



# The Mid-South Flyer

March 2011



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

## Breaking News

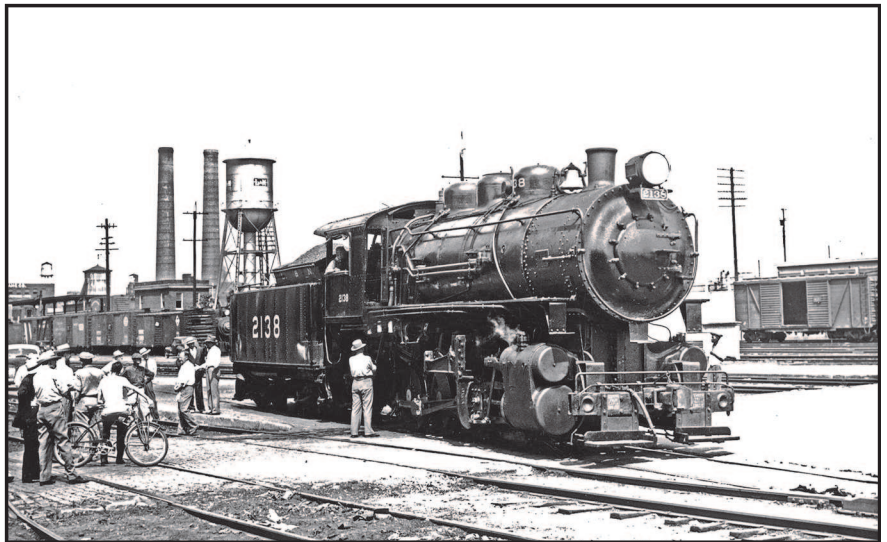
# Birmingham to host R&LHS 2012 Convention

The Railway & Locomotive Historical Society (R&LHS) has announced plans to hold the Society's 2012 National Convention in Birmingham, Alabama, the historic heartland of Southeastern railroading.

Hosted by the R&LHS's Mid-South Chapter, the convention will feature tours of the area's historic railroad and industrial sites, railroad museums and modern railroad facilities. Informative presentations by authorities on local railroad history will also be featured.

The three-day convention will be held in late Spring of 2012. A tentative agenda with dates, venues and early registration information will be available by mid-summer on the R&LHS website at [www.rlhs.org](http://www.rlhs.org) and in future issues of *The Mid-South Flyer*.

Chartered in 2008 as the newest R&LHS chapter located in the southeastern United States, the Mid-South is headquartered in the historic Southern Railway depot in Leeds, Alabama.



*On June 27, 1945, #2138, a class C-1 0-8-0 built by L&N's South Louisville Shops in 1923, was photographed at the 18th Street Yard performing a "smoke control demonstration." This is one of many rare photos from the L&N Historical Society's collection.*

## March program

### Slideshow presentation to feature vintage L&N photos from Alabama

A narrated slideshow of vintage photos spanning nearly 100 years of the Louisville & Nashville Railroad's history in Alabama will be featured at the March 12 meeting of the Mid-South Chapter, R&LHS.

Presented by L&N Railroad Historical Society president and Mid-South Chapter member Lee Singletary, the hour-long program will feature rare and unpublished images taken from the L&N Historical Society's photo collection. The collection consists of photo's that were donated to the Society by members and friends.

In addition to private collections, the Society has obtained a number of official photos from L&N's corporate files. The entire collection spans the whole L&N system from the very late 1800's to the end of the L&N in the 1980's.

The Mid-South Chapter meets at the former Southern Railway depot in downtown Leeds, Alabama. The depot opens at 1:30 p.m. and the program starts at 2:00 p.m. Visitors and guests are always welcome.

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## Membership program highlights

# Chapter approves revised by-laws, votes to expand board of directors

The adoption of revised by-laws and the election of officers and an expanded board highlighted the January 15 Annual Membership meeting of the Mid-South Chapter, R&LHS.

Chapter President Marvin Clemons called the meeting to order and noted that 28 members and guests were in attendance. Member Larry Kelpke introduced his guest, Hal Holley of Leeds, a retired Central of Georgia Railroad employee from a family of railroaders.

