



March – April 2022

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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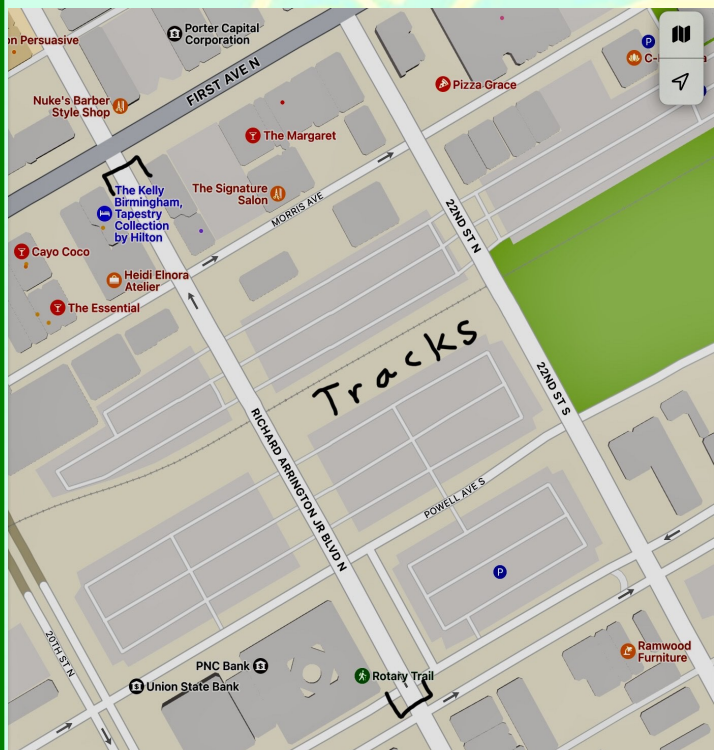
Memories of Woodlawn Junction

Text and Photos by Marvin Clemons

CHAPTER NEWS

TRAIN VIEWING IN DOWNTOWN BIRMINGHAM — A RARE OPPORTUNITY

If you are looking for a safe place to view and photograph active trains passing through downtown Birmingham, check out the Rainbow Viaduct on Richard Arrington, Jr., Boulevard (formerly 21st Street viaduct). That viaduct (located between 1st Avenue North and 1st Avenue South) has been closed to all vehicular traffic but is still open to bicycles and pedestrians. The condition of the bridge was such that the City of Birmingham had to close it to normal traffic until repairs (or replacement) can be accomplished. It is still open for walking, and, without vehicular traffic, it has become a good, safe place to view the trains passing underneath. If you are not familiar with downtown Birmingham, the street map below shows the bridge location.



Member Moment

The Member Moment this month features chapter president, James Lowery. The Member Moment page is very popular with readers — 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.

MID-SOUTH CHAPTER MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

If you have not yet renewed your membership for 2022, please do so soon. Our January roster indicates that our Chapter has grown to 78 members! We are happy to welcome the following new members who have joined since the last newsletter:

Thomas Mather, Houston, Texas
 Wick Moorman, Charlottesville, Virginia
 Steve Mueller, Carbondale, Illinois
 Victor Varney, Cary, North Carolina
 Philip (Steve) Vogel, Decatur, Georgia
 William Sandberg, Columbia, South Carolina
 Kathryn A. and John A. DiDomizio, Evansville, Indiana

You may find it interesting that some R&LHS members join multiple chapters. Here is a summary of the data for our Mid-South Chapter. A special thank you to Sherri Beck, R&LHS Membership Manager, for providing this data.

1. Eleven of our members have multiple chapter memberships.
2. Three of our members are members of all ten chapters.
3. One member is a member of nine chapters.
4. Five members have one additional chapter membership. The extra memberships were distributed as follows:
 Southeast (2), Lackawanna, Southern California, and Steel City.
5. Two members have two additional chapter memberships. These are:
 Member 1: Southern Central States and Steel City.
 Member 2: Southeast and Southern California.



Ken Boyd, Editor

THE MID-SOUTH FLYER

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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. Contributions, article ideas and reader comments are welcome.



