



The Mid-South Flyer

January 2013



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

January program

“The Last Hurrah for Birmingham Streetcars”

Only a handful of Mid-South Chapter members can recall the extensive streetcar system that once criss-crossed Birmingham, let alone say they rode it. Mid-South member Lyle Key lived just a short walk from a busy streetcar line in Birmingham’s West End, and three different streetcar routes operated over the double track line on Tuscaloosa Avenue. Back then, Lyle could ride a streetcar 10-1/2 miles southwest to Bessemer or 9-1/2 miles east to East Lake for only a nickel!



“Ensley Express — Birmingham Electric PCC #814 operating on Route #27 Ensley. The Ensley line was one of four routes upgraded with the new PCC’s. (Barney L. Stone photo, Krambles-Peterson Archive)”

As the featured speaker at our annual membership meeting on January 19, Lyle will present a colorful slide program on the final years of Birmingham’s once extensive streetcar system. The streetcar system still was virtually intact when World War II ended, and Birmingham Electric Company began implementing its post war modernization program. While that program envisioned abandoning most of the streetcar system and replacing the streetcars with trackless trolleys and buses, it also provided for upgrading some of the long distance routes and operating them with 48 brand new “PCC’s,” the acronym for “Presidential Commission Cars”. Birmingham was the only city in the entire Southeast where PCC’s actually were operated in revenue service.

Birmingham Electric did take delivery of its new PCC’s in 1947, but unfortunately, its well thought out modernization program began to unravel due to circumstances no one had envisioned. Rampant post war inflation caused the modernization fund to be expended before the planned capital improvements were completed, the Alabama Public Service Commission denied authority to implement a fare increase until it was too late, Birmingham Electric Company was acquired by Alabama Power with a SEC imposed requirement that the power company spin off its transit division, and the City of Birmingham became downright hostile to the continued operation of streetcars. During the early morning hours of Sunday, April 19, 1953, PCC #812 made Birmingham’s last streetcar run from Ensley to the downtown car barn, and Birmingham’s fleet of virtually new PCC’s was shipped north to Toronto.

Time to renew!

January marks the beginning of an exciting new year for the Mid-South Chapter, and we want every member to be a part of it. If you haven’t yet renewed your membership dues for 2013, please take the opportunity to renew at the January membership meeting. Renewal forms will be available in the Company Store before and after the meeting, and payment can be made by check or credit card. And remember, with your paid renewal you will receive a complimentary copy of the first ever Mid-South Chapter Member Photo Calendar, sure to become a collectible. This offer also applies to new members, so encourage a friend to join at the meeting and receive a new calendar, while supplies last!

Mid-South Chapter News & Views



A congenial gathering of Mid-South members enjoyed a holiday visit to the O-scale layout of Birmingham modeler Joe Fiore. Seated at left is John Stewart with Tim Smith. Standing, left to right, is Dan Ferris, Ron Mele, James Lowery with grandsons Campbell and Jax Hendrick, Lee Singletary with son Josh, Marvin and Kayron Clemons, host Joe Fiore, and Charlton McArthur. Thanks to Joe for sharing his remarkable layout with us!

2013 Mid-South Chapter meeting schedule set

The Mid-South board of directors has set the chapter meeting calendar for the coming year. All chapter meetings are held on Saturdays at 2 p.m. at the Leeds Depot. Meeting programs and special events will be announced in the newsletter. Please mark your calendar so you don't miss a meeting!

- January 19
- March 9
- May 11
- July 13
- September 14
- November 9

Construction slated for Amtrak/ multimodal transportation center

The Mid-South Flyer January 2013

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 \$47 and include subscriptions to the Society's twice-yearly magazine Railroad History and quarterly newsletter, and the chapter's e-newsletter, The Mid-South Flyer. Membership applications are available on the Internet at www.rlhs.org.

News, articles, photos, and comments are welcome and should be emailed to:

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BIRMINGHAM, Alabama -- Construction of a long-discussed downtown transportation station for Amtrak, local and intercity bus service will begin this summer following federal permission to level the current city bus terminal.

The plan involves leveling both the current local bus station and Amtrak station across the street and replacing them with two glass-fronted buildings and a plaza on Morris Avenue. In addition, a grassy area just beside the current BJCTA building would be used a parking lot, according to the plans.

