



The Mid-South Flyer

Fall 2017



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

Fall Meeting

Alabama's Knox family, pioneers in railroad contracting and right-of-way maintenance

Alabama has many home-grown companies known for new and innovative products and services, including railroad-related businesses. One such Montgomery-based company, Knox Kershaw Inc., stands out as an innovator in the design and manufacture of railroad right-of-way maintenance equipment. For our November meeting program, company president and CEO Knox Kershaw will share the story of his family business, from its beginning as a railroad contractor and bridge builder, to its present focus on the manufacture of railway maintenance equipment.

Founded in 1924 by Royce Kershaw Sr., the Royce Kershaw Co. specialized in railroad track construction. Over three decades, the company worked on over 4000 miles of track across the country. In 1956, the company evolved into Kershaw Manufacturing focusing on the design and development of a growing variety of railway track machinery. The products took off in the marketplace, bringing the Kershaw family great prosperity.

After his father's death, Kershaw worked with his brother, Royce Jr., to run Kershaw Manufacturing. Over the years, Knox Kershaw served as vice president general manager-axle division, executive vice president and president. Then in 1983, he sold his shares to his brother, bought out the smaller original company, and changed its name to Knox Kershaw Inc. ("KKI")

KKI initially focused on contracting railway services with its initial 40 employees, eventually expanding into manufacturing railway track maintenance equipment. After the company introduced its innovative KBR 900 Ballast Regulator in 1993, KKI gained a higher profile as an outstanding railroad equipment manufacturer. When KKI's contract maintenance business was decimated by railroad mergers in the late 1990s, in March 2002 Kershaw sold the company's track maintenance assets to a British company. Rather than closing KKI, which was one option on the table, Kershaw decided to expand the company's manufacturing abilities. Fortunately KKI's manufacturing caught on in the marketplace, and sales increased. In 2008 the Business Council of Alabama recognized KKI as the Alabama Manufacturer of the Year in the medium-size category.

In addition to ballast regulators and cribbing machines, KKI manufactures tie cranes, track brooms, material handlers and other equipment. The company also builds custom equipment to meet specific customer requirements and remanufactures equipment. Among KKI's major customers are Norfolk Southern, CSX, Burlington Northern Santa Fe, Florida East Coast, Union Pacific, Canadian Pacific, Canadian National, Kansas City Southern and Amtrak.

You're invited to join Knox Kershaw at the Leeds Depot this Saturday, October 28, at 2PM and learn more about his company's Alabama success story. Doors will open at 1PM, rain or shine, so come on down and bring a friend.

(Article excerpts from *Business Alabama*, November 2013)



Along the Durango & Silverton narrow gauge

Time to renew your R&LHS membership! [Click on here](#) for quick and easy on-line renewal.



First Responders Special — On a fine fall day in early October, photographer Josh Putman caught Norfolk Southern's safety train out on the Leeds trestle enroute from Tuscaloosa to Macon, GA. The safety train is visiting 23 cities during 2017 as part of NS' Operation Awareness & Response (OAR) program, which provides first responders with free training on how to respond to a railroad incident. According to contributor Donnie Strickland, the train's appearance on the former Central of Georgia's "P-line" to Columbus, GA lends evidence that the line is still very much in use, with about a dozen through trains each week

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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 \$50 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. Contributions, article ideas and reader comments are welcomed.

*Marvin Clemons, Editor
Email: mclemonsjr@gmail.com*

*David Lester, Contributing Editor
Email: davidclester@comcast.net*

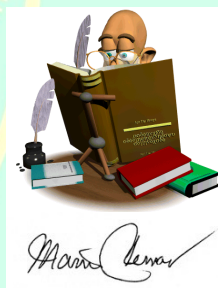
*John Stewart, Contributing Editor
Email: bhamrails@gmail.com*

Editor's Corner

Well, here it is autumn again, with all of its seasonal nostalgia. As the old holiday song goes, "it's that most wonderful time of the year," and for railfans a time to break out the old photos and share memories of trains and trips gone by.

With each issue of the **MidSouth Flyer**, we try to give you a taste of that railroad nostalgia, with a mix of articles and photographs meant to entertain and educate with the best of Mid-South railroad history and current events. Examples include two articles in this edition featuring John Stewart's account of rebuilding L&N's South & North Alabama Division, and John Browning's account of the recent celebration at North Carolina's Tweetsie Railroad, the surviving remnant of the famed narrow-gauge East Tennessee & Western North Carolina Railroad. We are fortunate to have such talented writers and photographers for contributors, and we hope you'll use their email link and let them know you appreciate their work

As you'll also note from James Lowery's column, the Mid-South Chapter will soon be celebrating its 10th anniversary. For those who began the journey in November 2008, it's a reminder of how fast the time has passed since our early days as a fledgling group of rail fans hanging out at the Leeds depot. We'll celebrate our anniversary throughout the coming year with special programs and a revival of the most popular articles from these pages, along with favorite photos and memories from the chapter archive. It should be a fun trip, and we hope you'll be along for the ride!





