



The Mid-South Flyer

Spring 2015



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

April Meeting

RR photographer Ken Boyd to speak on digital photography and locomotive “art”



Ken Boyd with UP 4012

Birmingham photographer, illustrator, and author Ken Boyd will be the speaker at the April 25 meeting of the Mid-South Chapter of the Railway & Locomotive Historical Society.

An avid photographer since the mid-1970s and a train and railroading enthusiast all his life, Ken has traveled extensively to study and photograph locomotives and other historic subjects. Ken has taught photography courses at the University of Alabama at Birmingham and Samford University on darkroom techniques, creative digital compositions and photographic processes of the 1800s. He has achieved Master of Photography status through the Shades Valley Camera Club in Birmingham.

With the rise of digital photography and editing, Ken embraced the transformation of photographic imaging from film and the wet darkroom to digital capture and the computer. His practice of photography has evolved over the last four decades, and his photographs are highly stylistic and unique illustrations.

Ken's work and his techniques have been published in magazines and journals including Camera and Darkroom, View Camera, Birmingham, Portico, Shutterbug, Shelby Living, Garden Railways, and numerous technical and trade publications and journals, including Power, Power Engineering, and Industrial Hygiene, Environmental Management. His photography has been featured in books entitled, The View Camera, Worthy of Remembrance, a History of Redmont, and Golden Jubilee, a book featuring the history of several Birmingham area Southern Baptist churches.

In 2014 Ken published through Voyageur Press an internationally distributed book entitled The Art of the Locomotive. The book has sold 10,000 copies since it was released last September and has a five-star rating on Amazon. As part of his presentation to the Chapter, Ken will talk about how he produced some of the images and discuss the work involved in getting his book published. He will have copies of the book available at the meeting for signing, along with prints from the book and others for sale.

We are delighted to have Ken as our April program speaker and look forward to learning about his unique approach to locomotive photography.

2015 Quarterly Meeting Schedule

Spring

Saturday, April 25 @ 2PM

Summer

Saturday, July 18 @ 2PM
(Chapter Picnic @ Noon)

Fall

Saturday, October 17 @ 2PM

*All meetings will be held at the
Historic Leeds Depot

Report from the Annual Membership Meeting January 24, 2015

(reported by Lamont Downs, Secretary)

The ANNUAL MEETING of the chapter membership of the Mid-South Chapter was called to order by President John Browning on January 24, 2015, at 2:12 p.m. at the Leeds Depot, Leeds, Alabama.

Business Portion of the Meeting

A quorum was present for the meeting. Twenty members were in attendance. The Dollar-A-Month bucket was circulated.

President's Greeting and Annual Report to the Membership

John Browning covered the following items and chapter accomplishments in his verbal report of 2014 chapter activities:

Browning listed the program meeting topics that had been presented during 2014, including presentations by Dan Ferris and Tom Lawson.

A chapter picnic was held in July and a Bring-Your-Favorite-Photo event in September. The chapter hosted an open house during the Leeds Festival in October.

Chapter-sponsored projects are continuing, including the Frank Ardrey Exhibit, the Historic Birmingham Mineral Railroad Signs Project, and the Chapter Archives.

Browning listed as the year's chief accomplishment the Museum Area, including the Frank Ardrey Exhibit. Browning thanked the membership for allowing him to serve as chapter president for the past two years.

Committee and Officer Reports

Treasurer's Report: James Lowery reported a balance as of December 31, 2014 of \$2,696.48, of which \$749.25 are in non-earmarked funds. The Frank Ardrey Exhibit account contains \$1,460.03, and the Historic Birmingham Mineral Railroad Signs Project account had \$487.20 at the end of the year (which has now been spent since the beginning of 2015).

Browning stated that we have been very successful in obtaining funds via the R&LHS Friends Campaign for both the Ardrey project and the Historic Birmingham Mineral Railroad Signs Project.

Secretary's Report: Downs reported that at the end of 2014 we had 65 paid members, compared with 70 at the end of 2013. As of January 1, 2015 28 members had renewed for 2015. Five of last year's members renewed their R&LHS membership but did not renew their Mid-South Chapter memberships. Downs encouraged those present who had not yet renewed their memberships to do so as soon as possible.