The reading of the November 2010 chapter meeting minutes was suspended due to the extended business session. Stan Burnett gave the Secretary/Treasurer's report. Membership as of January 15 was reported as 58 members, reflecting a gain of 22 members for the year 2010. As of the meeting date, R&LHS records show that 36 Mid-South members already have renewed for 2011. The treasury account was reported to be \$848.67, and the DAM (Dollar-A-Month) fund was \$106.24. There were no outstanding bills at that time.

Under Old Business, Company Store manager Lee Singletary and membership chairman Dan Ferris reported on the Chapter's participation in the December Smokey City Rail Show. The Company Store had strong sales and a number of new member prospects registered. Dan then reported on the proposed chapter calendar to be published for 2012. A members-only photo competition will decide which photos will be featured. Dan gave the requirements for submitting photos, which must be submitted by August 2011 to be eligible.

### *The Mid-South Flyer*

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*The Mid-South Flyer* is published bi-monthly by the Mid-South Chapter of the Railway & Locomotive Historical Society (R&LHS), Inc. The R&LHS is a non-profit educational organization dedicated to the study and preservation of railroad history. National and chapter dues are \$42 and include subscriptions to the Society's twice-yearly magazine *Railroad History* and quarterly newsletter, and the chapter's bi-monthly newsletter, *The Mid-South Flyer*. For membership information contact:

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Marvin reported that the board has accepted the invitation to host the 2012 R&LHS National Convention in Birmingham. National will provide administrative support and underwrite any expense not covered by registration fees. The proposed dates for the four-day convention are in the late May to early June time frame. There will be three main venues, a Saturday night banquet with keynote speaker, and a Sunday morning membership meeting with a "lighter fare" program. Average attendance has been 40 to 50 in the recent past. The board would like to double that and also would like to keep registration cost below \$200.00. Planning guidance has been received and Marvin will report further details at the March meeting.

Marvin gave a "State of the Chapter" overview. We have met or exceeded most chapter goals in 2010. There has been a high level of member participation over the course of 28 chapter-sponsored activities during 2010, including chapter meetings, special events, and board functions. The Leeds Festival continues to be one of our best "showcase" events. The chapter's finances are sufficient for our present needs. Additional funding sources will be explored in 2011. The by-laws have had a major revision, approved by the Board. The chapter membership will be canvassed in early 2011 regarding individual skills and interests to help match members with opportunities to assist the chapter's growth and development.

Next, the chapter received reports by board members concerning their respective responsibilities. As program chair, Marvin reported success

## Membership program highlights (continued)

recruiting an excellent lineup of programs in 2010. Membership chair Dan Ferris reported strong gains (see previous statistics) during the previous year, and stated his goal of increasing membership by 30% during 2011. Tim Smith reported on Exhibits. Plans for completing the permanent exhibit take on additional emphasis as we approach next year's convention. Tim reported on discussions with McWane and other groups and museums regarding ideas and assistance for the planned exhibit.

Eddie Cook reported on his work with Community Relations and Special Events. We continue to enjoy a good working relationship with the Leeds Historical Society and City of Leeds. Thanks to the city's assistance, we now have a security system at the depot.

Lee Singletary reported on the Company Store and fundraising. The sale of historic railroad maps continues to be strong. We need more items for the store to sell, and Lee asked members to consider what they might contribute for sale or consignment. The addition of T-shirts will be considered in time for the convention. In addition, the store may add a consignment table for members at meetings and rail shows.



*The former Southern Railway depot in Leeds, home to the Mid-South Chapter, will receive a major facelift in time for the 2012 R&LHS convention.*

Marvin reported on Communications and Publicity. *The Mid-South Flyer*, the chapter's newsletter, needs member contribution of news articles, feature stories, and photos. "Everyone's got a story to tell—what's yours?" Plans are underway to add chapter pages to the R&LHS website ([www.rlhs.org](http://www.rlhs.org)). Marvin also mentioned our need for additional media coverage for chapter programs and activities.

After old and new business, Marvin described the proposed revision of the chapter by-laws. A copy of the proposed revision, as recommended by the board, was included with the distribution of the November 2010 newsletter; therefore, the reading of the proposed revision was suspended. Lee Singletary moved that the revision be accepted as written, seconded by Eddie Cook. The vote to approve was unanimous. Marvin thanked member James Lowery for his assistance in drafting the new by-laws, which will bring the chapter more in line with the provisions of the National by-laws.