Mid-South Chapter Update

Reported by James Lowery, Chapter President

Historic Birmingham Mineral Railroad Signs Project

As you may be aware from previous newsletters, the Mid-South Chapter is helping sponsor a sign project to educate the general public about where L&N's Birmingham Mineral Railroad ran during its 100-year history from 1884 to 1984. With seed funding provided by R&LHS, the project is supported entirely by donations from individuals and organizations. Be a part of this worthwhile project by making a donation at the project's website www.Bham-MRR.com or directly at the [donation page](#).



To date, the project has installed a total of 134 signs in all six counties served by the BMRR. The latest four installations are as follows:

- ◆ **IVALEE** (a farming community in Etowah County outside of Attalla):
Sign #131 -- on Gallant Road beside the active railroad tracks of the former Huntsville Branch No. 2.
Sign #132 -- at the active railroad tracks still serving the Tyson plant. This is at the end of the active tracks at the eastern end of the Huntsville Branch No. 2. Previously, a sign was installed at the end of the active tracks at the other end of the Huntsville Branch No. 2 at Carson Road near Highway 79, so now both ends have the BMRR signs where the active tracks end.
- ◆ **MORRIS** (initially the Turkey Creek Branch. The L&N "mainline" was re-routed onto the roadbed of this branch, and thus the branch was short-lived, but its roadbed continued in use. We understand that some of the earliest mining took place in this area. The signs were installed in the area of the former community of Fedora, and the branch extended to the former community of Indio).
Sign #133 -- installed within sight of crossties sticking out from the edge of the street pavement on WEST side of Glennwood Road.
Sign #134 -- installed within sight of crossties sticking out from the edge of the street pavement on EAST side of Glennwood Road.



New Railroad-themed Pub To Open In Leeds

The Mid-South Chapter is looking forward to the opening soon of a railroad-themed pub in downtown Leeds to be named "Rails & Ales". The owners have purchased framed railroad-related prints for the walls of the pub and already have some railroad-related artifacts for their facility. We are looking forward to their opening and to continuing to work with them in the future as they further develop their railroad theme.

Center for Alabama Railroad History and Archives

The Mid-South Chapter has partnered with the Heart of Dixie Railroad Museum to form the new Center for Alabama Railroad History and Archives. Housed at the museum's Bill Boone Library in Calera, AL, the Center has established an online Alabama Rail Archive component that is digitizing, and making available on Flickr, historic Alabama railroad photographs in the Center's collection. Individuals are invited to donate or loan photographs to the Center for inclusion in the Alabama Rail Archive to make them more broadly viewable and available. Contact [David Coombs](#) or [Donnie Strickland](#) for further information regarding the Center or the digital archives.





Mid-South Chapter Update

Reported by James Lowery, Chapter President

LOOKING AHEAD TO NEXT YEAR

Consider Serving on the Mid-South Chapter Board of Directors

The Mid-South Chapter will be electing members of the Board of Directors at its upcoming January 2018 Annual Meeting. There are several vacancies on the Board of Directors that we would like to fill. If you want to be more involved in the exciting work of our chapter, please consider becoming a member of the Board. If you would like to be nominated to serve on the Board or you would like to know more of what Board membership involves, please contact James Lowery at JLowery@UAB.EDU or (205) 908-0179.



Expect More Frequent Mid-South Chapter Meetings in 2018

To help celebrate the chapter's 10th anniversary, the Mid-South Chapter Board of Directors has decided that beginning in January 2018 we will return to having Chapter program meetings every other month instead of quarterly. The schedule of our 2018 meetings is as follows – please add them to your calendar and look for program announcements as they are confirmed.

- January 13 – Annual Meeting (Program TBA)
- March 17 (Program TBA)
- May 19—Photographer David Hurt
- July 21 – Annual Picnic followed by a Program TBA
- September 15—Program TBA
- November 17 – Open House and 10th Anniversary of the Mid-South Chapter

10th Anniversary of the Mid-South Chapter

As noted above, next year we'll celebrate the 10th Anniversary of the Mid-South Chapter! A logo for our 10th Anniversary year has been created by Secretary Lamont Downs, and we are planning to celebrate our anniversary at each of the 2018 program meetings, culminating with an open house celebration on November 17, 2018. The Chapter newsletter also will run several special editions related to the chapter's anniversary. All will be invited to join with us to celebrate this exciting milestone in the history of the Mid-South Chapter!

