



# THE MID-SOUTH FLYER



September – October 2022

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

## Chapter and National Website Addresses Have CHANGED

The Mid-South Chapter's excellent and devoted Website Manager, member Lamont Downs, has worked with the national Railway & Locomotive Historical Society's website manager as national R&LHS worked through a conversion of the national website to a new platform based on Wordpress. The Mid-South Chapter website is part of the national system, so Lamont worked hard to ensure that our chapter website would be converted smoothly to the new platform. Great work, Lamont!!

The only changes you need to be aware of are that the *CHAPTER* web ADDRESS has changed to the following:

<https://rlhs.org/WP/mid-south-chapter-birmingham-al-2/>

And the *NATIONAL* R&LHS home page web address has changed to <https://rlhs.org/WP/>

Be sure to change the web address in any places where you have either or both of these addresses bookmarked.

## Other News

### Outdoor Model Trains on Display and Rideable

If you are in the Columbia, Tennessee, area toward the end of September, plan to attend the public event (Train Meet) at the Mid-South Live Steamers train club where they have an extensive outdoor layout and operational model trains that you can ride on!

The layout and riding on the trains is available to the public only twice a year during the Meet events, and the Fall event will be September 22 through September 24, 10:00 am to 4:00 pm.

The website for the Mid-South Live Steamers train club and layout is as follows:

<https://www.midsouthlivesteamers.com>

The following link has the dates and address for the September Train Meet open to the public:

<https://www.midsouthlivesteamers.com/calendar/public-fall-meet-cmjch>

The following link is to a short information video about their meets:

<https://youtu.be/5Cienr-PPIQ>

The following link is to a one hour video about the club filmed 5 years ago:

<https://youtu.be/cUgaqNqrUy8>

## Model Train Shows

### October 28 and 29, 2022, Train Show

Smokey City Rails and Magic Valley TCA

Helena Sports Complex

Information at [smokycityrails.com](http://smokycityrails.com)

### 61st Atlanta Model Train Show and Sale

Gas South Convention Center

August 27, 2022

Information at [www.gserr.com](http://www.gserr.com)

## Member Moment

The Member Moment this month features Mid-South Chapter member John DiDomizio. 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](mailto:wjones1302@gmail.com)). The story should total 400 words or less and ideally include a photo or drawing.



Ken Boyd, Editor

*THE MID-SOUTH FLYER*

[kenboydphotography@yahoo.com](mailto:kenboydphotography@yahoo.com)

*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.

## MEMBER MOMENT

## Mid-South Welcomes DiDomizio as a New Member

*John DiDomizio*

New member John DiDomizio and his wife, Kathryn, reside in Evansville, IN, and have five children and one grandchild. John is the President/CEO of Indiana Business Railroad, operator of the Union City Terminal Railroad in Northwest TN. He has served in this capacity since July 2007, while also working in business development with Indiana-based engineering firms. In addition, John is a telecommunications/broadband business consultant and has served on various local Chamber and community committees involving transportation and infrastructure policy. Early in his career, he worked for a local gas and electric utility company in various roles including power generation, economic development, demand side management, integrated resource planning, strategic marketing, and broadband. He graduated from the University of Evansville with a Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering.



**Photo taken in Barstow, California, in June 2016 in front of Santa Fe FP45 95 at the Casa Del Desierto Harvey House Museum and Amtrak Train Station.**

John enjoys model railroading and is a member of several railroad historical societies including the C&EI Railroad Historical Society, L&N Historical Society, Great Northern Railway Historical Society, and the Santa Fe Railway Historical & Modeling Society. Growing up in Evansville, he was exposed primarily to the L&N and Southern Railway operations and rode on an excursion train behind Southern (TVRM) 4501 between Huntingburg and Princeton, IN, in the early 1970s. He has a special interest in post-War passenger operations up to the creation of Amtrak in 1971 and has ridden trains across the country including transcontinental and short-distance routes on Amtrak, commuter routes in major cities, and VIA Rail routes in Ontario. During his college years in the 1980s, he rode trains in Western Europe including the TGV in France and higher speed lines in the UK. In the early 1990s, he served on the Evansville Amtrak Task Force advocating for the restoration of Chicago-FL service utilizing the CSX line through the region.