Following was the annual election of officers and board members. The slate had been distributed with the meeting announcement (see notes from board meeting on following page) Eddie Cook announced that he would not be available to serve on the Board for the coming year and withdrew from nomination. Marvin expressed appreciation for Eddie's hard work during the past two years plus. Marvin nominated John Browning for the vacated position, seconded by Stan Burnett. There being no further nominations from the floor, Ron Mele moved that the slate be approved as presented. Tim Smith seconded, and the slate was unanimously approved. One newly created board position (a 3-year term) will remain open for future nomination.

With the conclusion of the membership meeting, Marvin introduced Lee Singletary, who also serves as president of the L&N Historical Society. Lee presented a preview of L&N photos from the Society's collection. A full slideshow will be presented at the next regular meeting on March 12. There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned. (*Minutes edited from notes by Stan Burnett, Secretary/Treasurer*)





## *By the Board*

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

The Mid-South Chapter Board of Directors held its' January meeting at the home of Marvin and Kayron Clemons in Hayden. Present at the meeting were Marvin (chapter president), Dan Ferris (chapter vice-president), Stan (chapter secretary-treasurer), and board members Larry Kelpke, Tim Smith, Lee Singletary, and Jeff Johnson. Chapter member James Lowery also attended to lead a discussion of a proposed revision to the chapter by-laws. A copy of the proposed revision was previously distributed to the board.

Marvin distributed copies of a chapter calendar for 2011 reflecting dates for chapter meetings and related events. Stan gave a brief statement of the Smokey City Rail Show Sales and Net Sales "gain" (\$293.50), with a current treasury balance \$1010.46. Stan also reported that half of our MSC membership has already renewed for 2011.

The first part of the meeting was devoted to an extensive discussion of our By-Laws and was lead by Marvin and James. The primary purpose for the revision is to provide for a succession in chapter leadership positions and increase the size and functions of the board. The revision is also intended to bring the chapter's by-laws more in line with the national Society. The board voted unanimously to approve the proposed revision and recommend it for a vote at the Annual Membership meeting. In addition, the board approved a concomitant provision to the by-laws regarding a "Policy Concerning Action Taken Without a Meeting."

Following a break for lunch, the board participated in a conference call via speaker phone with Bob Holzweiss, president of the R&LHS regarding his proposal for the Mid-South Chapter to host the 2012 R&LHS Convention (also known as the Annual Meeting) in Birmingham. A thorough discussion followed during which Bob explained the primary planning considerations and mutual expectations for the convention. Following the phone conversation with Bob and after further discussion, Lee made a motion to host the convention and Dan seconded. The board voted to unanimously approve the proposal to host the 2012 convention.

The concluding item of business was nominations for the slate for officers and board members to be presented at the Annual Membership meeting. The board voted to expand the authorized board positions to eight members serving staggered two-year terms, with initial terms at two and three years to begin the election cycle. The following slate was proposed and unanimously approved for consideration by the membership:

<b>POSITION</b>	<b>NOMINEE</b>
President (two-year term)	Marvin Clemons
Vice-president (one-year term)	Dan Ferris
Secretary/Treasurer (two-year term)	Stan Burnett
Board Position #1 (two year term)	Eddie Cook
Board Position #2 (two-year term)	Dr. Carl Marbury
Board Position #3 (two-year term)	Lee Singletary
Board Position #4 (two-year term)	Tim Smith
Board Position #5 (three-year term)	Jeff Johnson
Board Position #6 (three-year term)	Larry Kelpke
Board Position #7 (three-year term)	James Lowery
Board Position #8 (three-year term)	No nominee

*(Edited from notes submitted by Stan Burnett, Secretary-Treasurer)*



# A Telegrapher's Story

"A LOST LANGUAGE", by LeRoy Palmer.