The multimodal facility will include all public transportation. The Greyhound station will move from 19th Street to Morris Avenue, joining with a new Amtrak building on its present site. The transit authority offices will also be located in that building, while the bus terminal remains across 18th Street at the current site.



Calling Mr. Boatright!

Controlling vegetation along railroad rights of way can be quite a challenge. Apparently one rail operator decided it would be quicker to tunnel through than to spray!



By the Board

Mid-South Chapter Year in Review

As a sign of progress, every organization likes to claim each passing year as the “biggest and the best.” While that may be a bit of hyperbole, it’s no exaggeration to say that by almost every measure, 2012 was a very good year for the Mid-South Chapter, with more program offerings on a broad variety of topics, completion of needed repairs and improvements to the depot, restoration of the agent-operator’s office, and record income from company store sales and donations. And lest we forget, right in the middle of it all, the chapter hosted the R&LHS Annual Membership gathering in May!

Your Mid-South Chapter officers and directors are pleased to offer the following report of accomplishments in 2012. As is often the case in small all-volunteer organizations, these achievements were made by a handful of dedicated members for the benefit of all, and we owe them our thanks and the chapter, our service.

Finance & Membership (Stan Burnett, Secretary-Treasurer)

From the vantage point of the Secretary/Treasurer, I can report that this has been an active year for the Mid-South Chapter, R&LHS. Income from membership dues, the receipt of our first large cash donation, Company Store sales, and the chapter’s share of the National Convention receipts totaled record revenues of \$11,300.13. With this infusion of cash, we were able to make several needed capital acquisitions including a multimedia projector, a high resolution scanner for archiving our photographic holdings, and the computer hardware to support the ATCS display in the Agent-Operator’s office. Together with the purchase of these assets, our total expenditures for 2012 amounted to \$10,640.39.

Our membership showed a slight increase in 2012, with 10 new members and 8 non-renewals for a net gain of two members. In January 2012 we showed a membership of 59, and as of December 2012 we had 61 members. It is very important that everyone renews as soon as possible in order to receive current publications from R&LHS and, of course, the Mid-South Chapter newsletter and other benefits of membership.

Programs & Events (John Browning, Director)



Shane Boatright

We had a wide variety of programs at our chapter meetings in 2012. After our annual meeting in January, Marvin Clemons presented a slide show of some of Frank Ardrey’s photographs taken around the Birmingham area. In March, our guest speaker was Mr. Shane Boatright, president of CEO of Boatright Companies. Boatright Companies specializes in railroad vegeta-

tion management, railcar repair, railroad safety equipment, crossties and timbers and owns the St. Mary’s Railroad in Georgia. Mr. Boatright gave us some very interesting information on the cost of building and maintaining railroad track and the future of high speed rail in the US.



Dan and Sam Ferris greet R&LHS convention guests

In May, our chapter hosted the RLHS national convention. Our members and guests enjoyed two days of great field trips to destinations such as Norfolk Southern's Norris Yard, The Irondale Café, Sloss Furnace, Railroad Park, Vulcan Park, Heart of Dixie Railroad Museum, the Bessemer Hall of History and a brief bus tour of the US Steel sites in Fairfield and Ensley.

In July, we took our program on the road with a visit to the Southern Museum of Civil War and Locomotive History. While there, we were given a tour of the new facilities that are being set up for the Southern Railway Historical Society archives. After we left the museum, the bus headed to Canton, Georgia for lunch and an afternoon of fun riding the trains of the Canton, St. Paul and Pacific Railway. This is a privately owned 7 ½ inch gauge live steam operation that graciously allowed us to tour their facilities.

At our August meeting, chapter board member Dr. Carl Marbury gave a talk about his family's relationship to Leeds and its railroad history. September 15th and 16th were the dates of our annual open house in conjunction with the Leeds Folk Festival. At our last meeting of the year, on November 3rd, we had a two part program. Lee Singletary presented a program on this year L&N Historical Society meeting in Nashville, and we concluded with an all member slide show of shot of Southern Railway 630's recent visit to the Birmingham area. We hope that a good time was had by all, and we invite you to join us in the coming year for more interesting programs. If you have a program of interest that you would like to present, just let us know and we will get you scheduled.