The Union City Terminal Railroad (UCT) operates on a former GM&O mainline between Rives and Union City, TN, and interchanges with the Canadian National (former IC) at Rives. The line also includes a segment of the NC&StL line in Union City and is used as a lead track for several rail customers. The UCT began operation May 24, 2017, and has been focused on growing carload traffic, truck/rail transload, and car storage. In addition to the UCT, IBR owns a portion of the former C&EI Mt. Vernon branch right-of-way between Ft. Branch and Owensville, IN, and hopes to develop a transload opportunity on the line in the future. IBR is also pursuing other potential opportunities in the region.

# A “RAILS” DISCOVERY IN BIRMINGHAM

*By James and Peggy Lowery*

(In place of a Chapter Update, in this issue, we are including the following article about a new historic railroad feature in Birmingham.)

What do the following things have in common at a location in Birmingham, Alabama: Ghost Train Brewing Company, “Train Ride” outdoor building painting, former Southern Railway roundhouse, “Inception” outdoor sculpture, an active railroad spur, a walking trail, and a plaza in the midst of a walking trail?

If you live in the Birmingham area, you might have walked on the Rotary Trail which is a walking trail built on the former Seaboard Air Line railroad roadbed in downtown Birmingham. The western portion of that walking trail has been open for several years and extends from near Railroad Park eastward to across the railroad tracks from Sloss Furnaces National Historic Landmark where it terminated until recently. Now, the trail has been extended alongside an active railroad spur and then into the Avondale community.

We encourage you to walk this newer eastern portion of the Rotary Trail extension referred to as the Hugh Kaul Trail and to start your walk at its eastern end in the Avondale area at 2nd Avenue South and 38th Street South (plenty of parking along the streets). Shortly after starting your walk along the trail, in the middle of the trail you will see ahead of you a massive sculpture rising from the center of a circular plaza. Take a close look at the sculpture, and you will notice that it is made of historic 80-pound railroad rails. The descriptions and photographs included with this article explain the sculpture and the area.

When you are in the Sunrise Rotary Plaza in the middle of the walking trail and are enjoying the sculpture, imagine what this space looked like over a century ago when there were many railroads running through this area including many railyard roundhouses. One of those roundhouses was located where the plaza and sculpture are now. The shape of the plaza echoes the shape of the Southern Railway roundhouse that was here.

See the following description of this historic location, the map that goes with it (provided by Goodwin Mills Cawood), the description of the sculpture, and current photographs of the sculpture. (Note that the historic 1902 Sanborn Fire Insurance map shows the name of the railroad as Southern Railroad, but its official name was Southern Railway.)



