



September 2020

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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CHAPTER NEWS

THE PROGRAM PLANNED FOR SEPTEMBER HAS BEEN DELAYED DUE TO CONTINUING COVID-19 CONCERNS AND WILL BE RESCHEDULED FOR A FUTURE MEETING DATE.

Behind the Scenes: An Insider's View of Daily Operations at Birmingham Terminal Station

Marvin Clemons

OTHER UPDATES AND NEWS

HODRRM Member Picnic Event - An outdoor picnic (informal) is planned for October 24, 2020, at the Heart of Dixie Railroad Museum in Calera, starting at 4:00 pm. More to come! R&LHS Mid-South Chapter members are invited.

"Industrial Revolution—The Locomotive Comes to Alabama" - The current issue (summer 2020) of *Alabama Heritage* magazine, published by The University of Alabama, includes a 14-page feature and photo essay on the history of the locomotive in Alabama. The feature by Mid-South Chapter Board member and *MID-SOUTH FLYER* editor, Ken Boyd, traces the introduction, development and social and economic implications of the locomotive across Alabama from 1834 to the modern era. Copies are available from <https://www.alabamaheritage.com/online-store.html>, Books-a-Million, Barnes & Noble and Little Professor Bookstore.

R&LHS Scholarship Award Recipient - Katie Teipel, a student at the University of Alabama, was one of four recipients of 2020 scholarship awards from the national R&LHS. Congratulations Katie!

Member Moment

The Member Moment this month features Dori Boyd. If you would like to be featured and tell your story, please contact Warren Jones (wjones1302@gmail.com). The story should total 400 words or less and ideally include a photo or drawing.

CORRECTION:

The July Member Moment featured member Nicholas Costas. His name was spelled incorrectly. We sincerely apologize to Nicholas, his family and the membership for this mistake.

NORFOLK SOUTHERN DOWNGRADES THE FAMOUS OLD FORT LOOPS

In May 2020, Norfolk Southern downgraded and essentially closed the Loops east of Asheville, North Carolina. This is the mainline that once transported wealthy passengers to Biltmore Estates and other mountain retreats. The 13 miles of tunnels, bridges and grades as steep as 2.94 percent have operated since the early 1900s and have long been a favorite with railfans and photographers. Unfortunately, the infrastructure clearances through the Loops cannot accommodate double stacks. Only locals and an occasional Norfolk Southern mountain run will continue through this historic stretch of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

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 and the *MID-SOUTH FLYER*. Contributions, article ideas and reader comments are welcome.

Ken Boyd, Editor

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CHAPTER UPDATE

James Lowery, President

The Chapter Update this time will be information about a couple of recent sign installations as part of the Mid-South Chapter's Historic Birmingham Mineral Railroad (BMRR) Signs Project – sign installation number 157 and number 153.

Sign Number 157

A BMRR sign (number 157) was installed in August in the Kiwanis Centennial Park at the beginning of the Kiwanis Vulcan Trail located at the Vulcan Park and Museum. Three other BMRR signs had already been installed along the trail (BMRR roadbed), but this one was a special designation for highlighting a concrete Point of Curve marker that had been discovered during construction of the Park. This is the only Point of Curve marker that we have found still in existence in the entire BMRR system. The following is the description of that installation as listed on the Bham-MRR.com website:

157. Sign Location: Vulcan Trail (beside interpretive sign panel that is located left of the fountain in Kiwanis Centennial Park). The BMRR sign is located above the historic BMRR Point of Curve marker, and the sign describes the marker as follows: "The concrete marker below made with blast furnace slag instead of rocks is located a few feet from its original position where it designated the beginning and angle of the curve in the train tracks." The Kiwanis Centennial Park is built on the former BMRR roadbed. **Latitude/Longitude:** N 33 29 32.15 W 86 47 43.40 **BMRR Branch:** Red Gap Branch

The accompanying photographs show that installation location and the concrete marker, the top of which was inadvertently destroyed when the construction workers discovered the marker.