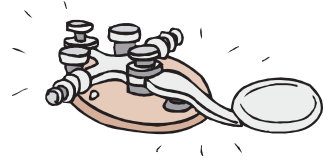
(from an article appearing in the June, 1940 issue of "Railroad Magazine")

**Editor's note: The well-told tale by a veteran railroader is a joy to behold. The following account by an "old-time telegrapher" conveys the drama of railroading when the telegraph was the only means of communication, and is also a lamentation of the passing of a cherished railroad tradition. While the setting is in the upper Midwest on the Milwaukee Road, one can imagine that a similar story could have as easily been told by a Southern Railway operator at Leeds, Alabama more than a half-century ago).**

As months and years drift by, the number of us old-time telegraphers in rail service who know the train wire language is dwindling, like the "thin blue line" and the "thin gray line" of Civil War veterans. On practically all the main-line dispatching circuits the telephone has displaced the telegraph. Only the oldest ops can remember the days when the average train dispatcher had a "copier", a fast pen operator who wrote all orders in the order book as the dispatcher issued them and checked as each was repeated.

In this era of telephone dispatching, the work is, of course, done much more quickly. Orders are now repeated in one-fourth the time that was required for even the "gilt-edge" Morse man, although the time and all station names are spelled out, while train and engine numbers are repeated on the telephone. The veteran brass pounder has to admit it, even though he misses the vanishing language. Formerly I could be busy at my desk, or even reading the newspaper, and still hear the train wire with its "OS" reports of trains passing over the district, and thus I kept posted on everything approaching my station. Now I hear nothing unless I sit with the telephone receiver hung over my head. They took some of the romance and fascination away from railroading when they installed telephones on the train wire.

The twelve-hour night shift men were excellent "spotters". That is, they were adept at catching much-needed sleep when opportunity offered and they trained themselves to wake for their call. The old Morse dispatchers knew that Bill or Joe was "in the hay" when they got no answer on the first call and they would slowly repeat "RC RC RC DS" or "ZA ZA ZA DS," or whatever the call was, the repeated chatter bringing the Op to life. This was customary and was well understood.



One of the first things the op learned was to arouse from deep slumber for his call.

I remember the first job I ever worked, night operator for the Milwaukee Road at Burlington, Wis., in 1901. I'd been on the job only a few nights when. One morning just before daylight, I got mighty sleepy and stretched out on the freight desk, with an "Official Guide" making a soft pillow for my head, and was soon sleeping soundly. I dreamed I was walking along a street, and as I passed a store I heard a telegraph instrument tapping out "BU BU BU BY" which was my office call. I thought, "Gosh! I'd better go in there and answer that. It's my call!" The next thing I knew, I was tumbling off that desk onto my feet as I realized that the Beliot dispatcher was hammering out slowly "BU BU BU BU DS."

I dove for the telegraph desk.

I have had this same dream, or one very much like it, many times since on similar occasions. Other old-time ops report having had identical experience. Seldom would we get deep enough in the hay to fail to recognize the familiar sounder call. There's not much excuse for lightening slingers to drowse on an eight-hour shift nowadays, but should a man working the late night, or third, trick in the heat of Summer, slip off to dreamland between trains, the telephone bell is, perhaps, not the equal of the old repeated Morse call to arouse him from slumber.

Perhaps you have sat in some wayside depot waiting-room and listened to the clatter of the instruments in the telegraph office and wished you could understand what was passing over the wire. But missing now from the chorus of clicking sounders is the loudest one of all, the sounder of the train dispatcher's wire. What you would hear now, if you could read them, would be the message wire and the commercial wire, carrying private telegrams. Gone is the hottest and fastest of them all, the sounder with the mysterious abbreviations and language of its own, which every student aspired to read. When a student could read the train wire his education was complete; he was a full-fledged op.

In 1900, I was an apprentice at the CMStP&P depot in Elkhorn, Wisconsin. George Hayes was the daylight operator there. In addition to his regular duties, he had the job of teaching two students, Bill Jones and myself. Both of us were green farm hands. I don't know how dumb I was as a ham, but I do remember that Mr. Hayes was in despair over Bill. We both did learn, however. I became a boomer op, and the last I heard of Bill Jordan he was the chief dispatcher for some Western pike.

I was given night work with the night man, a short, fat little Irish fellow named Eddie. Eddie was a prince. He used to send to me faithfully an hour or so every night when he wasn't too busy, but he was a rotten sender. The boys along the line had a hard time reading him. But I got accustomed to the funny twists he put on his Morse, and I had no trouble. Later on, when I was working along the line on the extra board, if some op had to copy Eddie and I was around he'd make me sit in and take Eddie's dots and dashes.

