



**Season's Greetings!**

# *The Mid-South Flyer*

December 2011



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

## Registration opens for 2012 R&LHS Birmingham meet

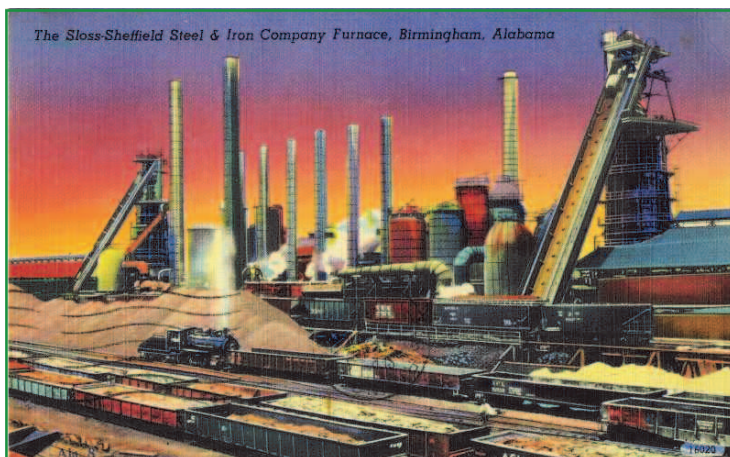
*“Birmingham: Railroads, Red Ore, and Red Hot Metal”* will be the theme of the 2012 R&LHS Annual Meeting, to be held in Birmingham, Alabama during May 17-20, 2012. Hosted by the Mid-South Chapter, R&LHS, the four-day event will feature tours of both historic and contemporary railroad and industrial sites in and around Birmingham. Planned venues will include tours of Sloss Furnace, one of Birmingham’s first blast furnaces built in 1882, the Birmingham district’s first modern rail hump yard, and a visit to the Heart of Dixie Railroad Museum, featuring an excursion over a portion of the former L&N Railroad’s Alabama Mineral Division.

In addition to tours, the program will feature presentations by subject-matter experts on an appealing variety of historic subjects including Red Mountain’s iron ore “Mineral Lines” and the Birmingham Electric Company’s extensive streetcar system. The program will kick off with a Thursday evening orientation to the Birmingham railroad district by local historian and Mid-South member John Stewart. An informal Friday night slide show will feature images from *Birmingham Rails, The Last Golden Era*. Co-authored by Mid-South Chapter members Marvin Clemons and Lyle Key, *Birmingham Rails* was chosen to receive the 2009 R&LHS George Hilton Book Award.

Complete registration information, including the meeting agenda and hotel reservations, is included in the Fall 2011 issue of the R&LHS *Quarterly Newsletter* and will appear on the R&LHS website at RLHS.org. Please note that membership in R&LHS is required for meeting registration.



*The 2012 R&LS Annual Meeting logo features the three elements that earned Birmingham the title “Pittsburg of the South.” (Digital artwork by Eric McFerrin)*



*The Sloss-Sheffield Steel & Iron Company Furnace, Birmingham, Alabama*

*Sloss Furnace*

*(See related article on Sloss Furnace, page 2)*

# Sloss Furnace and the Founding of Birmingham

by John Stewart

*(Editor's note: Mid-South member John Stewart is a noted expert on the history of Birmingham's railroads and their importance to the development of Birmingham's mining and manufacturing industries. John will be docent for the 2012 Annual Meeting tour of Sloss Furnace, and has prepared the following article to acquaint our readers with this historical Birmingham landmark).*

One of the highlights of the 2012 R&LHS Annual Meeting will be a tour of Sloss Furnace National Historic Landmark. The facility we will visit took its present form about 1929, but the original furnaces on this site date to 1886. It is a truly unique facility and is a "one of a kind," as so many of our blast furnace complexes in the United States have been razed.

Sloss is an amazing place to visit, and there are many stories, including more than one possible ghost-related legend, regarding the furnace. But there is more to Sloss Furnaces than its' colorful past, because the man that built Sloss Furnaces also played a key role in the building of Birmingham. Indeed, without Sloss, there might not have been a Birmingham.

Sloss Furnace is located at a crossroads of Birmingham's rail infrastructure. In today's world of mergers and acquisitions, it is the crossing of the CSX and Norfolk Southern mainlines. But Birmingham is a railroad city, a city created in the image of the New South, a city founded not on a river, but along a "railroad and mechanical reservation".