CHAPTER UPDATE

James Lowery, President

Leeds Depot Situation

Well...a new twist presented itself just as the chapter was gearing-up to attempt some semblance of normalness by (1) exploring the possibility of returning to in-person meetings at the Leeds Depot and (2) starting to work with the consultant responsible for implementing the permanent historic Birmingham Terminal Station exhibit at the Leeds Depot as part of the two grants the chapter has received for that purpose. However, the City of Leeds has discovered that a sinkhole has opened up underneath part of the observation platform attached to the Leeds Depot. Understandably, the City of Leeds closed the Depot and is not allowing any occupancy until the City can determine the extent of the sinkhole underground and can make a plan for remediating it and for ensuring that it does not recur. Of course, the Mid-South Chapter is supportive of the City's efforts to correct this problem in the best way possible.

So...the Chapter is in a position that it cannot hold any meetings at the Leeds Depot until the City of Leeds gives the "all clear" after dealing with the sinkhole. Also, the Chapter's work on the Birmingham Terminal Station exhibit will remain in the planning stages (which includes a large part of the exhibit work), and, if necessary, the actual installation work to come later will be on hold until after the sinkhole has been corrected.

Thank you in advance for your understanding, and we will keep you informed of the situation as it progresses.

Initial Chapter Meeting Plans for 2022

Despite the sinkhole setback at the Leeds Depot and the ongoing COVID saga, the Mid-South Chapter Board of Directors is committed to exploring other options for meetings, field trips, and educational and social opportunities for the members and community. Every effort is being made to propose an opportunity for us to gather this spring. Watch the e-Newsletters and *THE MID-SOUTH FLYER* for updates on the depot situation and possible offsite gatherings. We appreciate your ongoing membership and interest in the chapter.

Photo Request for an Upcoming Issue of the Flyer

The editor is requesting your best photos taken from the Rainbow Viaduct on Richard Arrington, Jr., Boulevard as discussed on the Chapter News page (page 2). The best images will be shared in a future issue of this newsletter. Although not all photos can be shared due to space limitations, we look forward to seeing your images! Please send your photos to Ken Boyd at kenboydphotography@yahoo.com.

BMRR Sign Installations Update

Following the recent installation of additional BMRR signs in Pinson Valley, Ensley, Etowah County, Red Mountain Park Venice Road entrance, and Homewood, sign number 178 was installed March 8th in the Helena (Alabama) area at Lee Springs Park. That park encompasses the location of a major historic coke ovens operation and features the remains of that operation. It is a wonderful park which includes interpretive signage throughout as well as walking trails and a large children's playground. Look for the BMRR sign at the park entrance.

The park is located near the Hillsboro Trail that was built on the former BMRR roadbed at the Appleford subdivision on Shelby County Highway 52 west of Helena.



BMRR Sign at Lee Springs Park. Photo by James Lowery.

MEMBER MOMENT

*A LATE ARRIVER TO RAILROADING AND RAILROAD HISTORY**James Lowery*

The title of this article may help explain why many of you know much more than I do about railroads, railroad operations, and the history of railroads. I envy those of you who grew up as railroaders, rail fans, railroad modelers, etc. I did not, and that explains a lot of my lack of knowledge about railroads, past and present.

Growing up in Columbus, Mississippi, gave me the opportunity to watch trains in freight yards several blocks from my house and, more importantly, the opportunity to learn how to hop moving freight trains and ride them through town. Back then, train wheel/axle assemblies could be seen lined up waiting for installation. “By the turn of the century, aided by the Frisco and the Mobile & Ohio, Columbus had tracks coming and going in almost every direction of the compass.”

As was the case with many children growing up in the 1950s, I had the “requisite” Lionel Santa Fe simple model train set. And, like many children of that era, I day-dreamed about how wonderful and freeing the lives of hobos and train engineers must be. But, for me as I grew older, no more “railroading” until after a long career as an administrator at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

Then along came grandchildren, who, lucky for me, enjoyed watching trains in Irondale and model train layouts in Vestavia. Thus began my “rediscovery” of a latent love for trains. Along came the Mid-South Chapter, and I was hooked on learning about historic trains and railroads and their significance in the Birmingham area. Next after that came a fascination with the correlative mining and historic iron industry.