Exhibits and Displays (John Stewart, Director)

With restoration nearing completion, the Agent-Operator's office at the historic Leeds Depot now gives the appearance that the agent will be "back in 5 minutes!" In the past year some of the main additions include a timetable rack refinished by member Eddie Cook, with a wide range of historic timetables on display. In November, member John Peterson installed an ATCS (Automatic Train Control System) display showing real-time train movements through the Leeds vicinity, providing a "heads up" for viewing and photographing passing trains.

One of the goals in progress for some time has been the depot exhibit space. This includes the Agent-Operator's Office as well as the two waiting rooms. We have a good set of framed graphics on display in the trackside waiting room, as well as a finely detailed model of the Leeds Depot. The depot model is "framed" by two restored illuminated switch lights.



Marv Clemons and John Peterson with the latest additions to the Agent-Operator's office



Frank Ardrey as a young photographer in 1948

One of our key exhibit opportunities is a display of the Frank Ardrey photography collection. Our goal is to display these historic images on a digital monitor utilizing solid state technology. The projected cost for this and related equipment is \$2500. To this end, the chapter has submitted a solicitation for donations under the "Friends of the R&LHS" program, with early donations already totaling \$650.

The street side waiting room is used for the Company Store and includes a display case with items for sale, including vintage maps and books as well as a variety of donated items that come to us from time to time.

In the summer of 2012, the exhibit committee invited Mr. Philip Ratliffe, Curator at Vulcan Park in Birmingham., to visit the

depot and review our setting and progress to date. In particular, we wanted input from an expert in educational exhibits regarding development of a long range development plan. A number of ideas came from this meeting:

- Inventory the materials that we already have on hand in order to see what stories we can tell.
- Determine the focus of our future exhibit space – don't try to be all things to all people.
- Consider the opportunity to be a part of the regional rail and industrial history venues. This might include focus on being an educational venue for “kids of all ages” but especially school-age children.
- Consider partnering with Vulcan Park & Museum to do a small specialized exhibit from our collection. This would provide us with the museum’s exhibit expertise, gain community support for our planned exhibit, and acquire the temporary Vulcan exhibit as a permanent part of the Leed’s Depot exhibit.
- Consider the best use of the baggage room as part of our efforts – for example, it might be used as an orientation space for visiting school groups.
- Consider the long term uses of the caboose, which is now vacant and awaiting proper stairs for access.

Our next step will be to develop an overall master plan for the board’s approval to present to the membership for action, contingent on member commitment and funding. Steps are now being taken to seat a committee to complete this important action.

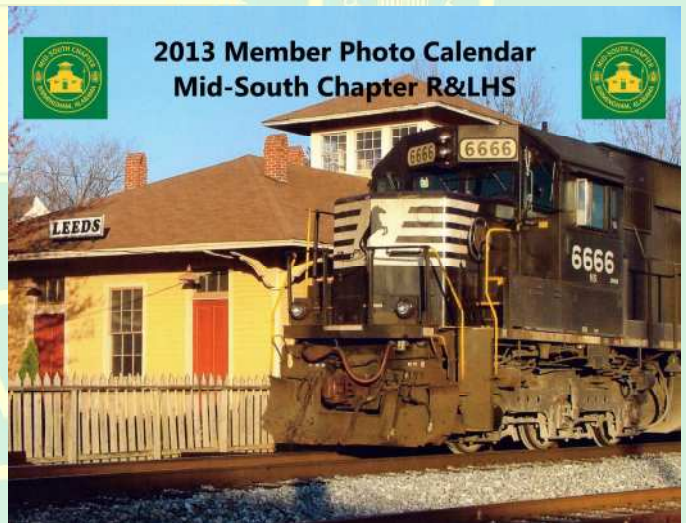
Company Store (Lee Singletary, Director)



The Historic Leeds Depot



© Frank Crowe 2011
"Leeds Passing"
This watercolor depicts the Leeds Depot in 1940s, as it appeared in the "Alabama Clip-Florida Special" pulled by green and gold Southern Railway No. 4 "Pony" locomotive #11155 passing through Leeds, Alabama on route to Birmingham. In the distance, a Central of Georgia freight train is seen in the background crossing over the classic 1888 timber trestle at Columbus, Georgia.



