became effective, the employees called another meeting to elect new representatives, and all but one (white) miner were re-elected. Then a formal gathering was held at the downtown offices and a new contract was formalized. This established that the employees had elected to be represented through their “Welfare Societies” rather than the United Mine Workers union. The Company believed it had “as bona fide [a] contract with our employees as can possibly be made.”

Although there were work stoppages in the Birmingham District during the subsequent months, AF&ICo had none due to labor. It was noted “we have had some deflections at all of our places, the majority of these deflections being at Acmar, but those who were dissatisfied have moved and we now have a unanimous affiliation with our Welfare Societies by the employees... [who will] withstand any effort that may be made by labor delegates and agitators to have them desert their present relationship with the company.”

From a sales side, nearly all of the AF&ICo commercial contracts carried annual prices with wage clauses, allowing the Company to recoup increases in wages. It may be imagined that the customer companies had as much reluctance to government mandated wage increases as did the Company. It took months to negotiate these wage-based price increases

with commercial customers, although most of them were eventually successful, with losses incurred by the Company in the meantime.

Finally, it was noted that the implementation of the NIRA did have the benefit of ending “the cut-throat completion... and business we are now securing is on a livable basis.” The company was optimistic that commercial steam coal contracts business would improve and that business lost by “cut-pricing” would be regained.

From the local operations side, the year 1933 saw the completion of the No. 4 mine at Overton. It is interesting to note that this mine would utilize “long wall mining” equipment. Basically, this means that a long wall of coal is removed (say, left to right) with roof shielding protecting the operation. When the end of the “wall” was reached, the equipment reversed, now right to left and moved forward incrementally. The shielding was also advanced incrementally (forward) and the roof is allowed to collapse behind the advancing mining. It was implied this was the first use of this technology by AF&ICo in their operations.

Based on the production figures noted in recent years, it comes as no surprise that “this operation [No. 4] will in a short time produce all the tonnage at Overton and replace the tonnage now coming from No. 1 and Shades Valley.” The coal from No. 4 would be hauled 1 3/4 miles overland and washed and loaded at the No. 1 tippie. It was noted that No. 1 and Shades Valley were nearly depleted.

It was noted that the Company’s offices were moved from the Liberty National Building to the Webb Crawford Building in downtown Birmingham. This provided more room [for meetings, it was noted]] at virtually no increase in rent due to the market.

Safety was addressed with a statement that 1.2-million tons of coal had been mined in two years (1932 and 1933) with only one fatality, which occurred at Overton. The Company continued to self insure accident and death claims and maintained a reserve for this based on the previous annual payments to private insurers. It is noted that the State of Alabama produced 436,000 tons per fatality in 1933.

In summarizing 1933 production, the company mined 621,000 tons in 1933 vs. 632,000 tons in 1932. Contribution to net earnings were Overton (-10 percent), Acmar (-16 percent), Margaret/Markeeta (78 percent) and miscellaneous (50 percent). Thus Overton showed a loss for another year running.

It was noted that the Company operated schools for the miner’s children, charging a small fee and making up the deficit from company funds. Commissary operation was noted as being quite good for the year, and producing \$49,000 profit. And it was stated that the compulsory farming program did not hurt the commissary sales. It was believed that the farming program produced staples for families giving them more income to spend on “clothing and luxuries.” (View in 1923 and more recently.)

The Shareholders Report for the year **1934** reported more on the efforts to gain a more favorable position with the NIRA; a compromise was achieved. As a result Alabama went to a 7-hour work day and a new wage scale starting April 1, 1934.

There was a miners strike “in the early spring” although the hoped of increased sales by AF&ICo due to other company’s shutdown was short lived and only a brief spike in sales occurred. In addition the Western Railway of Alabama, a twenty-year customer, was lost due to price.

It was stated that the federal authorities mounted investigations against AF&ICo for violations of the NIRA. These did not amount to anything at this time, but they would resurface in future years.

The Company hired “300 negroes from South Alabama, who had never seen coal mines, and have converted them into first class coal producers, and I am glad to say they have followed the influence of the older men and are thoroughly inoculated with our policies and system.”

The report reiterated the financial losses at Overton for several years and “our only incentive for continuance... was our desire to provide employment for those men who had been there for many years. The reward they gave for this effort... to take care of them was to join the United Mine Workers. After doing so, I saw no reason for our Company to continue this operation ... on August 11, 1934, we closed the mine for an indefinite period.”

It went on to say that equipment was moved where it made sense and that although housing was offered to former employees, there was trouble and so many eviction proceedings were begun.

The Operations Report by the General Manager for **1935** noted that the mines at Overton were all idle “due to poor market conditions and no prospects looking to opening these mines again soon seem possible.” The priority for

reopening appears to be No. 1 and Shades Valley, by pumping to maintain water levels below the workable levels. The other mines have been allowed to fill up with water to avoid pumping cost.

About half the housing at Overton was being used by miners from Acmar and Margaret, which had a shortage of housing. The company used trucks to carry these employees to and from work without charge. Houses not being used were boarded up for security.

This report indicated that the Welfare Society meetings and farming programs were being continued, although the farming program was not as active since work time was up somewhat apparently due to closing at Overton and other idled mines.

A mention is made of Union interference and two incidents of “**violence**” (bold face) at two locations, where “the crowd was driven out by the employees voluntarily through physical force.” (This is a separate story and has been debated by others. Violence culminated October 28, 1935, in a shooting incident near Acmar, Alabama, reported in the Anniston Star, December 4, 1935, as well as numerous others. Indictments followed, including DeBardeleben, but all were acquitted by 1936.)