Once hooked on that, I started putting together some things I had been told through the years before I ever got involved in historic railroading. Several of those “triggering” events were people telling me that a railroad ran through the residential areas near where I lived. I had no idea what or where that historic railroad was.

I decided that, if I (as part of the general public) did not know anything about that railroad, then a lot of other people also did not. “The rest is history” (pun intended) because that was the impetus and beginning of my Historic Birmingham Mineral Railroad (BMRR) Signs Project that became a project of the Mid-South Chapter. Installing those signs throughout the six counties served by the BMRR has been one of the most rewarding things I have ever done.



Left: James Lowery installing a historic mineral railroad sign.

Right: Hewes Hendrick helping his granddad with a sign installation.





HEART OF DIXIE RAILROAD MUSEUM

OFFICIAL RAILROAD MUSEUM FOR THE STATE OF ALABAMA

Seems like we just wrapped up our 2021 season, only to be starting our 2022 season on March 5. We have already held our Sweetheart Special and a new event Mardi Gras Limited in conjunction with Ozan Winery. Here adults enjoyed a late evening train ride to and from the winery, while stopping to sample some of Ozan's best wines.

In 2022, many popular events will be returning. Unfortunately, Thomas the Tank will be on hold for another year. Locomotive cab rides and caboose rides are available this year with limited seating per trip. Locomotive rides are \$38 and caboose rides are \$28. Visitors will also see a slight increase in ticket pricing due to increased cost for fuel, supplies, and service work.

Current Restoration Projects

- ◆ 1926 L&N RR Tavern/Lounge Car "Alabama Club" interior trim being installed to allow for final interior painting.
- ◆ 1952 CB&Q RR dining car "Silver Cuisine" roof repairs nearing completion. Interior work still ongoing.
- ◆ 1959 GE center cab locomotive, former Alabama Power #107, repairs not started.
- ◆ 1951 MOW Flat Car (former DODX) work progresses to install new wood decking.

Photo from the HoD Web Site:



Upcoming 2022 Train Rides:

Train Rides Every Saturday

Now - December

- ◆ C&S Departure Times: 10:00 am & 1:00 pm
- ◆ Regular Ticket Price \$15 for adult or child
- ◆ S&S Train departs every 20 minutes
- ◆ S&S ticket price \$3.50; or All Day pass \$10
- ◆ Special events may alter price, dates & times

Easter Eggspress

April 16

- ◆ C&S Departure Times: 10:00, 1:00, 3:00pm
- ◆ C&S Ticket Price \$18 adult or child
- ◆ S&S Train departs every 20 minutes
- ◆ Peter Cottontail & family activities