Meanwhile, I put in about six months with Eddie, showing up when he did at six p.m. and quitting at one a.m. I was beginning to get discouraged. I could read words off the Western Union commercial wire pretty well, but I couldn't get used to those "cut" words used by the dispatchers, even though I listened faithfully, trying to separate the characters and make sense of them.

I'll never forget that winter night when I opened the waiting room door, hustled over to the huge coal stove to thaw out, and heard the big train-wire sounder in the office rattling away. I listened a moment, when -- just like that-- I could read the language! Boy, was I tickled! What previously had been a jumble of sounds was now clear to me. When Eddie came in a few minutes later, I had the joyous news for him that I could read the train wire, and he seemed as pleased as I was.

After that, I was more anxious than ever to perfect myself. One day George Hayes said to me: "Kid, I'm going to give you a note to W.H. Melchoir, the chief train dispatcher at Beliot, and send you over to take your examination. Eddie says you have your block rules learned okay and you can read the train wire. They need operators and you are good enough to start out."

Next day I rode the morning local passenger train to Beliot. Mr. Melchoir examined me and sent me to Burlington to work that very night. There was no physical or standard rules examination at that time, but you had to know the block rules. You had to know how to ask the man east of you for a "47" before you let an eastbound train into the block, etc. A "block" was the stretch of track between your office and his, and "47" meant "Will hold all westbound trains until your train arrives."

Because the Morse train dispatcher had to work fast in order to keep his trains moving, there came into use so many abbreviations that if, as you sat in the wayside station waiting-room listening to the sounders, you could have to read every letter that was passing over the train wire, you still would have been unable to know what was going on, unless you understood the code. You might have heard the dispatcher and the op converse as follows: "Sa wn x w cmg ma hv 9 r tm." snaps the dispatcher. {Say when extra west train is coming. I may have orders for them.}

"Art tnk c tr smk no," returns the op. "Es hr ty cm ty in ste nw." {All right. I think I see their smoke now. Yes, here they come. They are in sight now.}

"U gt nytng r em." asks the DS. {Have you got anything for them?}

"Es abt 15 m wk," replies the operator. {Yes, about 15 minutes work.}

"OK 31 cy 3 r em & let me kw hw mch wk ty gt at DR b4 c clr em ma hv to chg tt meet wi 42 No 7s ab 20 m1 I'll hnd hm sm ti on tm at DR." {Okay. Make 3 copies on a 31 order for them and let me know how much work they've got at Darien before you clear them. May have to change that meet with number 42. Number 7 is about twenty minutes late. I'll hand him some time on them at Darien.}

Hour after hour, with occasional periods of rest, twenty-four hours a day, the sounder rattled on. Few words were spelled out in train movement conversation, as this language -- the "cut" language of the old Morse train wire -- clicked over the line.

All railroad offices with telephone dispatcher's wire equipment have a Morse circuit to fall back on in case of trouble on the phone wire. The young operators dread this. If they happen to be working with an old Morse dis-

patcher, they are in hot water trying to read his abbreviated instructions. To a veteran, however, it's the old familiar code.

Morse men admit that the telephone, like the typewriter, makes for greater efficiency. It standardizes operations, saves time and work, and diminishes the hazards of the iron trail. But we of the old school miss the romance of the earlier days of rugged individualism when you reached for a brass key instead of a black telephone receiver, and were proud of the bold, rapid, flowing strokes with which you wrote your train orders by hand.

And if a tobacco-chewing boomer op were suddenly yanked out of the dim past and put to work on a teletype machine, his consternation would be equalled only by his profanity. Teletypes are doing their bit to make Morse a dead language. So far, you'll find 'em on only a few of the big roads. The latest pike to install this system is the Erie, which is now using teletype machines for their consist and passing report systems.

As every rail knows the consist of a freight train includes all of its car numbers, listed in order, beginning at the head end. For each carload are shown contents, tons, destination, route (including other roads, if any such are needed to take the car to its destination), and sometimes the name of the consignee. Ventilation, refrigeration, or heating instructions are shown for perishable freight, and when livestock was last fed and rested.