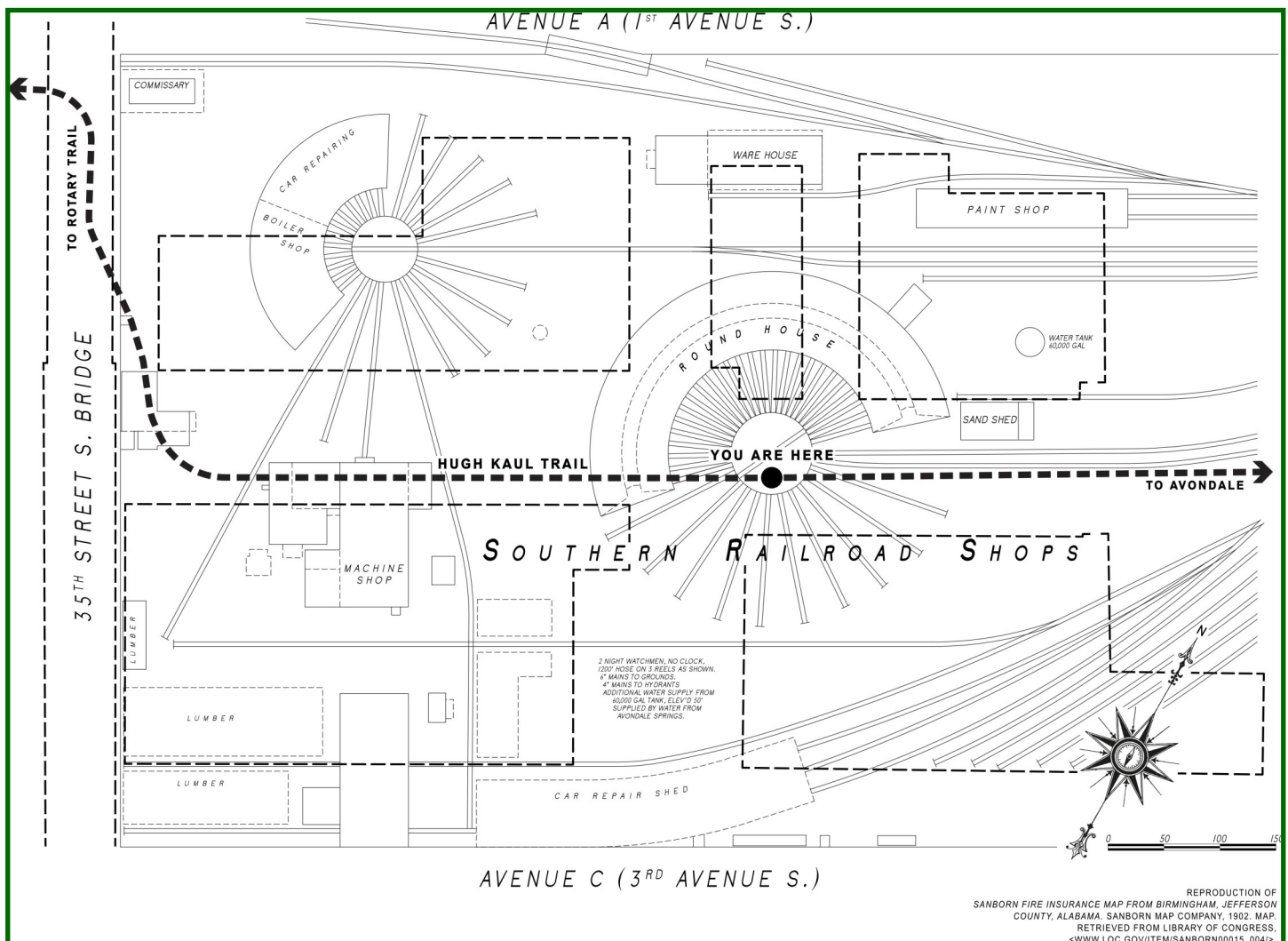
**“Inception” Sculpture on Sunrise Rotary Plaza.  
(Photo by James Lowery)**

**“History of the Site” sign in the plaza:** *Many years ago, our city found its soul in coal and iron-bearing ore, in limestone and in water. It found its soul in the rendering down of the earth, making use of stone to push the envelope of industry. It found its soul in iron. And a city that grew so fast they called it The Magic City sprung up around the industry.*

Shortly after founding Birmingham in 1871, the Elyton Land Company began expanding industrial development east toward Avondale. Several railway companies extended their lines along this stretch of what was called Jones Valley during the 1870s, and the result was a bustling rail yard that ran through the area. The rail yard and its machine shops relied on water piped from the natural spring at what is now Avondale Park. Operations at this rail yard were superseded in the 1910s by the Finley Rail yard in North Birmingham, and a series of warehouses replaced the railroad operations in this area over the following decades.

... In this very spot stood what was called a roundhouse, which featured a massive turntable that allowed these locomotives to be turned around.

Now located on this site – once so critical to the early iron industry – the circular form of Sunrise Rotary Plaza finds its inspiration in the roundhouse that stood here, in the logo of the Birmingham Sunrise Rotary Club instrumental in redeveloping it, and in the concentric ripples radiating from the central sculpture, *Inception*, created by artist Deedee



1902 Sanborn Fire Insurance map showing historic roundhouse.

(CREDIT: Goodwin Mills Cawood)

*Morrison. This circular shape having echoed through history now guides the transformation of a site once bustling with train traffic to a place of reflection along a trail shared by residents and visitors of a vibrant, modern Birmingham.*

*The revitalization and increasing popularity of this area have brought new businesses that continue to breathe fresh life into the city's historic spaces. This long-abandoned 2nd Avenue right of way has been converted into a multi-use greenway – the Hugh Kaul Trail along the Jones Valley Corridor – and serves as an important connector between downtown Birmingham and the city's eastern neighborhoods.*