2012 was a good year for the Company Store. With acquisition of a secure store area, we now have a more permanent place to set things up and have them ready for sale. We still have a few copies of the Frank Crowe print from the original watercolor commissioned by the Mid-South Chapter. Entitled “Leeds Passing,” the scene depicts the Leeds depot in its original paint scheme from the early 1940s, with a Southern Railway passenger train pulled by a green-and-gold Pacific passing by and a Central of Georgia freight crossing over the classic 1888 timber trestle.

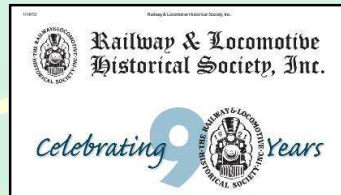
Still in stock are autographed copies of Mid-South member Ron Mele's ever-popular book on the former Birmingham Southern Railroad, the last surviving Birmingham short line. The store has also added new maps to our cata-

logue, and this year and for the first time we're offering the Mid South Chapter calendar featuring photos taken by Mid-South members.

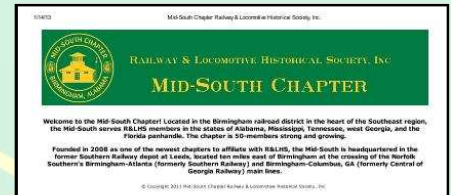
The past year was our best for sales at train shows. We participated in three train shows in 2012 and look forward to repeating in 2013. As always, we welcome donations of railroad related books and items for us to sell and raise funds for the Chapter.

Publicity and Media (Tim Smith, Director)

This has been a year of expanding our presence on the Internet. This is a logical move for our chapter, as our audience continues to move away from print to electronic media for information. For some time now our chapter newsletter has been delivered via email, which is not only convenient to Internet users, but saves us the cost of printing and postage.



The R&LHS Home Page at www.rlhs.org



The R&LHS Home Page at Midsouth.rlhs.org

Former Mid-South board member Jeff Johnson did an excellent job setting up the Chapter's web pages as part of the R&LHS website. Under this arrangement, our web content is maintained and updated by R&LHS, which limits our flexibility for updating our information as needed. As an alternative, the board has suggested that we create and maintain our own website on a separate server, which could be linked to the R&LHS website under our Chapter heading. This arrangement would permit us to have both a presence on the national website, while having immediate access for updating our content.

As of this January, we completed our first full year of hosting our own Mid-South Chapter page on Facebook (search on Facebook for "*Mid-South Chapter RLHS*") We went live with the page on January 6, 2012. While many visitors receive updates, rail news, and view photo galleries on the page, we would like to broaden our subscriber outreach. A link from our Facebook page to our website will soon be added.

This summer began the kickoff of another Internet presence for us, with our own YouTube page (search on YouTube for "*MidSouthRLHS*"). Currently we feature a video presentation of the 2012 national convention, and hope to add more content in time. It is recommended we identify a chapter member or two who can shoot video and/or edit video presentations for the chapter.

Our goal for this year is simple: Bring all of our digital publicity under one roof, with links connecting the website, Facebook, and YouTube, along with anything else Internet-related that we might add. In the meantime, we invite all to visit us on the Internet, and "Like" us on Facebook for all the latest Mid-South Chapter news and updates.

Governance (James Lowery, Director)

The "Governance" position on the Board of Directors does not usually involve "projects" or "activities" in the same way that other positions on the Board do. In addition to regular parliamentary duties at meetings of the Board of Directors and at program meetings, during the 2012 year, this position has assisted the Secretary by producing minutes of two meetings of the Board of Directors and minutes of one of the program meetings, and the position has researched the Internal Revenue Service rules concerning donations related to auctioning of donated items.

The position is currently working on another set of Board minutes, a proposed change to the bylaws, a draft policy for possible consideration by the Board, and paperwork that will be needed when items are donated to the chapter.