Sign Number 153

The following information appeared in a July issue of the MSC e-Newsletter, but is reproduced here in case you did not see it in the e-Newsletter and to document some of the history related to that sign site.

The BMRR sign (number 153) was installed in the Collegeville Neighborhood in North Birmingham at the edge of Maclin Park. Some of the historic significances of this site and area are as follows:

1. The sign was installed beside F L [Fred] Shuttlesworth Drive.



Fred Shuttlesworth was a significant figure in the Civil Rights Movement in Birmingham 60+ years ago.

2. Shuttlesworth's church is a few blocks from the site of the BMRR sign installation, and that church and the area around it are part of the Civil Rights Trail that commemorates the movement.



6. The newly built vehicle bridge (for Huntsville Road/ Shuttlesworth Drive) named Maxine Herring Parker Bridge that is within sight of the BMRR sign installation passes over active CSX tracks that are on the original roadbed of the Birmingham Mineral Railroad Huntsville Branch Number 1. The BMRR branch was named that because it roughly followed the route of the historic Huntsville Road from Bessemer through Hueytown, Fairfield, Ensley, Pratt City, and North Birmingham. As mentioned, the present-day active CSX tracks continue to run on that same original BMRR roadbed.

7. So, in summary, the BMRR sign number 153 installation ties into Fred Shuttlesworth, the Civil Rights Movement, the Birmingham airport, the Huntsville Road, active CSX tracks and the trains that run on them, and the BMRR Huntsville Branch Number 1.

BMRR sign number 153 installation is shown in the accompanying photograph. The bridge over the BMRR roadbed with active CSX railroad tracks running under it can be seen just beyond the street intersection in the photo.

3. As an aside, the airport has been named Birmingham-Shuttlesworth International Airport in his memory, AND the BMRR Gate City Branch ran across the land that is now that airport property.

4. More history about the location where the BMRR sign number 153 was installed, F L Shuttlesworth Drive originally was part of the Huntsville Road, and some online maps such as Google Street View still show that name for the street with the current name of F L Shuttlesworth Drive superimposed on the historic Huntsville Road name.

5. But what is the connection between a BMRR sign there and the old Huntsville Road? The Huntsville Road was a pioneer road (and possibly a Native American road prior to that) which was the route used historically to go from Birmingham to Huntsville (by way of Guntersville). The Huntsville Road was the route used by many pioneers bringing their families from back east to settle in Alabama.





HEART OF DIXIE RAILROAD MUSEUM

OFFICIAL RAILROAD MUSEUM FOR THE STATE OF ALABAMA

Even during these difficult times, volunteers have successfully returned the Shelby & Southern Narrow-Gauge Railroad back to steam operations. Little No. 3 made her return in July and has received lots of attention from guests and railfans alike. Our trains continue to operate each Saturday, and we are proud to see each and every rider! As for our popular fall events, a lot of change will happen this year. Our usual events will not take place, but our team is working extremely hard to develop new events that better meet safety guidelines. One of these events is listed below as “Scarecrow Junction,” which will replace our popular October Pumpkin Patch Express. Other event changes are on the drawing board, with hopes for a public release soon. Please follow us on social media for the latest updates and ticket availability.



Current Restoration Projects

- ◆ 1926 L&N RR Tavern/Lounge Car “Alabama Club” HVAC work continues.
- ◆ Shelby & Southern Narrow-Gauge Railroad is now operational!
- ◆ 1952 CB&Q RR dining car “Silver Cuisine” minor repairs continue even with budget freeze.
- ◆ 1951 MOW Flat Car (former DODX) work started to install new wood decking from boards purchased last year.

1953 Fairbanks Morse Diesel Locomotive No. 1850

Recent vandalism to most of the locomotive windows has required our shop crew to pull this display locomotive from Clark Yard and spot it outside the shop for further evaluation.