*Take a moment to contemplate both the rich history and the new ripples that emanate from this plaza before using the Red Rock Trail System to discover the many unique treasures that truly make Birmingham the Magic City.*

**Sculpture Description:** “Inception” by Deedee Morrison. “Inception” soars 26 feet into Birmingham’s skyline. It incorporates a 5-foot steel sphere that represents a droplet of water and is encased in 269 sections of hand-cut historic rail steel, weighing over 14,000 pounds [7 tons]. The cut steel rail cascades around the sculpture at varying heights, replicating a sense of the geology of Jones Valley and honoring the contributions of our natural resources in our built environments. The colors of aged rail — ochre, bright silver — and the glossy blackness of coal speak to Birmingham’s industrial heritage. The center sphere of the sculpture is the inception or starting point of opportunity for our future — that moment where the act of creation begins. It acknowledges the water from the nearby Avondale Spring which brought the railroad and other industry to the area. It reiterates the source of life and fosters renewal. Our future is determined by how we honor our past. The reshaping of the environment and the human impact of that reshaping continues in Birmingham to this day. “Inception” encourages a relationship between the pedestrian, their interconnected natural environment, and our shared history; honoring the invaluable contributions made by the native abundance of the land and by the iron and steel workers and their families to Birmingham’s economic, cultural and industrial development.



“Train Ride” mural on building across from Sunrise Rotary Plaza.

(Photo by James Lowery)

While at this spot, also notice a couple of other “railroad” related things. The large building where the trail turns toward the railroad spur tracks contains the new Ghost Train Brewing Company facility.

And, running along the northern side of the trail at the sculpture location is a brightly painted building with a marker beside it explaining the “Train Ride” colorful artwork on the outside of the building. Some people may like what that marker has to say, but some may not. We will leave it up to you to decide for yourself. Wording on the marker: *“Train Ride” GFR Collective 2022. The impact Graffiti Art has had in paving the way for many of today’s street artists and contemporary artists is without question. Yet Graffiti Art, an often misunderstood art form, is overlooked when acknowledging its great influence. We hope that the “Train Ride” mural will prompt you to look twice, appreciate this form of art, and maybe even inspire you. GFR Collective considered the natural backdrop of the piece and “tagged” their names in a bold and stylized way, a nod to the roots of Graffiti Art.*

So, take some time out from your busy schedule to relax by walking along a trail that features local railroad history and that connects the historic Avondale community with historic Sloss Furnaces National Historic Landmark, and farther west to Railroad Park.



**Top of “Inception” sculpture showing rails and steel sphere depicting a drop of water.**

**(Photo by James Lowery)**



**Bottom of “Inception” sculpture rails details.**

**(Photo by James Lowery)**



# HEART OF DIXIE RAILROAD MUSEUM

*OFFICIAL RAILROAD MUSEUM FOR THE STATE OF ALABAMA*

## Have You Visited the Heart of Dixie Railroad Museum Lately?

We hope you are enjoying the Heart of Dixie Railroad Museum (HODRRM) page that we include in the Mid-South Flyer and the HODRRM “Cinders from the Smokestack” newsletter that we send to you periodically.

If you have never been to the museum located in Calera (south of Birmingham) or if you have not been recently, we encourage you to visit it and to enjoy, and learn from, the outstanding railroad and train equipment, rolling stock, restored train cars and locomotives, train cars in various stages of restoration, train rides on full size trains and on a small-scale train such as the former Birmingham Zoo train, museum and archives material, artifacts, displays, signal yard, gift shop, etc. The excellent HODRRM website at <https://www.hodrrm.org> lists a lot of the equipment and facilities they have in use and on display.

If you sometimes travel along Interstate-65 south of Birmingham, treat yourself to a stop at the HODRRM. If you want to plan your trip ahead of time, check out their website at <https://www.hodrrm.org> for additional information.

Keep in mind that HODRRM is able to do all the wonderful things they do because of their outstanding volunteers, and HODRRM welcomes any train enthusiast who wants to be involved in the work of the museum as a volunteer.