Regional Interest

Atlanta's Peachtree Station

Article & Photographs by David C. Lester

Considering that Atlanta was formed as a railroad junction in the 1830's, and grew to be a major railroad center, the passenger train stations serving the city have received comparatively little attention by historians and rail enthusiasts. While the Atlanta stations did not compare with the grand terminals in New York, Chicago and other larger cities, they each had their own character and proved to be good facilities for the traveling public. The stations that figure most prominently in Atlanta history are the old Union Depot, Atlanta Terminal Station, and Atlanta Union Station. There is one station, though, which has received even less attention in the annals of Atlanta history, even though it has continuously served the traveling public for 95 years, longer than any Atlanta passenger station, and will celebrate its 100th anniversary in 2018. This station, of course, is Southern Railway's (now Amtrak's) Peachtree Station.



Peachtree Station, May 1976

Although some railroads maintained their own depots during the first twenty years of Atlanta's development as a rail center, it was not until 1854 that Atlanta's Union Depot was built to serve multiple railroads. This depot was destroyed during the Civil War, and a new one, of similar design, was built to replace it in 1871.



Peachtree Station main waiting room

While this depot served all of Atlanta's railroads for about thirty years, Southern Railway announced at the turn of the century that it would build a large and modern passenger station, to be known as Atlanta Terminal Station. Terminal Station, opened on May 13, 1905, and provided travelers with a vast improvement over the old Union Depot. The new station also reduced the number of trains serving the old Union Depot. After another twenty years, community and railroad leaders finally decided that the old Union Depot had outlived its usefulness, and built a new Union Station, not far from Terminal Station, which opened on April 18, 1930.

While these stations dominated the rail passenger scene in Atlanta, Southern Railway had built a small suburban station in a fashionable residential section of Atlanta known as Brookwood. This station was built to relieve some congestion at Terminal Station, and eliminate some train movements for Southern trains that had to back into Terminal Station. In addition, the new station enabled residents of Brookwood to avoid having to go "all the way" downtown to Terminal Station, which was approximately four miles away. Of course, considering the personal transportation options in 1918, this trip was more of a challenge than it is today.

Southern chose prominent Atlanta architect J. Neel Reid to design Peachtree Station. Reid, who was a member of the firm Hentz, Reid and Adler, had designed many of the large homes in the Brookwood area, as well as some commercial buildings. He and his firm also did work in Macon, Georgia and in Florida. Reid and his partners were considered part of the Georgia School of Classicists, and had a profound influence on architecture in Atlanta and the South.

Peachtree Station opened at midnight on Sunday, March 17, 1918, just a few months before the end of World War I. Winston E. Gaines, who had previously worked in ticket sales at Terminal Station, managed the station. The station was well maintained, and early plans for the station show that it included a pharmacy adjacent to the main waiting area and ticket window.



Samuel Spencer, the first president of Southern Railway

While the main entrance to the station is at street level on Peachtree Street, the Southern Railway (now Norfolk Southern) mainline runs under Peachtree, making it a “through” station. To board the train, passengers walk through the station to steps that lead down to the track. When the station opened in 1918, it served twenty-one trains per day, with fourteen arrivals and seven departures.

In preparation for the 1996 Summer Olympic Games, held in Atlanta, the interior of the station received some remodeling, which included the relocation of the ticket window, the installation of a passenger elevator, and the glass enclosure of an observation area at the rear of the station. While these changes were needed to prepare the station for heavier traffic during the Olympics, some believe that they ruined a portion of the original interior aesthetics that Reid designed.

After the demolition of Terminal Station in 1970, a statue of Southern’s first president, Samuel Spencer, which sat in the plaza at Terminal Station, was moved to Peachtree Station and placed in a garden next to the station. The Spencer statue remained at Peachtree for twenty-six years, until it was cleaned and moved to a downtown park for the Olympics. The statue was also reunited with a base it had sat on during its sixty years at Terminal. In 2009, the statue, and its were moved to Norfolk Southern’s Atlanta operating headquarters.

Peachtree Station has served a wide variety of passenger trains since it was completed in 1918. Until Terminal Station was demolished in 1970, it hosted some regularly scheduled passenger trains that were able to bypass Terminal. In addition, for many regularly scheduled trains headed north from Terminal Station, Peachtree was a second stop for passengers who lived close by. After 1971, Peachtree was the only remaining passenger station in Atlanta. It served Southern’s remaining passenger trains, the *Piedmont*, which provided daily service coach service between Atlanta and Washington, and the *Southern Crescent*, the railroad’s flagship train, providing overnight coach and sleeper service between Atlanta and Washington.