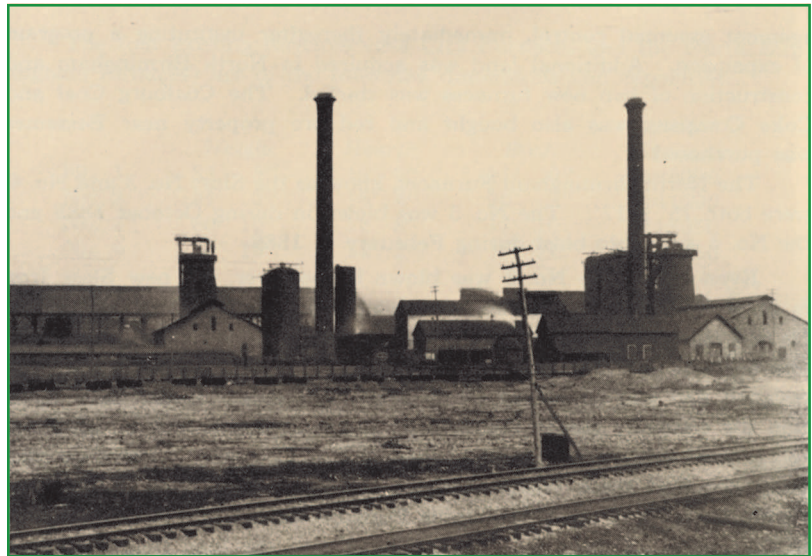
If you like railroads and railroad history, then Sloss is not only an iconic facility mirroring our nation's great railroad and industrial heritage. It is so much more. For Sloss is a symbol of Birmingham and it bears the name of one of the men who made Birmingham possible. For without James Sloss, Birmingham might not exist!

You may not realize it, but Birmingham didn't exist during the Civil War. There was a sleepy farming village, called Elyton, which was the county seat of Jefferson County. But there was no Birmingham. What was nearby was a vast wealth of natural resources – mineral wealth. Even the Indians recognized that the strange red rock in the "red" mountain could be used for paint and dye – it came to be called "dye rock".

There was a rail line from Montgomery through the new town near Elyton, which penetrated the ridges and valley of north Alabama and opened the area for development of the mineral resources. But just barely did they manage to do it. Funds were so tight that John Milner, who was the chief engineer was quoted as saying "more curves, more curves, more stiff grade" seeking to minimize cost of expensive grading, bridges and tunnels. So the new line snaked along around hollows and streams and hills and valleys.

The politicians in Montgomery had anted up somewhat and provided bonding to raise capital for the rail line. But in the tight times after the War, these bonds were not considered strong, and they were traded among financial interests. The South and North had a railroad, many expenses and little in the way of revenue. When interest payments became due on the bonds, one of the key persons demanding "payment or else" was none other than John Stanton, who had been outfoxed by Milner and his colleagues on the location of the railroad and town.

*(Continued on next page)*



*Sloss "City" Furnace, 1889*

The “or else” was this: if you don’t pay the due on the bonds on time, then we will own your rail line, and we will use it to divert traffic and trade to our line to Chattanooga.

What could they do? The State of Alabama who wanted the line, and had issued the original bonds couldn’t provide any help as they were nearly bankrupt themselves. The North and South interests tried to come up with a scheme to save the railroad, but it seemed hopeless.

It was James Sloss, then owner of the Nashville and Decatur RR, who put together a financing package based on leasing and capital by the L&N to pay the interest on the bonds and bail the South and North RR out of the position they were in. There is more to the story, but that is the gist of it and with a few more twists and turns, the South and North RR as well as Sloss’ Nashville and Decatur RR effectively joined the L&N.

Both the L&N and James Sloss had vision to help see the project through, and to open up the mineral wealth of north Alabama. In the meantime, the little town came to be called Birmingham, and rail service was established in 1871. It would be another 15 years before things picked up in business, and it would be yet a rocky time for the L&N, Sloss, Milner and the other characters in the story.

But Sloss did prosper, and he did come to Birmingham. When capital opened up in the early 1880’s, Sloss and other investors built in Birmingham. The Sloss furnaces opened in 1886, along with almost a dozen other ventures. Several key mergers and moves came to pass that effected the future of Birmingham which included not only iron, but eventually steel and some of the best rail made in the United States.