As is the case with other museums, the Heart of Dixie Railroad Museum’s existence depends on memberships and donations to support its work, its ongoing equipment restorations, maintenance of its trackage and rolling stock, archival hard copy and digital historical collections, educational services, public outreach programs, etc. Consider becoming a member or making a donation to support the work of the Heart of Dixie Railroad Museum.



### Event Dates

November 18, 19, 20, 25, 26, 27  
December 2, 3, 4, 9, 10\*, 11, 16,

(\*6:30 p.m. – Private Event)

### Departure times

5:00 p.m.  
6:30 p.m.  
8:00 p.m.

## VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

As with all non-profit volunteer organizations, volunteers are the driving force behind the museum. Without them, there would be no Heart of Dixie Railroad Museum. If you enjoy railroading or know of someone who does; come and join us. We have many areas to volunteer: Train Crews for both the C&S and S&S railroads are the most popular. However, volunteers fill many more roles: Ticket Agent, Librarian, Gift Shop, Car Shop/restoration, Track Gang, Signal Maintainer, Grounds Keeper, Fundraising, Marketing, Safety Team, IT/Radio Communications, and Special Events. Our board of directors and officers also volunteer their time. Whether you can volunteer a few hours or a lot. Thanks

# A REGIONAL DAYTRIP ON YOUR OWN

## Tons of Trains for All Ages

*Places to go in Alabama if you love trains*



Do you have a love of trains from the times when there were more passenger cars than freight cars? Does the lonesome whistle of an old locomotive evoke happy chills and memories?

Whether you're the train fan in your house or you have children who are, you can visit all sorts of interesting places in Alabama to ride trains or learn about our rail history.

Read on to find out about some of our state's amazing train excursions, kiddie trains and more.

[https://www.al.com/life/2022/06/places-to-go-in-alabama-if-you-love-trains.html?e=f911f4118b0aeb70a6c687195292c9ca&utm\\_source=Sailthru&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=TIA%209-1-22&utm\\_term=Newsletter\\_this\\_is\\_alabama](https://www.al.com/life/2022/06/places-to-go-in-alabama-if-you-love-trains.html?e=f911f4118b0aeb70a6c687195292c9ca&utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=TIA%209-1-22&utm_term=Newsletter_this_is_alabama)

### NOTES FROM THE EDITOR:

A special “thank you” to Marvin Clemons for finding and sharing this excellent resource!

In future issues of *THE MID-SOUTH FLYER*, we may feature some of these excursions. If you visit one of these locations, please share your images and experiences with the editor. Also, as you visit similar destinations in surrounding states, we would love to hear about those locations.

## FLIGHT OF THE REDBIRDS

Marvin Clemons

(Editor's note: This article was first published in "*Birmingham Rails – The Last Golden Era*" by authors Marvin Clemons and Lyle Key. It has been edited and illustrated especially for the *Mid-South Flyer*.)



The towerman's view looking towards the north end of the station on a typical morning. The Frisco passenger engines ("Redbirds") are seen parked on the left, while Illinois Central's "*Seminole*" is arriving on Track #9. The Seaboard switch engine in the foreground is switching cars for the morning "*Local*" set to depart for Atlanta at 7:30 a.m. (Photo by Stan Burnett)

Ask any railroader about an unforgettable experience working for the railroad, and you're likely to hear several good stories. One that stands out for me was the time the Frisco "Redbirds" took flight from Terminal Station and nearly got away.

The story begins on a warm August day in 1965. I was fresh out of high school and had recently qualified for the towerman-operator's position at Birmingham Terminal Station. On that Saturday morning, I was working the busy

day shift, with a morning rush hour starting with the 7:00 a.m. arrival of Frisco's *Sunnyland* from Memphis, followed closely by the departure of Seaboard's *Local* for Atlanta, the arrival and departure of Southern's *Pelican* for Chattanooga and Illinois Central/Central of Georgia's *Seminole* for Columbus, Georgia, all within the space of two hours!

Due to all the Frisco and IC activity, early morning was also a busy time for the Frisco switch engine. After switching out the *Sunnyland's* passenger engines, affectionately

dubbed 'Redbirds' for their bright-red Cardinal color, the switcher sorted out the mail and express cars for connecting trains before switching the *Seminole*. Following the *Seminole's* departure at 8:20 a.m., the Frisco switch crew completed their morning tasks by moving the waiting "Redbirds" from their temporary perch on the station's south end to the north end, parking them on a short spur known as the Ramsey track. Once parked they would nest there until shortly before noon, when the Frisco switch engine would disturb them from their roost and couple them to the waiting *Kansas City-Florida Special* for its 12:05 p.m. departure for Memphis.