HODRRM Member Picnic Event

An outdoor picnic (informal) is planned for October 24, 2020, at HoD, starting at 4:00 pm. More to come!

R&LHS Mid-South Chapter members are invited.

Upcoming 2020 Train Rides:

Saturday Train Rides

Saturdays June 13—September 26th

- ◆ C&S Departure Times: 10:00 am & 1:00 pm.
- ◆ S&S Departs regularly from 9:45 am—3:00 pm.

Ozan Winery Departures

Select Saturdays through November.

- ◆ Departs from Ozan Winery boarding location.
- ◆ Departure Times: 10:10 am & 1:10 pm.
- ◆ Visit Ozan Winery website for tickets and info.

Scarecrow Junction (final details still to come)

Saturdays & Sundays Oct 3,4,10,11,17,18,24,25

- ◆ Departure Times: 10:00 am & 1:00 pm.
- ◆ Take a trip to Scarecrow Junction.
- ◆ Seek out each custom designed scarecrow.
- ◆ Go to our web for additional info and tickets.

Autumn Leaf Limited

Saturdays in November 7, 14, 21

- ◆ Departure Times: 10:00 am & 1:00 pm.
- ◆ Stunning Shelby County forest fall colors.

Other Fall Events—Still Pending

Including Halloween & Christmas.

Visit www.hodrrm.org to learn more about our events.

TRAINSPOTTING AND WATCHING IN NORTHWESTERN ALABAMA AND NORTHEASTERN MISSISSIPPI

A REGIONAL DAY TRIP ON YOUR OWN

David Hurt

I have a couple of things in mind if anyone wants to come over to northeast Mississippi for train viewing or photographing.

Number one closest hot spot to me is Sheffield, AL and of course Decatur, AL. In Sheffield and west of there, there is the NS main line to Memphis, and, in addition to the NS power, there are loaded (and empty) coal trains that run through with BNSF power (used to be UP power).

If anyone goes to Corinth, MS there is the depot at the diamond. KCS crosses the NS there, and there are a lot of Civil War things there -- the battle at the crossroads. Last I heard, NS was running trains mostly between 7:00 am and 10:00 am, and the KCS usually leaves out of their small yard in Corinth about 3:00 in the afternoon and goes up to the big yard northeast of town -- it was the former Corinth and Counce Railroad.

If anyone wants to drive that far, the newly formed Rock Island Rails is what used to be part of the IC line that ran from Memphis-Clarksdale-Baton Rouge. The new Rock normally runs out of Sumner or Webb, MS.

Columbus, MS - has the Golden Triangle Railroad (they serve Weyerhaeuser) about 15 miles out of town.

There is a WATCO line that runs Columbus, MS to Tuscaloosa, AL on the old GM&O line that once ran to Montgomery. This WATCO line leaves out of Artesia, MS to Columbus on KCS trackage rights, then it is WATCO after that. One also sometimes can see oil trains with tank cars that come into Artesia from Texas and Meridian, MS, and they usually have CN power on their trains. They are running 6-axle power on that line but normally at a very slow track speed of not more than 20 mph. All of the trains that run Artesia-Tuscaloosa stop in Reform, AL where a crew from Tuscaloosa takes the train the rest of the way. The WATCO trains have trackage agreement all the way into Bessemer over the CSX.



Crossing the Tennessee River at Decatur, Alabama. Photo by Ken Boyd.

MEMBER MOMENT

NAPA VALLEY WINE TRAIN

Dori Boyd

The Napa Valley, located a short drive north of San Francisco and west of Sacramento, is one of the most famous and beautiful wine growing regions in the world. The valley is featured in movies and books and is the destination for many who enjoy wine and the spectacular scenery.

In 2017, Ken and I visited the valley for our second time. This was part business trip for Ken as he was completing his second locomotive book and doing research for an upcoming book on North American watermills. With his fascination for locomotives and my interest in wine and elegant dining, we planned a day for the Napa Valley Wine Train.