Sloss built his furnaces, then sold out to a successful retirement and the role of a senior leader of the Birmingham civic and business community. The furnaces that he founded, along with those of Woodward Iron, made Birmingham one of the top producers of “merchant” pig iron in the United States. Birmingham iron was made into every imaginable part of the new industrial wealth of the United States.

Birmingham went on to become known as “Pittsburgh of the South.” And railroads came to town from every direction. The last “new” railroad to reach Birmingham, the Atlanta, Birmingham and Atlantic from Brunswick, GA, arrived in 1907. There would eventually be eight Class I railroads in Birmingham, along with at least five significant industrial lines winding all over the Birmingham District, as the industrial region came to be known.

So, when you visit Birmingham, you are coming to a railroad town that became the industrial workshop of the New South, and a remarkable rail center. And when you visit Sloss Furnaces, you will see the dream of James Sloss and know that without him, there might not have been a Birmingham.

For further reading, consider:

Sloss Furnace’s website

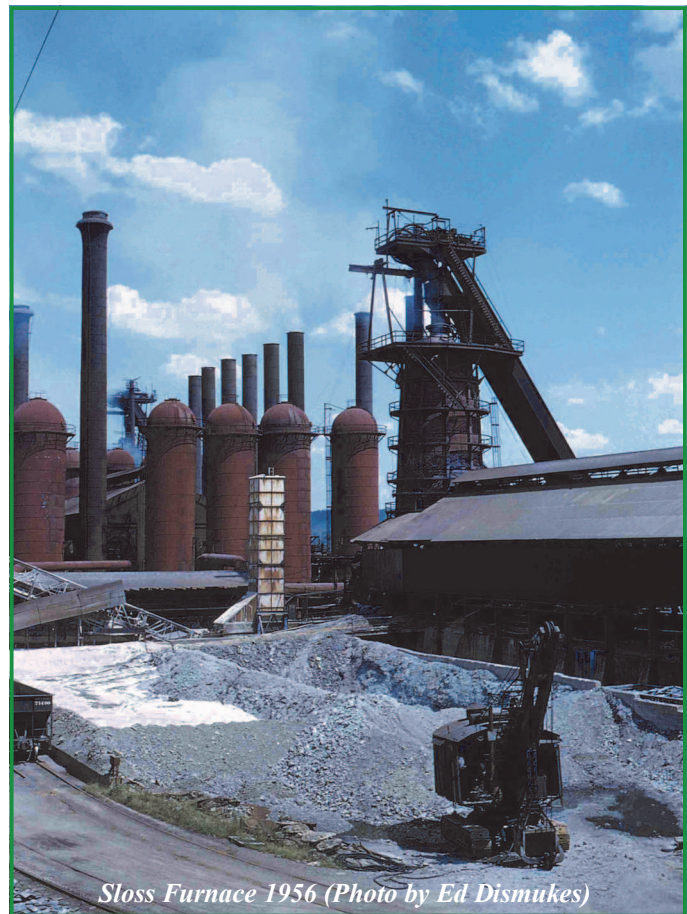
<http://www.slossfurnaces.com>

Kincaid Herr’s, Louisville and Nashville, 1850 - 1863

Ethel Armes’, The Story of Iron and Coal in Alabama

Maury Klein’s, History of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad

John Stewart’s website, [www.bhamrails.info](http://www.bhamrails.info)



*Sloss Furnace 1956 (Photo by Ed Dismukes)*



## By the Board

### Highlights from the Mid-South Chapter Board Meeting

The Mid-South Chapter, R&LHS Board of Directors met on November 5, 2011 at the Tutwiler Hotel, site of the planned 2012 R&LHS Annual Meeting. We had eight members in attendance, which is a quorum of the board. Attending were Marvin Clemons, Dan Ferris, Stan Burnett, Lee Singletary, Larry Kelpke, John Browning, Tim Smith, and Jeff Johnson. Chapter member Lyle Key was also present.

Prior to convening, the board toured the Tutwiler Hotel with Trisha Conrad, Director of Catering. We saw the main banquet/dining room, convention registration area, the room where some railroad societies will have a presence, the top floor area, and a sample suite and room. The Tutwiler has given R&LHS "main attraction status" during the weekend of the meeting. Following the tour, the board convened at 10:25 AM. Stan reported that the MSC bank account has a total of \$801.81, the Dollar-A-Month fund is \$247.33, and we have paid membership of 54 for the current year. We already have one paid new member for 2012, railroad artist Frank Crowe.