### All was quiet, when suddenly...

It had been a routine morning at the station, with only a couple of wrong moves by the new kid in the tower. A switching error on my part had resulted in a ten-minute delay to the departure of Central of Georgia's *Seminole*, a real 'no-no' in an era when passenger trains ran on time. Fortunately for me, the station trainmaster on duty was

Mr. Forrest Hairston, a kind-hearted gentleman who understood that part of learning was making mistakes. After insuring I was sufficiently embarrassed to learn my lesson, Mr. Hairston wrote up the delay as due to "extra switching" without naming the real culprit. Such were the kind gestures shown by many veteran railroaders towards new hires like myself.

The station had settled into a mid-morning lull, and Mr. Hairston had joined me in the tower for a brief respite. Sometime around 10:30 a.m. I was sitting at the operator's desk listening in on the dispatcher's phone and staring blankly out the window. Suddenly something moving caught my eye. I knew no trains were about, so I got up and moved closer to the window for a better look.

### "The Redbirds have flown!"

To my amazement, the two Frisco "Redbirds" were slowly creeping down the Ramsey track without a switch engine in charge and heading for the mainline. I was witnessing a runaway train! The engines crept across 7<sup>th</sup>



Frisco passenger engines #2020 & 2021 are parked on Terminal Station's "Ramsey track" awaiting their next assignment. The bright red engines were affectionately dubbed "redbirds" for their cardinal-like color. (Photo by David Salter)



**A grainy newspaper photo showing Frisco “Redbird” passenger engine #2021 jammed up against a couple of boxcars following its escape from Terminal station. A quick-thinking switch engine crew averted disaster by stationing the empty boxcars in the runaway engine’s path. (Birmingham News photo)**

Avenue and moved out onto the station lead heading downhill towards the Frisco control tower a few blocks away at 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The tower controlled train movements along the 10th Avenue Belt Line used by Frisco passenger trains arriving and departing from Terminal Station.

Grabbing the phone, I rang up the 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue tower operator and excitedly shouted, "Runaway Redbirds coming at you!" "What?!!!" the operator exclaimed. "That's right," I replied, "they've rolled out of the Ramsey track and there's no one on board!"

With the engines slowly gaining momentum and approaching 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue, the Frisco operator quickly alerted a switch engine crew working along 10th Avenue that the crewless engines were heading their way. Along the way, the engines would cross a dozen city streets, several without crossing signals to warn approaching motorists.

### **Boxcars to the rescue**

Somehow the engines had to be stopped before reaching Billy Goat Hill, but as it stood the only thing standing in their way was a string of empty boxcars being switched on the Belt Line near 18th Street and the Western Grain feed plant. The quick-thinking switch engine crew ran ahead and set the handbrakes on the boxcars, risking the cars' destruction to prevent a worse calamity.