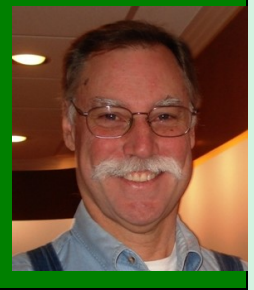


Railroad History

Two tracks, or not two tracks?

By John Stewart, with Thomas Denny & Lyle Key

(Email jstew@bhamrails.info)



If you are a student of Birmingham's history you know that it was founded at the junction of two railroads to be a New South industrial city. And you likely know that in post-civil war Alabama, there was precious little capital for the building of railroads in 1870. The South & North Alabama Railroad RR ("S&NA") had been saved from bankruptcy only by the efforts of James Sloss' Nashville and Decatur RR ("N&D") being offered, along with the unfinished S&NA to the L&N RR in a long term lease including the requirement that the L&N complete the railroad through the hills and valleys of north Alabama.

According to Chief Engineer John Milner's son, as noted in Armes "Story of Iron and Coal in Alabama", Milner would direct the layout of the line north of Birmingham to have "more curves, more curves and more stiff grade", in order to save money. Milner's wife is quoted in the same story as saying, "That was not the way my husband planned it, nor the way he wanted it. It was the way he just had to make it."

Birmingham did grow and prosper to the point that the original line was inadequate. In 1907, L&N President Milton Smith addressed a committee of the Alabama legislature describing the situation in which the L&N Railroad's South S&NA Subdivision found itself. This address was part of an ongoing battle royal between the L&N and the Alabama Legislature over rates, but that is another story. Smith opined: *"Take the North and South Alabama as an illustration. It is a road originally built with limited capital through a rugged country across drainage, and when opened for traffic there was not a community of 100 persons on the line between Montgomery and Decatur. The Alignment is crooked and the grades excessive, equivalent to more than 80 feet to the mile [1.5%]. The heaviest locomotive in use, having a tractive power of 35,000 lbs. can move but 740 train tons."*

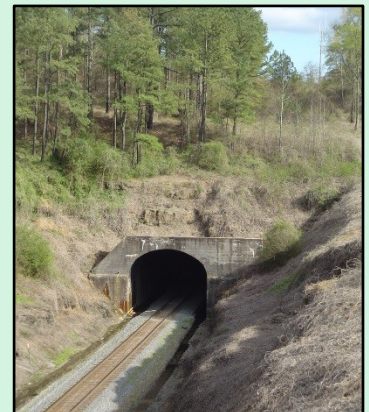
Smith's point was to seek to have the legislators understand that railroads must be able to respond to traffic demands if they are able to support shipper's needs and that improvements cost money.

By the time that Milton Smith was before the legislative committee in Montgomery, the L&N had already double tracked 14 miles through Birmingham from Black Creek south to Oxmoor. Most of this work was done near original location with moderate adjustments in alignment and curvature. Likewise work had been done from Decatur south to Flint about 5 miles in north Alabama, and from Calera south to Hardy (near Alabaster) about 13 miles providing double track, passing sidings and terminal facilities as reported in the *Railroad Gazette*. This included old Boyles Yard opened in 1904.

Smith outlined these recent improvements to the legislators, then he added, *"Traffic now pressing is greater than can be moved and if the present volume of traffic is to be continued and increased, it will be necessary to reconstruct the line, reduce grades and curvature, lay second tracks... the work of reducing grades and laying second track between Oxmoor and [Alabaster], 14.4 miles has been begun at an estimated cost of \$1 million."* Smith went on to say that the other needed improvements between Montgomery and Decatur would cost \$15 million.

Smith finished by saying that if capital could not be obtained, *"The carrier must restrict its traffic to existing facilities, that is, must refuse to undertake to move traffic in excess of its facilities."* Birmingham's growth would stop.

Of interest from an engineering standpoint is what and how the improvements were made. Fortunately the railroad press of the day has provided great information. The project mentioned above, between Oxmoor and Hardy (near Alabaster) included a new crossing of the Cahaba River and Shades Mountain. The old line had been completed before the Civil War to the south foot of Shades Mountain; the 75-foot deep cut through the mountain was not completed until about 1870. The new line was completed in 1908 and involved relocating the mainline, a new bridge over the river and a tunnel at lower grades through Shades Mountain to replace the deep cut.



It is noted above that improvements had been completed from Black Creek south through Birmingham to Oxmoor. Black Creek is north of Boyles Yard and near New Castle, John Milner's coal development built to assist the fledgling S&NA to develop new traffic. From New Castle northward the original line swung to the northwest along Cunningham Creek and passed through some of the earliest coal mining areas of Birmingham at Morris and Warrior, crossing the Locust Fork of the Warrior River and traversing valleys to gain ground over the ridges, crossing the Mulberry Fork of the Warrior River toward Cullman.