When Ken and Warren asked me about writing a Member Moment for the *MID-SOUTH FLYER*, I wanted to do something less technical that might appeal to readers with less interest in gauges and dates and wheels and horsepower. The Wine Train seemed a good choice.

I must admit that the train was a classic. The engines were beautifully restored locomotives from the 1950s, two of them. The railcars were older and very elegant with a Victorian flair. The station in Napa was extensive with not only railroading items but also wines from up and down the valley.

We arrived at the station on a mild and beautiful mid-January morning with mist in the air and a gorgeous sunrise. Boarding was at about 10:00 and we traveled on the train until late afternoon. We chose the lunch trip for cost and timing reasons; shorter and evening trips are also offered. The train leaves from Napa and travels at a slow speed north to St. Helena, a journey of 36 miles. The itinerary is carefully planned as the staff moves the guests from car to car with various wine experiences in each setting and a fabulous gourmet lunch in a dining car. We were free to roam about the train and explored all the way to the engines at the front. We made one stop in the valley to get off the train and tour a winery.

I would highly recommend this trip to railfans as a way to experience a vintage rail trip and entertain adventurous family members at the same time. Ken and I would definitely do this trip again!



A STORY ABOUT A KING COTTON TRIP

David Hurt

It was June of 1987, when I was still living in Columbus, Mississippi, when I got a telephone call from the office of the Columbus and Greenville Railway asking me if I would like to ride from Columbus to Birmingham by bus and return the next day on Norfolk Southern train #63 to Columbus on the C&G Business car #1, "King Cotton." I did not hesitate and said, "Heck yes!!"

The next day, I drove to the yard office of the C&G and met up with Luther Bush who worked in the shops, and the two of us headed on to the bus station. I remember the bus stopping in Reform and maybe Gordo, then Tuscaloosa. When we arrived at the bus station in Birmingham, I remember folks hitting us up for money, and one or two had had too much to drink, so I called Floyd Tayloe and said, "Come pick us up as soon as possible."

When Floyd picked us up, we ended up at the Norfolk Southern yard and got on board the "King Cotton" where we pretty much stayed the rest of the day. I do not remember the meal time, but I remember getting a good night's sleep. Woke up the next morning, showered, dressed, and had breakfast. Once, the car lurched slightly and after that, not at all.



The King Cotton. Photo by David Hurt.

The “King Cotton” was coupled to the back of the bay window caboose, and, as we were leaving, Bob Hasty called us to bring out lunch, which he and Floyd had prepared, composed of some great sandwiches and a lot more. Also on the train was the Road Foreman, and he was very nice.

As the trip moved on, we stopped for some reason in Parrish, and I got off the train for maybe 10 minutes. One of the employees there asked me, “What are you doing up here?” and I replied, “I was invited to ride to Columbus.”

Luther or Bob took a photo of me standing on the back platform of the “King Cotton” before we left, and, to this day, I have yet to find that slide (or negative). It was a fun trip on that line that day, and I totally enjoyed it very much.



Later on, the line to Parrish was severed several years ago at Berry where Norfolk Southern ran their Container trains* and the Columbus and Greenville’s “Luxapalila Valley Railroad” got the Norfolk Southern line from Columbus to Millport and Belk, Alabama.

Note: You can view the current Columbus and Greenville Railway website at https://www.gwrr.com/railroads/north_america/columbus_greenville_railway#m_tab-one-panel



The King Cotton. Photos by David Hurt.

** See the article on the Norfolk Southern COLTainer in the January 1997 Railfan & Railroad magazine, by Ronald G. Mele with photography by David Hurt.*

Editors Note:

David Hurt is a Mississippi resident and recent MSC program speaker.