*Mid-South Board members attending the November meeting (clockwise, left to right) Dan Ferris, Larry Kelpke, Stan Burnett, Lyle Key (visiting chapter member), Tim Smith, John Browning and Lee Singletary. Attending but not pictured were Marvin Clemons and Jeff Johnson.*

The minutes for the August 27 board meeting were previously distributed and the minutes were approved. It was noted that the new website address for the MSC is <http://midsouth.rlhs.org> which had been reported in the minutes as [www.midsouth.rlhs.org](http://www.midsouth.rlhs.org).

Marvin reported on the September Open House in conjunction with the Leeds Folk Festival. We had good weather, many visitors, including the mayor of Leeds and some Leeds council members. The open house was the venue for Frank Crowe's new painting of the Leeds Depot. We sold 19 of the Leeds Depot prints, with half of the sales (\$285.00) going to the MSC as a "reduction" from Frank's Commission. Original commission cost of \$1000.00, less \$285.00 leaves a balance of \$715.00 owed to Frank Crowe.

Larry reported on the status of depot repairs. We have not been able to identify the paint chips for the depot color, but have "matched" the color at Lowe's. Jeff Falletta has arranged for a contractor to paint the building, and Lowe's is donating the paint. Jeff and Frank Little are to have the depot pressure-washed and replace the double doors leading to the station platform. Repairs to the platform will also be addressed. Jeff is discussing the repairs with the City of Leeds, and hopefully the work will be completed in time for the annual meeting in May.

Regarding the chapter's rooms at the depot, Marvin said we need to decide on how to configure our rooms. This is per conversation with Frank Little about walls, framing, photos, etc. The color of the interior walls does not have to remain as is. Marvin reported that several members met at the depot last week for an inventory of artifacts and display items, which is necessary for accountability to donors and the Leeds Historical Society, which serves as temporary custodian. Marvin also reported that there is a good possibility that R&LHS will help the MSC on chapter projects. This is through a program called "Friends of the R&LHS". An extensive letter from Bob Holzweiss, dated September 8, 2011 addresses that possibility. A copy of his letter to Marvin has been provided to each board member.

A detailed discussion followed regarding the May 2012 Annual Meeting. The R&LHS board has approved the meeting plans and the forthcoming R&LHS *Quarterly Newsletter* will carry the registration announcement. The meeting task list is now mostly covered. Ron Mele has offered to edit the meeting guide, and John Stewart has volunteered to docent for Sloss Furnace tour. John Browning reported that we will have two buses available with a capacity of 112 passengers.

Marvin proposed establishing a chapter Preservation Award, with the first award presented to Terry Oden in recognition of his work to move and preserve the Frisco locomotive at Sloss Furnace. Motion to approve made and seconded.

*(Continued on next page)*

## Obituary

# Mid-South member Frank Ardrey

Noted Southern Railway and southeastern railroad historian and photographer, Frank E. Ardrey, Jr., passed away on November 29, 2011, following a brief illness. Frank was 91 years old.

Known for his generous mentoring of those with an interest in railroads and railroad history, especially his beloved Southern, Frank eagerly shared his vast photo collection and encyclopedic knowledge of steam locomotives with book authors, historians, and enthusiasts. His photographs have been published in literally dozens of books, magazine articles, and calendars, and most recently were featured in the book *Birmingham Rails*, which the authors dedicated to Frank. In March 2010, Frank was honored by R&LHS with the Fred A. and Jane R. Stindt Photography Award in recognition of his contribution to the art of railroad photography.



Frank Ardrey

Frank is survived by his son Carl; grandchildren, Meredith Ardrey Baggett and W. Thomas Ardrey, and sister Elinor Ardrey Baker. A tribute to Frank's life and work will be published in a forthcoming issue of the R&LHS *Quarterly*.

## *By the Board* (continued)

Dan reported on developments regarding the first chapter calendar. Per Lee, one possible source (White River) has not responded. Craftsman Printing in Birmingham could be a possible source (they did the *Birmingham Rails* book.) Another company, "Rocky Heights" might do calendars and will be checked as a possible source. We would like to have 2 or 3 quotes to be presented at the next board meeting. Dan reminded us that we need captions for each picture. Dan, Lee, and Jeff are to work on the calendar make-up.