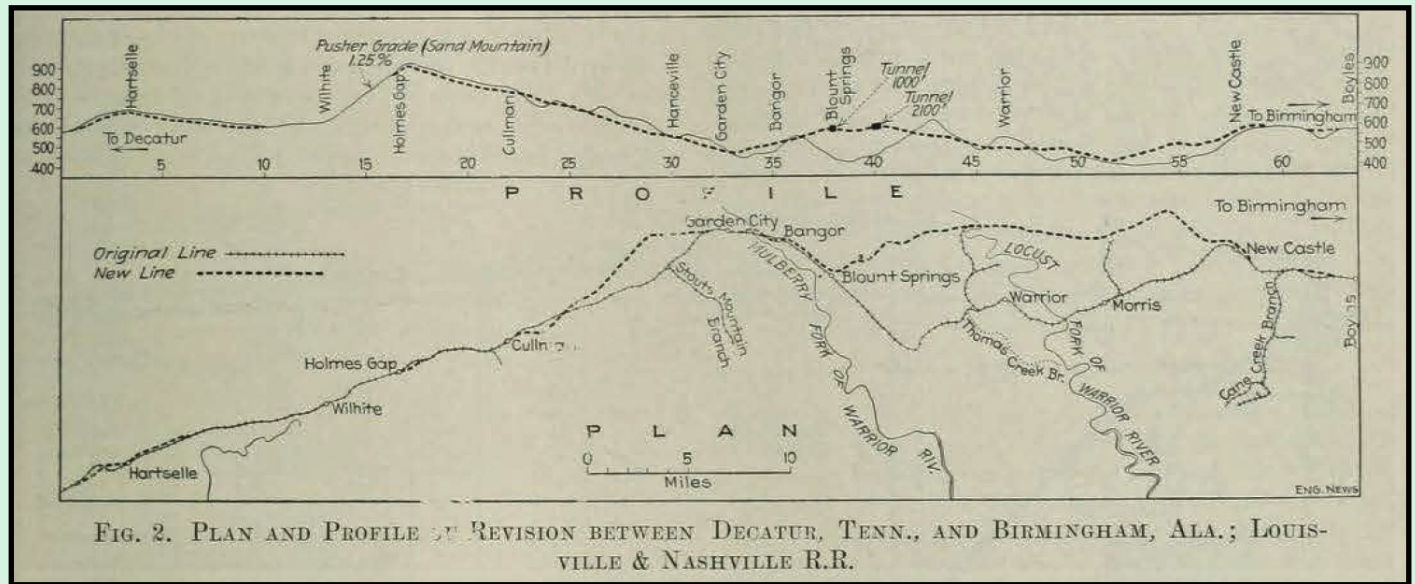


FIG. 2. PLAN AND PROFILE OF REVISION BETWEEN DECATUR, TENN., AND BIRMINGHAM, ALA.; LOUISVILLE & NASHVILLE R.R.

It is in this area that the L&N completed one of the most ambitious improvements between Birmingham and Decatur. This was part of a larger "grade revision" project that extended from just north of Nashville, TN, south to Decatur, and then on south through Birmingham to Calera.

Briefly, the project in Tennessee included a new line to bypass Nashville, cross the Cumberland River, build Radnor Yards, and a new grade at present day Brentwood which lowered the line 45 feet, and may still be seen adjacent to the Brentwood interchange on I-65.

From Brentwood the L&N built a new route 98 miles south to Athens, AL. This "new line" would supplement the original Nashville & Decatur RR (N&D) built before the Civil War by James Sloss. The new line included two tunnels and a pusher district of 0.9% for some 6 miles. The new line was planned for freight traffic so the old N&D line could be used for mostly passenger traffic and local freight. This effectively created a double track line from Nashville to Athens.

From Athens to Decatur the line was relatively flat but on swampy terrain near the Tennessee River. Bids received were higher than the L&N wanted to pay, so this line was built by company forces. Equipment was acquired for \$85,000 that included an Atlantic Steam Shovel, self-propelled, 10 air operated dump cars, a modified tender to serve the shovel and provide a workshop platform, an all steel Bucyrus pile driver, a Jordan spreader, and a caboose workshop car. This work train used small locomotives to shuttle the dump cars as required. The Atlantic shovel was self-propelled and equipped with air brakes. According to *The Excavating Engineer*, this outfit was very successful and saved enough money compared to bids received to pay for the equipment. The total excavation on this line segment was 385,000 cubic yards at the "Tanner cut" which was then used to build new fill on the swamp areas north of the Tennessee River.

The L&N didn't have a bridge over the Tennessee River at Decatur; L&N (then and now) had trackage rights over the Southern's bridge. The reconstruction improved the bridge approach location on the north side of the river for L&N. On the south side of the Tennessee River, L&N had already built extensive facilities at New Decatur, south of Decatur including yards and shops.