THE ART OF THE LOCOMOTIVE

THE LURAVILLE LOCOMOTIVE — THE “SUWANNEE RIVER LOCOMOTIVE”

Ken Boyd



The Luraville (Suwannee River) Locomotive at the State of Florida Department of Agriculture, Division of Forestry Exhibit. Photo by Ken Boyd.

After many years as a teacher, photographer, history buff and writer, I am often invited to speak to historic, church, photographic, library, civic and other groups. The request is usually for me to talk on some photographic technique, explain my book publication processes or discuss locomotives and watermills, two subjects I have researched for decades.

My locomotive presentations are generally chronological and include a lot of photographic images. I spend time detailing stories about some of the most interesting old steam engines. Audiences for the locomotive talks, which include both railroading enthusiasts and folks with less interest in trains, invariably get excited when I tell amusing and curious stories from the past.

One of my stories that often generates a lot of interest and questions is about the events surrounding the Luraville or “Suwannee River” Locomotive. The locomotive spent at least 73 years at the bottom of the Suwannee River! This fact and the audience familiarity with the Stephen Foster song “*Old Folks at Home*,” commonly known as “*Way Down Upon the Suwannee River*,” make even the bored

spouses in the crowd put the phones down, sit up and pay attention!

The story of the Luraville Locomotive began in about 1850. The locomotive was likely ordered to provide early passenger and light freight service somewhere along the northern region of Florida, but east of the panhandle, maybe for a predecessor line of the Live Oak and Gulf Railway or the Suwannee River Railway, which began operations in the area several decades later.

Back in those days, locomotives typically began life on a passenger line and were later relegated into a second career as a mostly worn-out industrial switcher or tram or even as a stationary steam engine. In Florida, most locomotives ended up in the logging industry.

Railroading history in the Sunshine State from the mid- and late 1800s in rural northern and western Florida is interesting and colorful. Much of the region was opened and shaped by the logging industry, and towns sprang up along logging railroad operations. By 1900, nearly 430 railroad companies had been chartered and more than 170 lines were



Live Oak and Gulf Railway Began Operations in the 1890s and Built West from Live Oak to the Suwannee River and Beyond, Including Service to Luraville. The Railway Used Sections of the Earlier Suwannee River Railway Infrastructure. From the State of Florida Photographic Archives Collection.



constructed in Florida for a total of thousands of miles. Railroads networked much of the region. Some of these lines eventually became the commercial rail lines we know today.

In about 1890, the Luraville Locomotive became the property of the Bache Brothers Lumber Company, which operated a sawmill near Luraville, Florida. Before that time, literally nothing is known about the origins of this 10-ton, wood-burning, 4-4-0 American-type locomotive from the mid-19th century that made its way to Luraville.

Experts, including Smithsonian researchers, agree that it dates to about 1850 and was probably built by either Danforth Cook & Company or by Rogers Locomotive & Machine Works. Through numerous rebuilds, plates and tags were removed and parts were swapped to keep the engine going. As a result, the locomotive identity was lost, and it is difficult to determine which company did the original manufacture and a case can be made for either. Regardless, this is one of the oldest and possibly the oldest locomotive in the Deep South today. (Recent locomotive ruins recovered at a construction site in central Florida have revealed at least parts of a locomotive that could be even older.)

At Bache Brothers Lumber Company, the old engine was used to pull logs from expansive forests along the Suwannee River to the company sawmill. The lumber company had operations on both sides of the river, and a barge ferry was used to transport the train back and forth across the river. This operation continued for about a decade until the loco-

motive was lost into the river in either 1898 or 1906 or thereabouts.

The accounts vary about not only the year but also about what actually happened when the locomotive was sunk. The simplest explanation is that the locomotive just jumped the tracks and fell into the river. A more likely story is that the loaded barge became unbalanced, it capsized and the engine was dumped into the river. A third possibility is that the engine broke loose from cables at the ferry terminus while being loaded or unloaded. Some have even reported that the locomotive was rolled into the river intentionally, maybe because the lumber company was bankrupt or in poor financial condition. We will probably never know for sure, but regardless the Luraville Locomotive sank into the black waters of the river and there it stayed.