Marvin reminded the board of the upcoming election for chapter offices at the January membership meeting. Nominations are needed for vice-president (president-elect) and one board vacancy. In the absence of a nominating committee, the board as a whole is responsible for presenting a candidate slate at the annual meeting. Marvin requested that the board offers its recommendation for candidates at the January board meeting.

Marvin reported that the next mailing of *Railroad History* in November will include a 2012 membership renewal form. Our new MSC local dues are \$15.00. Marvin noted that R&LHS president Bob Holzweiss outlined a new R&LHS policy regarding advance dues remission to the Chapters, with the first installment payable by December 1, 2011.

Marvin reported on the status of liability insurance in connection with the 2012 Annual Meeting. National has event insurance for the hotel venues, but not for bus transportation and other venues away from the hotel. Insurance is an ongoing question and concern, and will be resolved at the R&LHS executive committee meeting in November. Lyle Key will represent the Mid-South Chapter in that discussion and report his findings. Marvin has discussed general liability coverage for chapter events at the depot with Frank Little of the Leeds Historical Society, and agreed that both groups should be named insureds on the City of Leeds' general liability policy. Frank said he would propose such action to the city.

The board scheduled its next meeting on January 14, 2012, hosted by Dan & Sam Ferris. The chapter's annual membership meeting will be held on January 21, 2012. There being no further business, the board adjourned at 12:05 p.m.

— Minutes submitted by Stan Burnett, Secretary/Treasurer

## *The Mid-South Flyer*

December 2011

*The Mid-South Flyer* is published quarterly 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 \$47 and include subscriptions to the Society's twice-yearly magazine *Railroad History* and quarterly newsletter, and the chapter's newsletter, *The Mid-South Flyer*. For membership information write to:

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Email: stan7742@otelco.net

News, articles, photos and comments should be sent to:

**Marvin Clemons**

65 Lee Circle  
Hayden, AL 35079

Email: mclem46@att.net

# Leeds Depot artwork unveiled at open house

## *Prints go on sale as fundraiser*

A newly commissioned watercolor of the historic Leeds Depot was unveiled at the Mid-South Chapter's open house in September. Entitled "*Leeds Passing*," the original artwork depicts a typical scene from 1943, as a Southern Railway steam-powered passenger train passes by the depot, while in the distance a Central of Georgia freight train crosses over on the landmark Leeds trestle.

The chapter commissioned noted railroad artist Frank Crowe to produce the artwork, which will be placed on permanent display in the depot's exhibit room. Crowe was on hand at the unveiling to autograph numbered copies of the limited edition print, which are available through the Mid-South company store for \$30.00 unframed and \$85.00 framed and matted. Prints will be available at the January chapter meeting, or by contacting Lee Singletary at [klsingletary@juno.com](mailto:klsingletary@juno.com)



*"Leeds Passing" by artist Frank Crowe*

## ***Mid-South Chapter News & Events***

### **Membership renewals are due!**

R&LHS national and chapter membership renewal dues are now payable for the membership year 2012 beginning January 1, 2012. National dues for both renewals and new members are \$32.00 and chapter dues are \$15.00, for a total of \$47.00. A membership renewal form was inserted in the recent copy of *Railroad History* magazine mailed to all members, and an extra renewal form is being distributed with this newsletter. The form should be mailed with full payment by check or credit card to the national membership secretary at the address listed on the form. Please remember to include payment for both national and chapter dues. Additional chapter donations may also be designated beside the chapter's listing on the renewal form. Prompt renewal is encouraged for timely reimbursement of chapter dues, which is the primary source of our operating income.

### **Annual Membership Meeting Called for January 21, 2012**

The Mid-South Chapter's annual membership meeting will be held on Saturday, January 21 at 2:00 p.m. at the Leeds Depot. The chapter's first meeting of the year is the designated venue for annual elections and the board of director's report to the membership. Nominations and voting for officer and board positions are open to all members in good standing. Positions open for nomination are Vice-President (President Elect) and one board vacancy. Any member interested in nominating another member or running for election may notify any board member to be included on the voting slate, or nominate from the floor.