Mother's Day Special & Vendor Festival

May 7

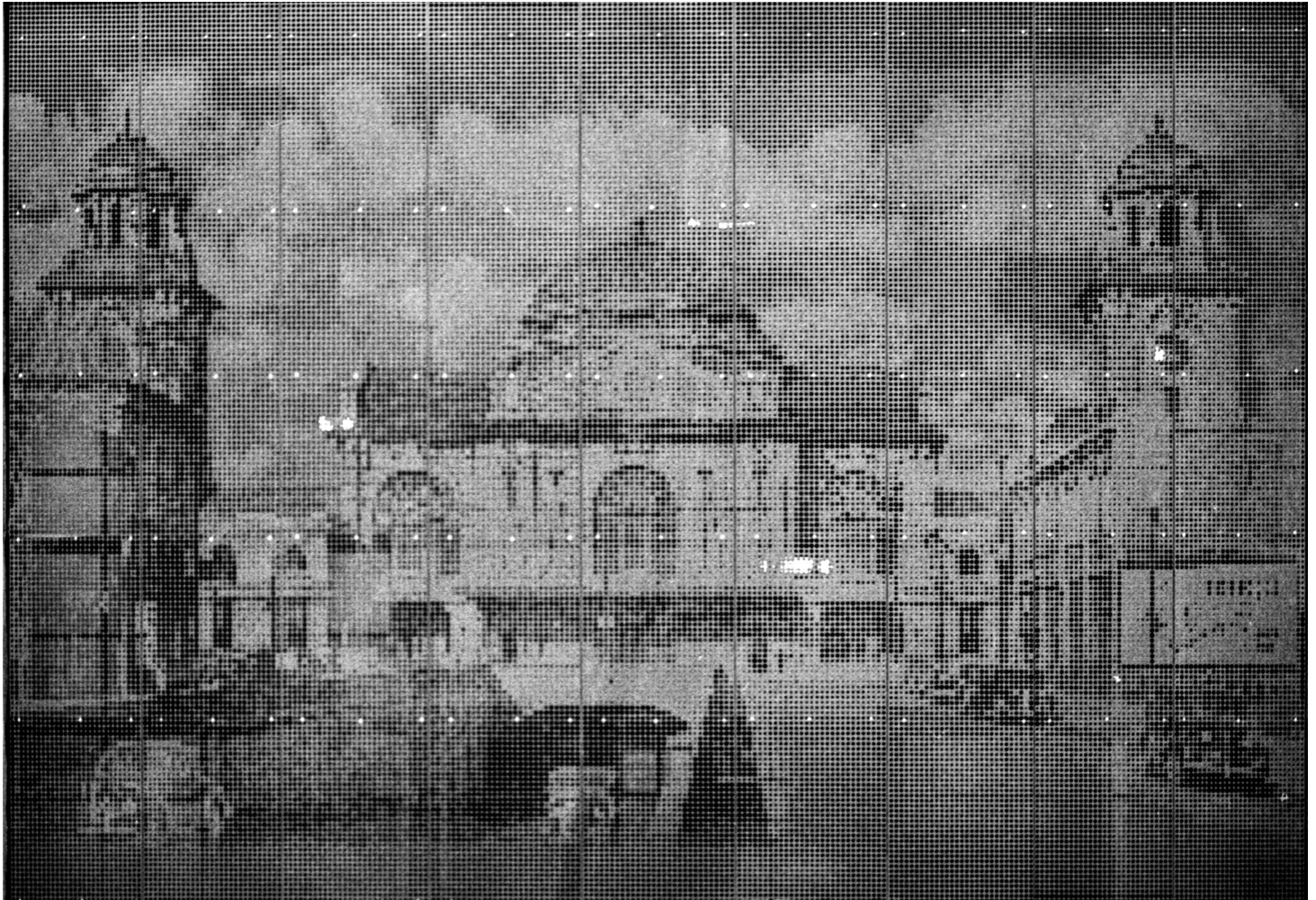
- ◆ C&S Departure Times: 10:00, 1:00, 3:00 pm
- ◆ C&S train moms ride free when accompanied by one or more ticketed coach riders.
- ◆ S&S Train departs every 20 minutes
- ◆ Food & Craft vendors on grounds

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

Partnerships

We would like to recognize all of you at the Mid-South Chapter of the Railway & Locomotive Historical Society for your continuing efforts to preserve railroading history. Through your effort, historic information has been saved and will be passed on to future generations. The sign program for Birmingham Mineral Railroad provides a chance for the public to learn how and where this railroad line once served. Without this program, that part of railroading history would surely fade away. HoD is proud to have in its collection the former Woodlawn Freight depot. This former L&N Freight Depot now houses the Boone Library. The library collection is constantly growing as we receive new railroad book collections from local families and friends.

METAL ART IMAGE OF BIRMINGHAM TERMINAL STATION NEAR THE NEW AMTRAK STATION



Metal art rendering of the historic Birmingham Terminal Station. Photo by Cliff Martin.

Many readers of *THE MID-SOUTH FLYER* are aware that Birmingham is home to a beautiful new rail station in downtown that not only serves Amtrak but is also an intermodal transportation center for Greyhound and local public transport services. The three-block Birmingham Intermodal Facility is located along Morris Avenue between 18th and 19th streets.

The new Amtrak Station is the fourth passenger station located within a two-city block corridor — this includes the original Union Station (primarily L&N), the first Birmingham Amtrak station, the second Birmingham Amtrak station, and the current Birmingham Amtrak station. It is significant that all four of these stations through the years (including the current one) have used the same loading platform and overhead structure (shed) that were built in 1930 as part of a track-grade separation project. Anyone living in the area and interested in historic rail stations in Birmingham should plan to pay a visit to the new station corridor.