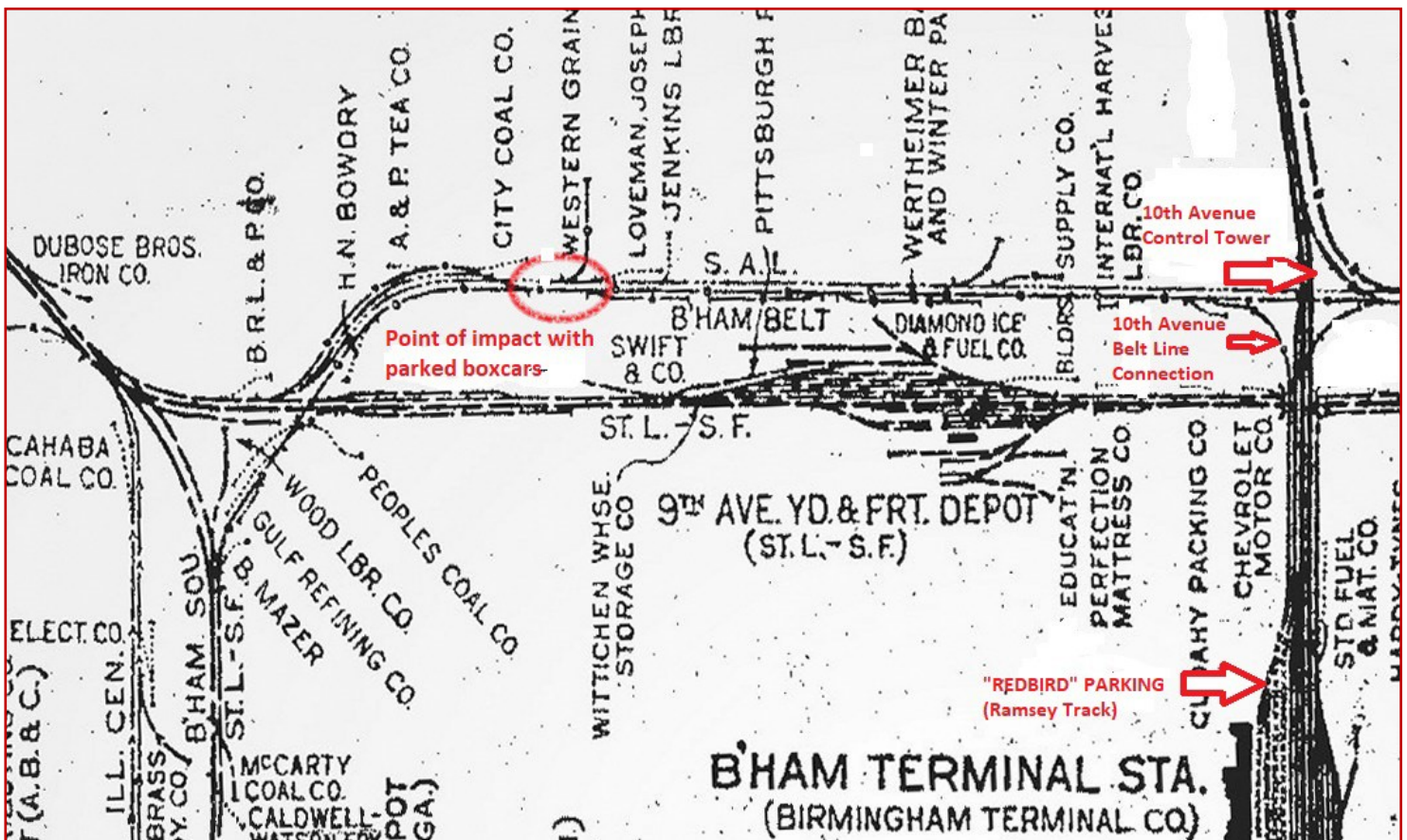
All the while the engines stealthily rolled down 10th Avenue until the waiting boxcars brought them to an abrupt halt with a loud **“CRASH!”** The boxcars were smashed like an accordion, but amazingly the “Redbirds” survived with barely a scratch except for a minor dent or two to the nose of Frisco #2021.

Less than ten minutes from the time they rolled out of Terminal Station, the short flight of the “Redbirds” was over. They had traveled nearly two miles across busy city

street crossings, miraculously without hitting anything or injuring anyone.

After an inspection, the wayward “Redbirds” were uncere-  
moniously hauled back to Terminal Station where they were  
coupled to the waiting train. By then I was off duty and  
missed sending them on their way, but later learned the  
“Redbirds” landed safely that evening in Memphis.

How and why the engines suddenly took off was never  
known. An investigation did reveal that they had been  
parked without their handbrakes or the track derail being  
set, which would’ve prevented them from escaping. As a  
result their wings were clipped, and no “Redbird” would  
ever again fly the coop from Terminal Station without  
permission.



"The "flight of the Redbirds" began at Terminal Station (lower right arrow) proceeding along the Frisco pas-  
senger main to the block tower at 10th Avenue North, before dropping down the connecting track to the Bir-  
mingham Belt Line onto 10th Avenue. From there, the engines traveled along the median of 10th Avenue

# THE MID-SOUTH FLYER



Interesting lineup of motive power at 32nd Street in Birmingham, near the new Hugh Kaul Trail extension of the Rotary Trail.

(Photo by Ken Boyd)