### **Artifacts needed for restoration of Agent's office**

Restoration of the depot Agent's office is well underway, and several artifacts are needed to add authenticity to the room. Please contact Marvin Clemons if you have any of the following to donate or loan: Pot-bellied stove, large Southern Railway wall map, Southern Railway wall calendar from the 1940's or '50s, Form 19 train order pad, and a balance scale for weighing small express packages. Also needed are pull-down green window shades and a hanging lamp with shade for the operator's bay. Any items or furnishings that were original to the agent's office would be especially appreciated.

# September Open House Memories

On the third weekend in September, the Mid-South Chapter hosted our annual open house during the Leeds Folk Festival and John Henry Days celebration. Hundreds of festival-goers toured the depot and learned about the chapter and local railroad history. Our candid camera captured the following scenes of member volunteers and guests.



*Looking every bit the part, Bob Smith holds down the agent's office*



*The "terrific threesome" John Stewart, Bob Smith and Ron Mele were on hand to greet and meet visitors*



*Regular depot visitor Cary Atkinson (right) shows off his new toy wooden caboose purchased at the festival*



*Mid-South member Sam Ferris (left) leads a family on a tour of the agent's office*



*Artist Frank Crowe displayed his artwork, including the newly commissioned watercolor of Leeds Depot*



*Outside on the station platform, it was standing room only for the John Henry play*

## Holiday Classic



E. May Photo

*There's a familiar line from a poem by Edna St. Vincent Millay that reads, "There isn't a train I wouldn't take, no matter where it's going." One might add that "there isn't a track I wouldn't follow," for few sights are more beckoning to the railroad enthusiast than a railroad track fading off into the distance to places unseen. In keeping with the holiday season, we depart from our usual "golden oldie" photo for this winter scene of a rural branch line heading off into the snowy woods, stirring the imagination with thoughts of what lies beyond the hill or around the next bend. Can you recall a certain stretch of railroad track that awakened a similar feeling?*

### Where are we?

Thanks to Alan Dismukes for this truly rare photograph of a scene that's long gone, train, tracks, depot and all. Depot fans will recognize the substantial station as a standard design used by the Louisville & Nashville Railroad. That's pretty broad, so we'll narrow down the location to Jefferson County, Alabama (just barely) on what was then (hint) the main line of the South & North Alabama Railroad before the line was relocated just to the east. The original alignment can still be found if you know where to look.  
*So where are we?*



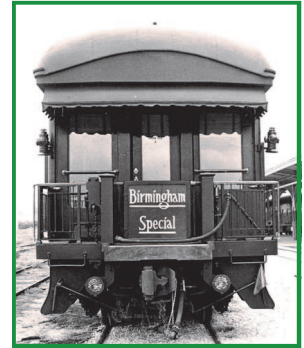


## From the Observation Platform by Marvin Clemons, President

It's hard to believe, folks, but another year will soon end and we'll begin our fourth year as the Mid-South Chapter. There's much I could say about what we've accomplished over the past year, and you'll hear more details from your board at the January membership meeting. But I believe our steadily growing membership and consistently high meeting attendance is probably the best indicator that we're on the right track, pun intended. Good programming is the mainstay of a historical society, and our chapter has excelled in attracting knowledgeable speakers on a variety of interesting railroad topics. Best of all, many of our programs have been presented by Mid-South members, proving our members have something of value to contribute.

It's a privilege of membership to enjoy our chapter's programs and activities, but these enjoyable events don't just happen. As someone has said, it takes a village, or in our case, it takes willing volunteers to keep our chapter alive and interesting. We all have some skill or talent and at least a little time available, and the coming year will hold many new opportunities for us all to contribute. A primary example is the R&LHS annual meeting in May, which will provide a tremendous opportunity to showcase the Mid-South Chapter to a national audience of our peers. Your board has planned a great program, but we'll need help to pull it off.

You'll hear more about May convention and other opportunities for your involvement at the January 21st membership meeting. Please make it a priority to attend the meeting, and learn how you can make a real difference for your chapter!



## Featured Member Photo



*Except for a few minor details like ditch lights and a horse on the nose, one could easily imagine this scene depicting a brace of Southern "tuxedo" F-units passing Leeds depot with a hotshot freight for Atlanta. But the scene is from 2011, not 1961, and the F's are heading up the Norfolk Southern's "OCS" (Office Car Special) en route to a VIP gathering at the Honda plant in Lincoln, Alabama. Credit Mid-South member Tim Smith with the nicely framed and well lit photo.*