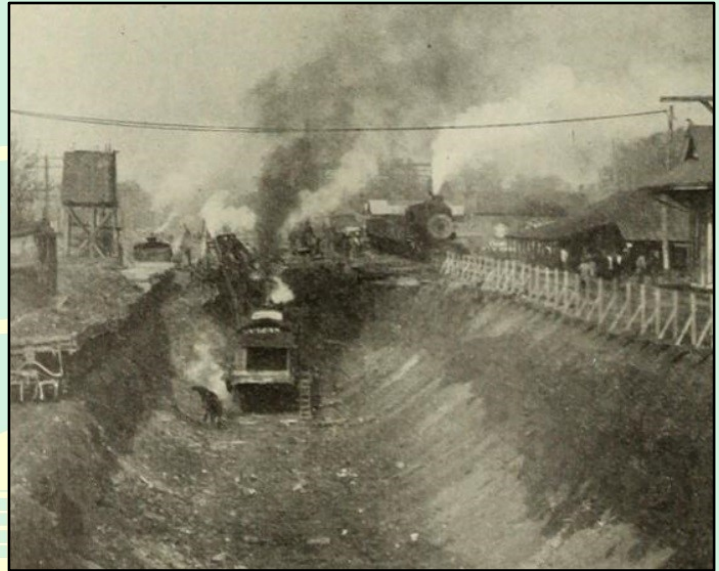
South of Decatur for the first 20 miles the work was not remarkable. It did improve grades and alignment to some degree. If you drive I-65 frequently, north of the Lacon exit, you may have noticed a siding in the trees on the east side of the

interstate that often holds a locomotive. This is the pusher for the controlling southbound grade on the L&N at Sand Mountain from Wilhoite to Holmes Gap. The grade is 1.25%; engineers at the time couldn't find a way to avoid it. The southbound pusher grade up the mountain is about 5 miles long.

On the south side, the northbound grade is about 12 miles, but at a more manageable grade of 0.5%. The town of Cullman is located on this segment of line. Here the L&N decided to lower the old line some 20 feet right through town. This required staged construction, relocation of the station and freight house and the construction of 5 street overpasses.

These five overpasses were reinforced concrete with sidewalks on each side. The loading was designed for a 35,000 lb. road roller plus 100 lb. per square foot. Today three of the original bridges over the railroad are still in use, but are posted at 10-ton total weight, including school buses. Note that a full size school bus weighs about 16 tons empty.

South of Cullman there were significant engineering issues to be addressed. Most of the old line from Cullman to Birmingham was relocated to a completely new alignment. Much of the remaining line was changed vertically so that for practical purposes, it was all new line. The primary obstacles were the ridges at Blount Mountain and Hayden, the climb to these ridges and the major water crossings at Mulberry Fork and Locust Fork of the Black Warrior River as well as the crossing of Gurley Creek. In addition there were many smaller streams and creeks to cross.



It is worthy of note that when the original line of the S&NA was planned in the 1850s, it was determined that it would be a line crossing ridge and valley terrain. The mineral wealth of this district was well known and Chief Engineer John Milner knew that the original investment for the main line would be great, but that the extension of spurs and branch lines to the future mines would be easier to build when the time came. The original competitor of the S&NA, the Alabama & Tennessee River connected Meridian MS with Chattanooga and followed a much easier valley route for much of its length. As it turned out, that line, which became the Alabama Great Southern did not serve nearly the raw material traffic from the mines of the Birmingham District as the L&N.

The new line and grade was planned to climb the side of Blount Mountain, heading southwest. This line followed the original line but at higher elevation to ascend the "mountain". After climbing the line turned south and two tunnels were bored. The first, Blount Mountain, is about 1000 feet long and is unlined, being in good rock. The tunnel was built from the bottom up, that is, the boring started at the track level and worked upward as forward progress was made.

The second tunnel, at Hayden, is about 2100 feet long but was in less sound rock and had to be concrete lined. It was built from near the top and then excavated down to the floor as forward progress was made. The roof was lined and then then as work progressed downward the sides are cut and lined; the upper portion has a footing behind the top of the side walls. The south end of the Hayden tunnel encountered such poor rock that the portal was built about 150 feet into daylight, the tunnel constructed and then filled to prevent slides from coming over the top of the portal.

It is interesting to note that compressed air was used for drilling equipment and that the contractor had an air compressor plant on the old line, using iron pipe to take the compressed air to Blount tunnel and then on to Hayden, a total distance of about three miles.

South of Hayden tunnel, the line followed a ravine and stream bed going downhill towards the south. The tunnel material was used to build a long fill coming down the south side of the mountain.