Cypress Scene along the Suwannee River. Photo by Ken Boyd.

For a long time, the engine sat upright in the river with the smokestack visible above the water level during dry spells. Eventually, it rolled over on its side in the river current but could still be seen at times in the dark, clear waters of the Suwannee.

In 1976, divers began recovery work in the river but were unable to budge the engine. When the water was low, they did remove and preserve the engine bell, whistle, throttle and other smaller components that could be brought to the surface. Still, the old locomotive remained in the river until 1979.

The hero in this story is James “Buddy” Lancaster, a life-long resident of Luraville, a World War II veteran, a tobacco farmer and a local store owner. He grew up hearing stories of the locomotive from older



Pulling the locomotive out of the Suwannee River. (Buddy Lancaster is second from left.) Photo above courtesy of the Lancaster Family. Photo at left from the State of Florida Photographic Archives Collection.



family members; he had seen the locomotive in the river and was determined to save the old iron horse. He developed a plan that he would finance himself, and he waited for just the right conditions and circumstances.

In 1979, when the water in the river was fairly low, the venture began and took several days. An old military truck with a heavy winch and two large wreckers were brought in to pull and hoist the heavy, mud-filled locomotive from the river. The process was not without challenges from problems with cables and chains breaking to freeing the relic from the river bottom. Crowds gathered to watch. The mass of iron and debris was dragged 157 feet across the river bottom to the eastern shore. It came out in several pieces with the two sets of drivers separated from the engine. After 80 years, the chimney and wooden cab were long gone.

Once on the river bank, a crane was used to hoist the engine onto a lowboy truck rig, and it was hauled and unloaded at the Lancaster home, next to the family store. The locomotive was set up, and cleaned and remained there on display adjacent to the Luraville store.

Eventually, the locomotive was purchased by Mr. Jack Goyke and donated in 1982 to the State of Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. The State transported the engine and all the pieces to their shops in Lake City, Florida,



James “Buddy” Lancaster and the Luraville Locomotive. Photo courtesy of the Lancaster Family.

where it was further cleaned and restored. A chimney was fabricated and a wooden cab was built. The cow-catcher is still missing to this day.

From there, the reassembled engine was moved to Tallahassee and was set up as a permanent exhibit on the grounds at the offices of the Division of Forestry. A replica depot has been constructed to serve as a covered viewing platform for the locomotive. The depot was constructed with wood recovered from Blackwater River State Forest. The exhibit includes an appropriate carload of cypress logs behind the engine and is located at the main entrance to the forestry office complex.

In 2012, a ceremony was held to honor Lancaster and the Luraville community and commemorate the old locomotive with the official naming of the engine the “Luraville Locomotive.” The exhibit is dedicated to Florida’s “monumental efforts in the logging industry and its locomotives.”

Today, the locomotive and the educational site are attractively maintained. A detailed historic marker with pictures tells the story of both the old iron horse and logging railroads in the state.

The locomotive can be visited at 3125 Conner Boulevard, Tallahassee, Florida 32311. The location is about 0.2 miles from the state capitol complex.

In reality, the decades-long immersion in the Suwannee River probably saved this historic engine from salvage and being scrapped, the ultimate fate of most old locomotives.



The Luraville Locomotive Missing the Cowcatcher.
Photo by Ken Boyd.



The Luraville Locomotive Exhibit with Viewing Platform and Cypress Railcar. Photo by Ken Boyd

SOURCES:

Boyd, Ken, *Historic North American Locomotives*, Kalmbach Media (*Trains*), Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 2018.

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THE MID-SOUTH FLYER



Inside the Amtrak station at the beautiful new Birmingham Intermodal Facility. Sign boards, door postings and floor markings remind travelers of COVID.

Photos by Ken Boyd.