The President’s Report for **1935** started with what had become an annual look back on State vs. Company production. In this case, the base line was 1926, which was the maximum production of 21 million tons of coal statewide. Production since 1926 had trended downward to 1935 when state production was 8.4 million tons. However, in 1926 the Company produced over 8 percent of statewide production, and by 1935 the Company produced nearly 17 percent of statewide production, better than doubling its position. In 1935, the Company was the largest commercial producer in Alabama.

The Shareholders report mentioned there was a coal strike in 1934 and another in 1935. As noted above there were several attempts made by the unions to organize AF&ICo.

The strikes, which did not impact the [non-union] Company with loss of production, did help drive business toward the Company from some former and some new commercial customers, generally the railroads.

The settlement of these strikes by the State of Alabama did have an impact of an increase in pay for AF&ICo miners due to the marketplace. This in turn did increase cost of production at the active mines.

Several items of note in the President’s Report were the instal-

lation of telephone service between all the mines and the city office -- Southern Bell did not serve the mines.

The Company schools, now only operating in St. Clair County [Overton closed] “rank at the head of the St. Clair County [schools], but we are given absolute supervision of the schools.”

The Welfare Societies at each mine were touted, with the officers elected each year by the employees, consisting of a President, Secretary and Committeeman from each mine. A separate organization for white and colored miners was maintained for each mine. The meetings were held monthly, in the evening and were attended by DeBardeleben, families and children, with entertainment being provide by the children. “All matters of interest were discussed freely and all complaints and grievances are handled at each of these meetings.” The image below from Alabama News Magazine, 1939, shows DeBardeleben (left), his secretary and a guest at one of these meetings. DeBardeleben died August 31, 1941.



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**Alabama Fuel & Iron Company**

CHARLES F. DeBARDELEBEN, *President*

The annual outside audits by independent accountants was glowing in noting that the Company was in better financial shape at the end of 1935 than it was at the end of 1931.

As in previous years, the contributions to earnings were tallied by division. All active divisions were profitable overall and by component earnings of coal, commissaries, rents, lights - Overton was not included.

A separate listing of cost for Overton was given as depreciation and maintenance amount of \$77,000, against grand total earnings without depreciation of \$324,000 -- which was certainly a significant amount at some 24 percent. Thus, Overton had been and continued to be a drain on operations income.

As to the future of Overton, the President's report stated that "the lease we had with the Acton Mining Company covering the acreage at Old Acton and Overton expired the first of January, 1936." (Shareholders reports are dated March 1936, for the previous year.)

"This lease carried a heavy minimum royalty, which minimum we had not earned for several years... I have closed trade with the owners of this property on the basis of leasing for one [more] year only the acreage at Overton carrying a number of our houses and the land adjacent to the mines carrying coal, totaling approximately 900 acres... At the expiration of this year [1936] we will then have to come to some decision as to our plans for the future operations of Overton."

The Central of Georgia mine spur from Lovick to Overton was removed in 1940. The 1940 the ICC filing stated "in support of the proposal to abandon the line, the applicant states that the mines now are closed and there is no probability that they will be reopened; the line serves no other industries...it has not operated for 6 years and is not needed..."

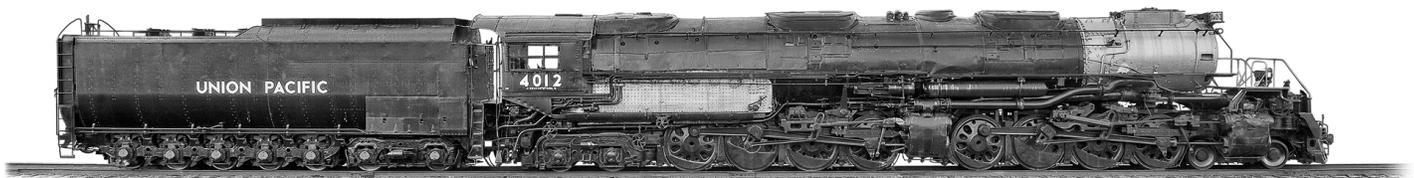
There were a couple of attempts to resurrect operations at Overton by others, included a proposal to rebuild the rail line, that did not occur. A stripping operation by Birmingham Slag Company adjacent to No. 2 was somewhat successful but did not last. AF&ICo did maintain Overton camp as housing for workers at Margaret/Acmar through World War II. Transportation was provided by truck free of charge to miners.

The final installment of this series will focus on the operations at Acmar, Overton and Margaret, the most extensive and longest lived mines and facilities operated by the AF&ICo.

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**Editor's Note:** This article is Part III of a four-part series by John Stewart. Part I was published in the November 2018 issue and Part II in the March 2019 issue of *THE MID-SOUTH FLYER*.

# THE MID-SOUTH FLYER



Ken Boyd

## Union Pacific No. 4012

Union Pacific Railroad ordered 25 four-cylinder, articulated 4-8-8-4 Big Boy steam locomotives between 1941 and 1942 from American Locomotive Company. A Big Boy weighed more than 1.2 million pounds and was almost 133 feet in total length. Unlike competing Yellowstones and Alleghenies, these locomotives used a four-wheel leading truck and were faster with an operating speed of 60 miles per hour and a design speed of 80 miles per hour. Every Big Boy ran for more than 1 million miles before being retired, and eight have been preserved. No. 4012 is displayed at Steamtown National Historic Park in Scranton, Pennsylvania.

Restoration of Union Pacific Big Boy No. 4014 began in 2014 and on April 9, 2019, the locomotive was successfully fired up for the first time in 60 years in preparation for the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad in May 2019.