All this information, in the case of the Erie, is transmitted by teletype to the company's general offices at Chicago, Cleveland, and New York, and to the district office at Jersey City, New Jersey, immediately after hotshot freights have left the yards. There, centralized tracking bureaus use the information to answer quickly all shipper and receiver inquiries about the movement of cars -- inquiries that in days gone by were answered with the aid of Morse conversation.

A friend on the Erie tells me that when his company adopted teletypes for its consist and passing report systems, last March, it converted 845 miles of telegraph wire to printer circuits, making a total of 2,320 miles of these circuits now in operation on the Erie. Of this total, he says, 2,075 miles are equipped with duplex apparatus over which messages or consists can be sent in both directions at the same time.

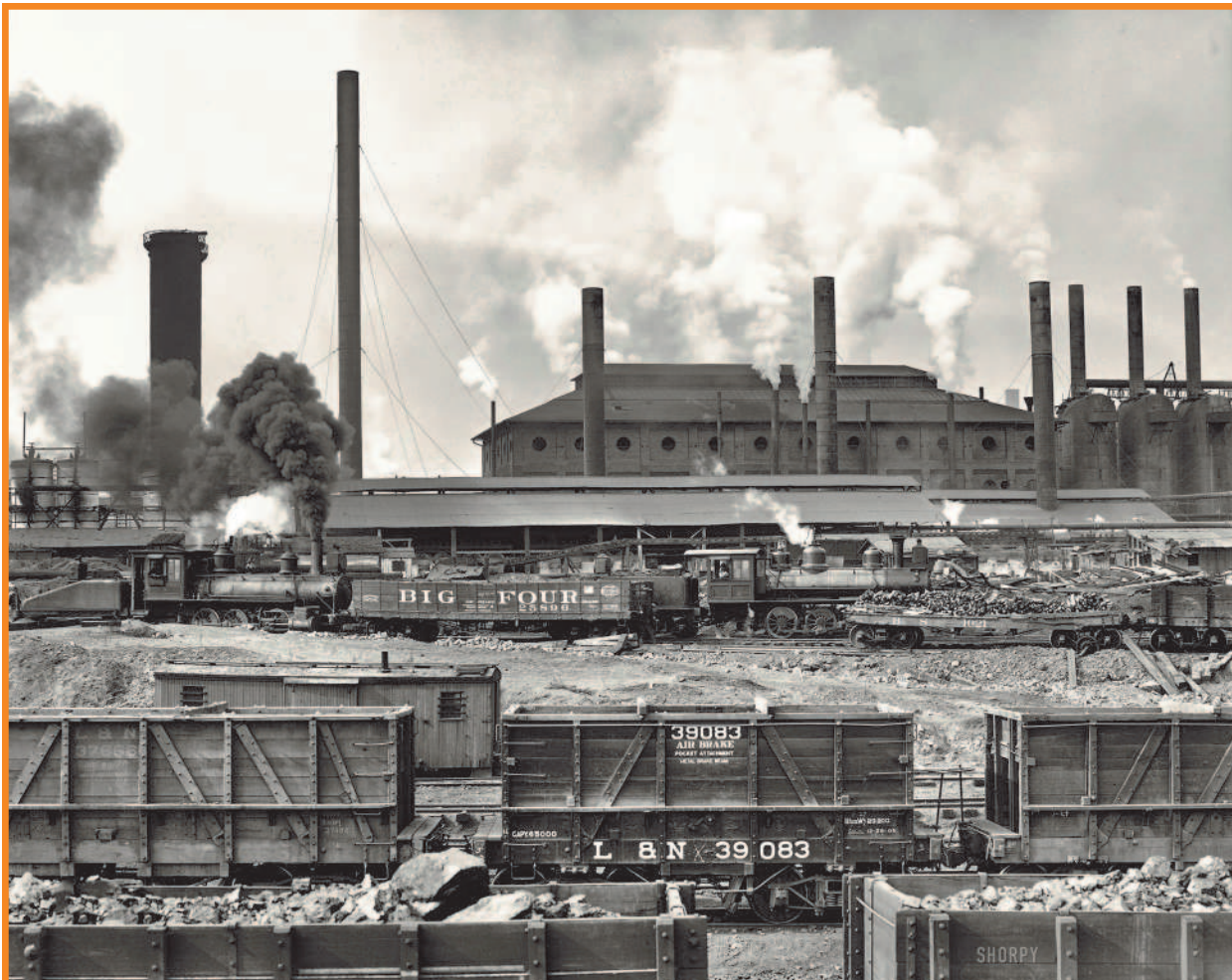
Morse experts concede that the telephone, the typewriter and the teletype seldom fail and, as I pointed out, do the work more easily and more rapidly. Few train dispatchers and ops would go back to the obsolete system if they could. But now and then you'll run across a mellow old boomer who sighs for the snappy Morse dialogue on the dispatcher's wire that is fast becoming a lost language.