The three major water crossings mentioned above are still standing. The Mulberry Fork bridge is north of the two tunnels described above. It consists of three girder spans, three deck truss spans and a girder span, all open deck and all on a 3° curve. The spans are 70'-35'-70'-118'-146'-118'-70' (rounded). The concrete piers for the truss spans are about 60 feet tall. This handsome bridge is visible from the old highway looking east, and has a curved lower cord on the main truss span.

The Locust Fork bridge is on tangent alignment and is also a combination of one deck truss span with deck girder and tower approaches. The third major structure on the relocated route is at Gurley Creek. This is a tower trestle structure with 7 plate girder spans and 6 each 40' tower spans.

A number of concrete arch spans were constructed as part of this project; concrete had certainly come into its own by this time period. Earlier structures would have been constructed of cut stone masonry, including arches. These may be found on the original routes of the S&NA as well as the N&D, as well as stacked stone box structures. The Ross Bridge stone arch culvert in Hoover, AL has become "famous," These improvements were completed by the time the United States entered WWI. Railroad operations continued through the twenties and languished through the depression years. Then the onset of WWII brought growth in traffic and industrial development.



Mulberry Fork Bridge



Birmingham Division CTC control panel

Seeking new operating efficiencies, the L&N implemented Centralized Train Control (CTC) which involves the use of electro-mechanical systems to enable one operator to control signals and track switches (turnouts) on a large segment of railroad. According to Murray Klein's *The History of the Louisville & Nashville Railroad*, the L&N's first CTC installation was the 96 miles between Brentwood, TN, south of Radnor Yards near Nashville to Athens, AL. This improvement was accomplished in June, 1942. Subsequent installations focused on single track lines, as shown on this 1956 map from *Railway Signaling* magazine.

Typically, installation of CTC on single track lines enabled fewer passing sidings, fewer block and siding signals, and less operating and maintenance staff. The double track between Athens and Calera in Alabama was one of the last segments to receive CTC operated from L&N's Birmingham Division headquarters near Boyles Yard. As was typical, the efficiencies of CTC enabled the railroad to remove double

track, and this was accomplished by 1963 (Klein) when the entire mainline from Cincinnati to New Orleans was under CTC control.

Evidence of the recently removed double-track south of Birmingham can be seen in this 1963 view near Calera, AL. The train is the north-bound "Pan American," as viewed from the locomotive cab. Note the heavy "headend" consist of mail and express, and the heavyweight Pullman trailing on the rear. (Marvin Clemons photo)



Trip Report

A Weekend of Narrow Gauge Fun in the Southeast: Tweetsie Railroad's Railroad Heritage Weekend



By John Browning ([Email John@cvcsllc.com](mailto:John@cvcsllc.com))

Tweetsie Railroad theme park, located between Boone and Blowing Rock, North Carolina is not just an amusement park with a train. It is actually a train with an amusement park built around it that honors the heritage of a railroad that once served the area. The narrow gauge portion of the East Tennessee and Western North Carolina Railroad, or "Tweetsie", as it was known to the locals, served the Boone area until 1950.

When the railroad ceased operations, the No. 12, a 3 foot gauge 4-6-0 coal fired Baldwin built locomotive was sold to a group of rail fans who started a short lived tourist train operation in Virginia. After the new railroad failed, the No. 12 was once again put up for sale. Singer and actor Gene Autry had an option to purchase the locomotive and transport it to California for use in the movies. After careful

study, Autry determined that the transportation costs to relocate the engine would be too great. In stepped an entrepreneur from Blowing Rock, North Carolina named Grover Robbins, who felt that the engine should once again operate in the Blue Ridge Mountains, where it had spent its career, so he purchased Gene Autry's option and the engine. He brought it home to the Blowing Rock area in 1955 and set about building a new tourist attraction known as the Tweetsie Railroad.

The train made its first public run on July 4, 1957 on a one mile section of track. In 1958, a cut was made through a large hillside and other earthmoving was done to extend the track to a three mile loop which still exists today. In 1960, the park acquired a 2-8-2 locomotive, No. 190 from the White Pass and Yukon Railroad in Alaska to share the load with No. 12. More rides were added and the park grew up with a Wild West theme. The park is still operated by the Robbins family today.

Once a year, the park hosts a Railroad Heritage weekend to showcase their beautifully restored locomotives. This event, which started in 2006, draws rail fans from several states and serves as a way to commemorate the heritage of narrow gauge railroading in the Blue Ridge Mountains. My wife and I decided to attend this year's event, held on August 26th and 27th, which celebrated the 60th anniversary of the park and the 100th birthday of locomotive No. 12. Many special events were planned for this year's celebration, including an evening photo special, a double-header, locomotive cab rides and a special shop tour.