One of the most interesting surprises to station visitors is actually just across the street. On the side of what is thought to be the oldest parking deck in Birmingham is a large metal art rendering of the famous Birmingham Terminal Station! This amazing art creation is installed on the side of the Jemison Flats parking deck, and the rendering faces the Amtrak station.

(As an editorial note, the famous and historic 1909 Birmingham Terminal Station, which was demolished in 1969, was located about 10 blocks or roughly one mile to the east of the new Amtrak station.)

The terminal station rendering is from a familiar photograph and was created by using computer-driven laser technology to punch small holes in sheet metal panels generating the image. In 2015, the completed panels were installed on what is actually the back side of the parking deck.

The artistic black & white photograph shown above of the metal art rendering was taken on Christmas Day 2021 and is the work of Cliff Martin. According to Cliff, the photograph is actually the result of a series of unfortunate holiday events. The original plan for Christmas was lunch at his family cabin on Lay Lake with his wife, Cindy, and Jim Pack, a good friend, who lives nearby on the lake. As timing would have it, renovation work on the cabin ran behind schedule and was not completed by Christmas.

Since Christmas Day was warm in 2021 and somewhat cloudy, the way photographers like it, the three decided to take a holiday stroll around downtown Birmingham while the city was quiet for the holiday. The photograph was a result of this Christmas Day outing!

Interestingly, the photograph was taken with a traditional 35mm film camera and a wide-angle lens. (For the photographers reading this article, the camera was a Nikon F6 with a 20mm/1.8 Nikkor lens. The light was overcast, and the exposure was something like f1.8 at about 1/60 sec. The shot was handheld on Kodak Tri-X ISO 400 speed film.) If you visit this site, the rendering is large. A 20mm lens provides a very wide view, and it barely recorded the entire scene.)

(Additional note: The new station began Amtrak service in February 2018. In 2021, a grant was received from the Southern Rail Commission to improve accessibility in anticipation of Amtrak restoring a Gulf Coast passenger rail corridor.)



Color photograph of the metal rendering taken on a sunny day. (Note vehicles for scale.) Photo by Cliff Martin.

MEMORIES OF WOODLAWN JUNCTION

Text and Photos by Marvin Clemons

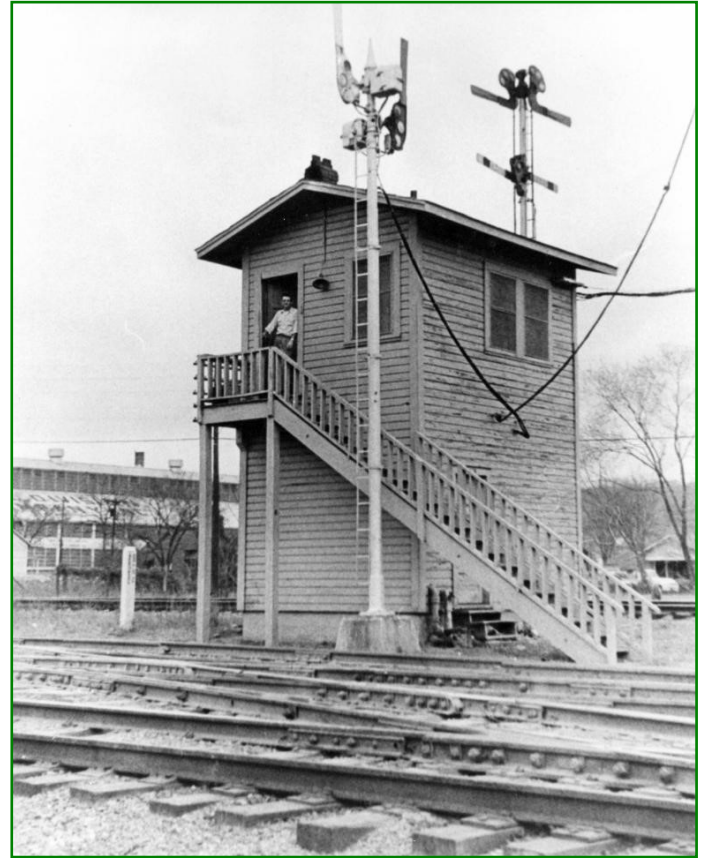
Editor's Note: The following article was published in "Birmingham Rails: The Last Golden Era" co-edited by Mid-South Chapter member Marvin Clemons. In this edited version, Marvin relates his experience as a young railfan learning the duties of a train order operator at the busy Southern Railway tower known as Woodlawn Junction, just east of downtown Birmingham).