The “Piedmont” awaiting departure from Peachtree Station in February 1975

From the late 1960's to 1994, Peachtree handled all of the Atlanta-based steam excursion trains that were run by the Southern/Norfolk Southern program. In the early days of the Southern excursions, moderate-duty steam power pulled thirteen-car trains to Macon and Toccoa, Georgia, Anniston, Alabama, and Chattanooga, Tennessee, among other places. In the latter days of the Southern program and the entirety of the Norfolk Southern program, Peachtree saw the excursion trains grow to more than twenty cars, pulled by some of the most powerful steam engines in the world.

When the *Southern Crescent* was handed over to Amtrak in 1979, the Amtrak *Crescent* took over the service, and it continues to run today as trains 19 and 20. Everyone agrees that Peachtree is too small to adequately accommodate the over 100,000 passengers that use it each year. Amtrak has been investigating options around building a

large multi-modal terminal in downtown Atlanta, so the future of Peachtree is uncertain. Thankfully, though, the station was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1976, so we don't need to worry about it being torn down. And, given that the Brookwood area continues to thrive as a residential and commercial area, chances are someone will find a good use for it. Until then, though, it will continue to host Amtrak trains 19 and 20, as Atlanta's senior passenger station.

References:

- 1 Robert H. Hanson, "Atlanta's Passenger Stations," *Lines South*, Volume 21, Number 2, Second Quarter 2004, pp. 38- 41.
- 2 *Ibid.*
- 3 William R. Mitchell, Jr. J. Neel Reid, Architect of Hentz, Reid & Adler and the Georgia School of Classicists, (Atlanta, Norfolk Southern's 1997) pp. 18-198. Atlanta operating headquarters.
- 4 Franklin M. Garrett, *Atlanta and Environs*, Volume 2 (Athens, Georgia, 1969), p. 730
- 5 Buckhead Heritage Society. (2009). Peachtree Southern Railway Station. Retrieved from www.buckheadheritage.com/node/44



Train time at Peachtree! It's a Saturday morning in April 1974, and the Southern Crescent has just arrived on its overnight journey from Washington DC. Meanwhile, ex-Savannah & Atlanta light Pacific #750 is easing into the station to board passenger for a round trip to Toccoa, GA



Mid-South members David Lester, Martin O'Toole and Dick Hillman at an R&LHS exhibit

Editor's note — Author, photographer and Mid-South member David Lester has written for *Railroad History*, the journal of the Railway & Locomotive Historical Society, and *Trains* magazine. David has contributed eighteen entries to the *Encyclopedia of North American Railroads*, edited by William D. Middleton, Roberta Diehl, and George Smerk, which was published by Indiana University Press in 2007. David has served as a co-author of the book *The Classic Eastern American Railroad Routes* (Chartwell Books, 2011), contributing six chapters. David is the Owner/Photographer of *NatureBook Photography*, where he focuses on creating fine art nature photographs and environmental education. We welcome David as a contributing editor for *The Mid-South Flyer*.

Golden Era Classics



A brief and shining moment — Relative to the long history of America’s railroad passenger service, the era of streamlined trains pulled by colorful locomotives lasted for only a moment in time. Named passenger cars were common during that “last golden era” before Amtrak, but the Frisco Railway added an extra dash of glamour by naming its bright red passenger diesels after famous race horses. After finishing its overnight run from Memphis in July 1962, Frisco E8 #2012, nicknamed “*Flying Ebony*,” is seen resting up at Birmingham Terminal Station with the **Sunnyland**. Credit Mid-South member Dan Gray with this classic image.

Where are we?

Our January program by Mid-South member Lyle Key will feature images of Birmingham streetcars during their final years of service. Here’s a preview shot of PCC #842 somewhere on Route 2 with the West End Express. The year is 1949, and we’re looking northeast as our streetcar swings off of a loop track to join the main line heading for town. The main line goes only a short distance to the left before it will also loop. There are plenty of other visible clues as to the location, not least of all a street sign and a familiar drug store in what was then a Birmingham suburb. One other hint: *Look in the book!*



(Barney L. Stone photo, Krambles-Peterson Archive)