One of the most impressive things about this event was the way that the friendly and knowledgeable park staff treated everyone. All of the park employees that I encountered seemed eager to answer any questions that were asked and seemed to be genuinely interested in seeing that each visitor had a memorable experience. Chris Robbins, current president of the Tweetsie Railroad and nephew of the founder was on hand to talk with guests and make sure that everything went smoothly. As long as you were careful and didn't try to do anything unsafe, you were allowed very liberal access to all areas of the park for photographs and train watching.

At the beginning of each day, before the trains went out for the first runs, fans were allowed to view and photograph the



Number 190 Blasting across the trestle with the Saturday evening photo train.



Veteran Tweetsie engineer Matthew Ernst taking Engine No. 190 up a grade with the Wild West train behind

locomotives at the small yard in front of the shop. At that point you could talk with the crews and request a cab ride pass. The engineers gave out passes for specific runs during the day so that the rider would know what time to be at the locomotive and could plan the rest of their day. Each afternoon, a tour of the locomotive shop, led by supervisor Scott McLeod was offered. He discussed the day to day operation of the railroad and talked about the many challenges that they face keeping two antique locomotives in peak operating condition. The Tweetsie shop also provides everything from parts to complete locomotive rebuilding services for other amusement parks and tourist railroads. Due to size and transportation limitations, the complete rebuilds are limited to three foot gauge and smaller locomotives. Tweetsie is now the official source for parts and supplies for steam locomotives built by Crown Metal Products. Many of these Crown engines are still operated today at various amusement parks, zoos and tourist attractions.

tions.

On Saturday morning, locomotive 192 handled the regular park Wild West train, which consists of five open air cars, while number 12 provided special trips pulling the railroad's 1870's vintage restored wooden coach. Visitors wishing to ride in the coach were asked to make a \$5 donation to a fund that supports ET&WNC railroad preservation projects.

On Saturday evening at 6:15, after the park closed, guests were treated to a photo special which included both trains. Riders boarded the open air cars pulled by locomotive 190 and were transported to the planned photo locations. The train stopped and unloaded passengers at the site of the famous Tweetsie trestle. Photo lines were formed and both trains backed across the bridge and out of site. First, No. 12 blasted across the trestle with the 1870's coach in tow. Next, No.190, under the control of long time Tweetsie engineer Matthew Ernst, brought the Wild West train across the bridge in a spectacular show of steam power. Everyone re-boarded the train and moved on to the Frontier Outpost, normally the site of the Wild West Show during the day, to once again get off the train and photograph another great run-by with both trains.

On Sunday morning, the fun started again with a doubleheader. No. 12 and No. 192 were put on the front of Wild West train and put on an awesome display of steam at its finest. The two locomotives working together looked and sounded great, especially climbing the grade leading to the trestle. Photographers and videographers were stationed all around the area trying to capture the moment.

Both of the beautifully restored locomotives were kept very clean and looked as if they had both just been polished. It is easy to see that Tweetsie takes great pride in their vintage equipment and are eager to share it with the public. Both engines are still hand fired coal burners that are kept as historically accurate as possible. According to the crew members that I talked with, maintenance and safety are very high on their list of priorities. Since the track is basically a large, three mile circle that is travelled in a clockwise direction, the majority of the turns are to the right. In order to prevent excessive wheel wear on the locomotive drive wheels, they have a practice of rotating the locomotive tires periodically. I was told that they will remove the locomotive tire from the left front drive wheel and swap it with a tire from the right rear of the locomotive. This requires a lot of work, but it helps keep the engine running gear in tip top shape.

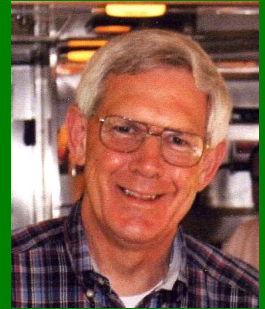


Sunday morning doubleheader charging across the trestle

Also on site is a narrow gauge speeder that they use to check the track each morning before the first train leaves for the day. The crew said that they cover the complete track to look for fallen trees and any possible damage to the rails before passengers take their first trip of the day. If you are interested in narrow gauge railroading and like the sight, sound and smell of coal burning steam locomotives, I would highly recommend that you plan to visit this park on one of their annual Railroad Heritage Weekends. You won't regret it!

PACING THE *KANSAS CITY-FLORIDA* *SPECIAL*

Article & Photo by Lyle Key (cdkrlk@comcast.net)



When I got home from college in the summer of 1965, it seemed fairly certain that Frisco's *Kansas City-Florida Special*, one of my favorite trains, soon would be making its last run. The Interstate Commerce Commission already had completed a series of public hearings on SL-SF's petition for authority to discontinue all of its passenger trains, and much of my summer break would be devoted to recording the *KC-FS* on film. Actually, by then, the *Special* no longer ran all the way to Florida. On January 1, 1964, Southern Railway, which operated the *Special* east of Birmingham, had given up its trackage rights over ACL between Jesup, Georgia and Jacksonville, Florida. That cut-off the *Special's* access to the Sunshine State and created an unlikely through train route between Kansas City and Brunswick, Georgia.