In the summer of 1957, our family moved from my hometown of Jacksonville, Florida, to Birmingham, Alabama. Coming from the flat land and scrub pines of coastal Florida to a beautiful valley surrounded by rolling hills, I felt I'd entered a different world. Little did I realize the wonders it held for a young railfan just beginning to discover trains!

We arrived in Birmingham ahead of our household goods and were staying with friends in the Woodlawn area, an older blue-collar neighborhood on the city's eastside. We had just arrived and were barely out of the car when I heard the Siren call of a diesel air horn! I ran up the sidewalk to the first intersection with a view towards the tracks just in time to see the most thrilling sight my young eyes ever had ever beheld: Four beautiful blue and gray diesels lettered "Central of Georgia" leading a long freight past a two-story wooden tower.

Running up to the tracks, I stood and watched as the train clattered noisily over the crossing diamond until the red wooden caboose went by. As the caboose cleared, I noticed someone closing a long swing gate across the track where the freight had just passed. With youthful exuberance, I double-timed to catch up to him as he started up the steps to the tower. Following him up the stairs, I introduced myself and asked if I might come in. Next thing I knew, I was inside the tower, which was soon to become my home away from home.

From that memorable day until my family's return to Florida in 1961, I was a regular visitor at Southern Railway's Woodlawn Junction tower. My new railroad buddy, a tower operator by the name of Jack Gillespie, gave me "cub" status and began teaching me the duties of a tower operator, copying train orders, 'OS'-ing



Southern Railway operator Jack Gillespie stands in the doorway of Woodlawn Jct. tower. The tower served as a train order and block office at the junction of the Central of Georgia's freight main to East Thomas Yard with the Southern's east-west mainline.

(reporting) train movements, and best of all, operating the manual train order signals and opening the gate to let the Central freights cross over the Southern mainlines enroute to East Thomas Yard. Imagine the thrill of swinging that wide gate across Southern's busy double main track and giving a "highball" to the Central engineer pulling out onto the main line. Heady stuff for a 13-year-old!

THE CENTRAL OF GEORGIA AT WOODLAWN

Towards the end of the 1950's, Central's freight traffic consisted of six daily trains over the Birmingham District (or "P-line") between Birmingham and Columbus, Georgia. All hauled good tonnage, thanks to strong

connections with the Illinois Central and Frisco at East Thomas Yard. Eastbound freights for Columbus were required to receive a clearance card at Woodlawn Jct., usually with a bulletin order or two attached. Running orders were rare, since the trains ran on jointly operated double track to the junction at Weems, and then under Centralized Traffic Control (CTC) to Sylacauga. Westbound freights didn't receive orders for the short trip over to East Thomas Yard, but they did require a train order signal to enter the manually controlled block between Woodlawn Jct. and Frisco's Block #1 at 10th Avenue North.

Probably the hottest eastbound freight was #34, scheduled to depart in the early morning around 4 a.m. but usually called around 6 a.m. Next was #38 with an early afternoon departure, followed by #46 shortly after midnight. Inbound from Columbus, the first train of the day was #45, which like its counterpart #46 passed Woodlawn after midnight. Next was #35 due shortly after dawn, then

a long pause before the late afternoon arrival of #29, the “hottest” freight of all with blocks of reefers full of Florida produce bound for the Midwest.

In addition to scheduled freights, the “Mary Lee” switcher would ramble out towards Leeds in the early afternoon for an evening of switching local industries before heading back in late evening. The “Mary Lee” typically operated with a GP7 or RS3 as a work extra displaying white signals, and usually carrying a dozen or so cars. The conductor would throw off an “OS” and “cars handled” report in both directions for the Woodlawn operator to call in to the Columbus dispatcher.