*A young boy appears captivated by the sight and sound of a telegraph operator copying Morse code at Illinois Central's Tolono, Illinois tower in 1960, near the end of telegraph on American railroads. (Photo courtesy J. Parker Lamb)*



## Golden Era Classics



**"Tennessee Coal & Iron Railroad Co.'s furnaces, Ensley, Alabama, circa 1906"** (from an 8x10" dry plate glass negative). Ensley Works was the largest producer of steel ingots and rail in the south for most of its history. By 1920, half the steel made in the south came from these open-hearth furnaces. The open-hearth method of steelmaking was rendered obsolete by more modern integrated methods, and this plant was closed by U.S. Steel in 1976 as a result. Credit *Shorpy.com*, a vintage photo website featuring thousands of high-definition images from the 1850s to 1950s. Our thanks to Ed Mims for submitting this remarkable photo from Birmingham's past.

### Calendar of Chapter Events

Saturday, March 12— Mid-South Chapter Meeting @ Leeds Depot— 2:00 p.m.

Saturday, March 19— Field Trip to Historic Machinery @ Steele, AL— Details TBA

Saturday, April 9— Coosa Valley Rail Show @ Gadsden, AL— 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Saturday, April 16— Chapter Cookout @ Leeds Depot— 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Saturday, April 30— Board of Directors Meeting— 10:00 a.m.— Details TBA

Saturday, May 21 \*\* — Mid-South Chapter Meeting @ Leeds Depot— 2:00 p.m.

\*\* Meeting date changed to 3rd Saturday of the month



## From the Observation Platform by Marvin Clemons, President

As every rail traveler knows, the view from an observation platform (or from a rear vestibule, be that the case) is to the rear of the train, through territory already passed. It's easy and pleasant to enjoy the view "going away," with time to reflect on the passing scenery without giving much thought to forward progress.

I think of that as a metaphor for our journey as a chapter. It's tempting to look back over our accomplishments and just enjoy the ride, when in fact, nearly all that we've achieved over the past two years is the result of looking ahead and working together. Thanks to a shared vision and commitment by our board and membership, last year's chapter goals have largely become our present reality, just as we'll work to make our goals for the coming year become our future reality.

We have set an ambitious agenda for the coming year and beyond. As you'll read elsewhere in this newsletter, we have accepted the invitation to host the 2012 R&LHS convention, a considerable honor for our young chapter. The convention will happen just a little over a year from now, which means we have to kick into high gear to complete our restoration projects and get the depot spruced up and ready to show. We'll get the job done if everyone pitches in, and to that end the board is developing a "convention readiness task list." Once we've identified what needs to be done, we'll start matching volunteers with specific tasks, according to individual skills and interests.

I recently passed by a church sign that asked the question, "What's missing from CH\_\_CH?" On the next line were the letters, "U-R!" I promise we'll make sure *you are* given the opportunity to help your chapter put on a great convention for R&LHS!



## Where are we?

As anyone growing up around Birmingham in the mid-1900's can attest, the geography of the Birmingham railroad district has changed dramatically over the past half-century. Entire railroad yards, not to mention miles of right-of-way and facilities, have disappeared from the landscape. Some became redundant by the changing needs of the railroads, while others like the majestic Terminal Station were removed to make way for the "best use" of valuable commercial property. In this instance, the scene at right was a once-thriving rail yard that eventually was replaced by a modern classification yard in the early 1950's. Several well-known Birmingham landmarks seen on the horizon offer a good clue to this location. So, *where are we?*



**What?** The Mid-South Chapter Meeting  
**When?** Saturday, March 12 at 2 pm—Doors open at 1:30  
**Where?** Historic Leeds Depot  
**Who?** Lee Singletary presenting a slide show featuring historic L&N photos from Birmingham and Alabama