"*KC-Florida Special*" passing by the coaling tower in Carbon Hill, AL

My father wasn't a railfan, but he always enjoyed going with me when I set out to photograph the *Kansas City-Florida Special* around Carbon Hill, Alabama. Dad had grown up in the little coal mining town of Howard, just west of Carbon Hill. On one of our photographic expeditions to Walker County, we left early enough to make a side trip to Howard, and much to dad's surprise, the town had completely vanished. It wasn't even a ghost town since there weren't any buildings for spirits to haunt. Everyone obviously had moved on when the coal mines had closed. The only visible vestige of civilization was the overgrown railroad right-of-way that once led to the mines.

After exploring the former site of dad's hometown, we drove north of Carbon Hill in search of a good photo location. Around Glen Allen, we stumbled onto a lonely road that lead back into the woods along the Frisco main line. The railroad was above us on a fill, and we found a long stretch that was clear of vegetation where the road followed the railroad around the outside of a sweeping curve. It looked like a perfect spot to pace the train, and in my quest for photographic perfection, I decided that I would avoid any possibility of windshield glare by taking my movie from the hood of the car. The game plan was for dad to ease our '57 Ford up to about 25 mph when the train blew for the grade crossing just down the road and then I would shoot it as it overtook and passed us.

We got the car in position and waited for #106, the northbound *KC-FS*. It was quiet and peaceful out in the woods, and we could hear the *Special's* melodious whistle in plenty of time to get the car cranked up and ready to go. Dad was poised behind the wheel, and I was stretched out across the hood. The anticipation began to mount as the train's whistle got closer and closer, and the roar from the diesel engines grew progressively louder. Dad began to ease forward when the engineer blew for the nearby crossing, and then the train's red and yellow E-units came racing up behind us. I started shooting with my movie camera, but it quickly became apparent that dad had gotten caught up in the excitement of the moment and that he was racing the train. The passenger train was winning the race, but not by much! For the first few seconds, I was focused on keeping the camera steady, but I quickly became more concerned about mere survival.

My memory of this experience is not altogether clear, but after I quit taking the movie, I somehow managed to crawl to the windshield and grab one of the windshield wipers. Memories of that moment come back to me everytime I hear the phrase, "Holding on for dear life." The movie camera was in my other hand, and I used it to tap on the windshield as a

signal to stop. Much to my relief, dad realized that it was time to call off the chase.

After dad got the car stopped, he sheepishly tried to explain what happened. “The whistle and the roar of the engines just kept getting louder and louder, and when I saw the train coming up behind us, I just took off.” We laughed about that father-son experience many times, but I never made another attempt at pacing **trains on the hood of a car!**

A few weekends later, dad and I made another trip to northwest Alabama to photograph the *Special*. This time, I was hoping to get a movie of the southbound meeting the northbound, and I figured that if both trains were on time, they would meet at the 6,453 foot passing track between Beaverton and Sulligent. They did meet along that passing track, but it was a running meet, and I wasn't lucky enough to be at the right place. All was not lost, however. There was a good pacing spot just south of the passing track where the railroad closely paralleled Highway 278. Dad held the car in position just behind the lead E-unit of #105, the southbound, and this time, I shot my movie through the windshield from the passenger side of the front seat. My plan was to ask dad to back off his speed toward the end of the shot, but before I could say anything, the train began to pull ahead of us. Just as I was thinking that dad had read my mind, he said, “I'm doing 80, and he's pulling away from me.”

Back then, it took about a week to get a roll of movie film developed, and I kept wondering if glare from the windshield had ruined my pacing shot. When I finally got the roll back and ran it through my projector, I was delighted to see that the windshield was invisible and that the pacing sequence really conveyed the thrill of running alongside a fast passenger train. My only disappointment was that Frisco had painted over the horse name on the lead E-unit.

Dad and I were pleased that we had done better the second time around, and while he and I often joked about our first effort at pacing, we never shared that story with mother.

Click on to the photo below for a clip from Lyle's car chase of Frisco's "Kansas City—Florida Special." This action scene, along with dozens of others from the 1960s film from Lyle Key and Marvin Clemons will appear in a new video entitled

"24 Hours in Birmingham: The Last Golden Era of Passenger Trains"

Featuring multiple station and runby scenes of all 26 passenger trains operating through Birmingham in the early 1960s on Southern, L&N, Seaboard, L&N, Central of Georgia, and Illinois Central.

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