On the passenger side, the eastbound *Seminole* departed Terminal Station for Columbus at 8:20 a.m. After pulling out of the Terminal and winding its way through the busy “Puzzle Switches” to take Southern's eastbound passenger main, the engineer would put the lovely IC or Central brown-and-orange E-units in “eighth



Central of Georgia F-3 #905 leads inbound freight #29 from Columbus, Georgia, across Southern Railway's Alabama Great Southern mainlines at Woodlawn Jct. This original black & white photo was colorized by Tom Alderman.



Central of Georgia's #10, the outbound "Seminole," with Illinois Central E-8 #4028 in the lead, roars past Woodlawn Jct. in July 1960. The "high green" semaphore signal can be seen in the top position of the train order mast.

notch" for a charge up Avondale Hill. Still a mile distant from the tower but approaching 50 miles an hour and gaining speed, the engineer would start calling for a clear train order signal with four long blasts from the melodic Nathan chime air horns.

Bracing myself with a firm two-handed grip on the train order handle and with butterflies in my stomach, I responded to the call for signals by pulling the lever with all my might in a steady sweep downward until it locked in the "clear" position. The engineer immediately acknowledged the clear signal with two short horn blasts. A few moments later the *Seminole* roared by, shaking the tower and blaring away for 50th Street crossing. The experience was quite an adrenalin rush!

The next scheduled Central of Georgia passenger train was the inbound *Seminole* from Columbus, which usually passed the tower on time around 6:20 p.m. for a sched-

uled arrival of 6:35 p.m. at Terminal Station. The Central's other passenger train, the nocturnal *City of Miami*, came through every other night at way past my bedtime. Eastbound for Columbus, it was scheduled to depart Birmingham at 10:50 p.m., passing Woodlawn around 11:00 p.m. Coming in from Columbus, the westbound *City* passed by in the wee hours around 3:05 a.m. for its 3:20 a.m. arrival at the Terminal.

CHANGE COMES TO WOODLAWN JCT.

The 1960s brought change to rail operations in the Birmingham District. The beginning of the end for Woodlawn tower occurred in 1961 with the rerouting of Central freights into East Thomas Yard. For years, Birmingham city officials had complained about frequent and sometimes long traffic delays caused by slow-moving Central freights blocking several major city streets between Woodlawn and East Birmingham. Faced with having to construct expensive

overpasses to alleviate the problem, Central and Southern reached an agreement for rerouting the freights through downtown. Instead of crossing over the Southern at Woodlawn, Central freights stayed on the doubled-track passenger main past Terminal Station and down Norwood Hill, turning off at Block #2 on the Frisco's lead for East Thomas Yard.

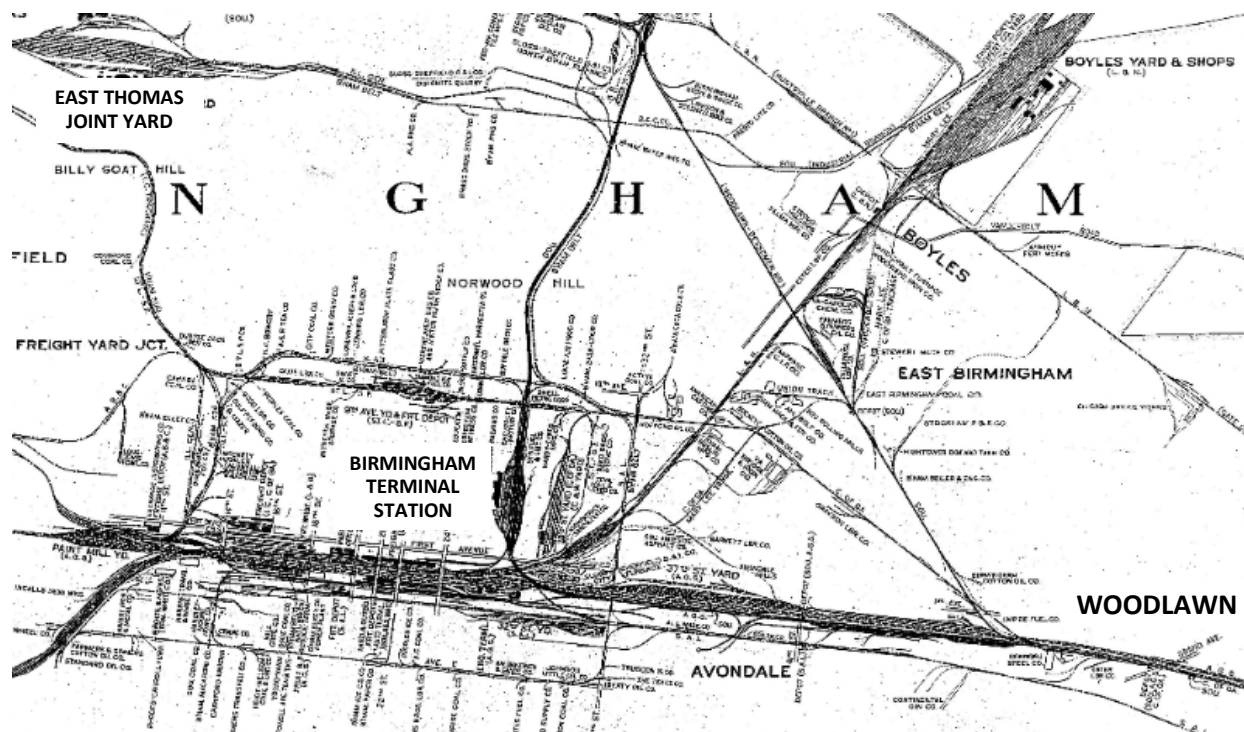
The new routing was not a complete remedy, however, since freights would still back up on occasion at Puzzle Switches and block several other busy crossings in Avondale. However, the rerouting did allow Southern to abandon Woodlawn tower, and in the summer of 1961 my youthful "home away from home" was razed to the ground. In the meantime, my family had moved back to Florida, so I fortunately was spared the grief of seeing the tower torn down.

On a visit to Birmingham the following summer, I returned to Woodlawn Junction to pay my respects. As I stood alone in the bare spot where the tower once stood, I was flooded by memories of the sights and sounds that once captured my youthful imagination. I glanced at the ground for some remnant of the tower, but there were no

identifiable remains to be found.

Taking one more look at where the tower had stood, I turned to walk back across the tracks. Just as I passed the spot where the crossing gate once stood, something shiny caught my eye. Lying in the weeds was the long steel bolt that had secured the crossing gate, no doubt tossed to the ground when the gate was removed. Surprisingly, the bolt was still shiny from having been held by so many hands, including my own, as the Central freights rolled by. Whether good luck or just coincidence, I always will believe that small token of Woodlawn tower was left there just for me.

Many changes have occurred to the Birmingham railroad scene since that memorable summer's day. Within a year of my visit to Woodlawn, the Central itself disappeared through merger with the Southern, and Central freights were moved to Southern's Norris Yard in Irondale. No more colorful lashups of Central's F3's, GP7's and RS3's would pass by Woodlawn. For several more years the *Seminole* and *City of Miami* still would roar by with their handsome diesels, but they too soon would disappear, victims of changing times in passenger travel and the coming of Amtrak in May 1971.



As indicated by the red circle, Woodlawn Jct. tower sat between the Southern double track main lines at the crossing of the Central of Georgia. The pair of double tracks north of the tower were the former Alabama Great Southern's "North" and "South" mainlines between Birmingham and Chattanooga. The bottom pair were the Birmingham Division's "East" and "West" passenger mainlines jointly owned by Southern and the Central between Birmingham and Weems Jct. Central of Georgia freights operated over the joint trackage, crossing over at Woodlawn Jct. and proceeding over their own track to Frisco's Block #1 at 10th Avenue North. They then rejoined the Southern main line to Block #2 in North Birmingham, turning off there onto the lead into East Thomas Yard.

THE MID-SOUTH FLYER



Columbus, Mississippi, Raiyard 1944. Source: <http://hawkinsrails.net>.



Columbus & Greenville Railway Roundhouse, Columbus, Mississippi, June 2020. Source: <http://hawkinsrails.net>.