Archives Committee Report: Marvin Clemons discussed the possibilities being considered of working with the City of Leeds or with the Heart of Dixie museum, and reported on some of the facilities available at Heart of Dixie. Facilities there are climate controlled, and materials would also be available

digitally via the Internet.

Historic Birmingham Mineral Railroad Signs Project: James Lowery displayed a sample of the signs being created and placed, and explained the meaning of the logo appearing on the signs. He provided a brief description of the Mineral Line and some of the communities it traversed. Walking/driving tour brochures are being developed. He emphasized that it is a continually evolving project with much more to come. Mountain Brook's *Village Living* has done an article on the project. Some discussion of other locations followed.

Exhibits Committee: The hardware (player and monitor) are up and running and on display in the exhibit room. Clemons has created an initial slide show, with others planned. Downs asked about the copyright status of the photographs; Clemons responded that we cannot distribute the photos in high resolution but can post low-resolution photos on the Web.

Election of Board Members and Officers

Browning presented the slate of officers as developed by the Nominations Committee. They are:

- James Lowery (Acting President)
- Dr. Carl Marbury (Vice President)
- James Lowery (Treasurer)
- Lamont Downs (Secretary)

There being no nominations from the floor, Clemons moved to accept the slate by acclamation. Some discussion followed. Downs asked about the status of the current Board. Browning announced that due to ongoing discussions about the nature and size of the Board of Directors there would be no election of Board members at this time; the current members would be retained in their positions until the situation is resolved. The motion to elect the announced slate of officers by acclamation was seconded and passed.

The Mid-South Flyer **Spring 2015**

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 \$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. Membership applications for R&LHS and the Mid-South Chapter are available on the Internet at www.rlhs.org. Article ideas and reader comments are invited and may be emailed to:

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

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

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

New Business

The meeting was turned over to Acting President James Lowery. Lowery reminded all present about the door prize drawing to be held at the end of the meeting. Clemons introduced David Lester to the membership. Clemons recognized Lester and John Stewart for their contributions to the newsletter.

Lowery hosted an open feedback session for the membership. Topics discussed included:

1. Number of chapter meetings per year: there was a consensus for four.
2. Ideas for program topics or speakers. Lowery introduced the idea of a "Mid-South Day" at other events or organizations.
3. Schedule conflicts. Information on other railfan-related events (or other major events that might impact on meeting attendance) should be sent to Downs for incorporation into our master calendar.
4. Ways to be involved and projects members might want to take on.
5. The purposes of the organization.

The possibility of joint meetings with the Heart of Dixie organization, the Leeds Historical Society, etc. was also discussed.

Adjournment

The business portion of the meeting was adjourned at 3:02 p.m., followed by a slide program presented by Marvin Clemons on his recent visit to the United Kingdom. The door prize drawings concluded the meeting.



Mid-South Chapter Update

by James Lowery, Acting President

Beginning with this issue of the *Mid-South Flyer*, we are replacing the traditional President's message "From the Observation Platform" and the printing of the Board meeting minutes with a "Chapter Update" reporting on chapter activities, along with any progress reports on various chapter projects.

General We have a great chapter with members not only in the Birmingham area but also from across the region and the United States. We appreciate all our chapter members and look forward to seeing everyone who can attend at the chapter program meetings. We have a very effective Board of Directors that is carrying on the business of the chapter and which has several projects that benefit railroad history in this area. Your members of the Board of Directors are James Lowery, Acting President; Dr. Carl Marbury, Vice President; Lamont Downs, Secretary; James Lowery, Treasurer; John Browning, Past President; Donnie Strickland; Natasha Bettis; Larry Kelpke; Lee Singletary; Tim Smith; and nominated for election April 25 is John Troulias. There are two vacant positions on the Board of Directors, and we would like to hear from anyone who would like to serve on the Board.

Chapter Meetings and Programs The chapter membership and the Board of Directors decided to have quarterly program meetings during 2015. The upcoming program April 25th meeting "The Art of the Locomotive" is described elsewhere in this newsletter, and the other program meetings for 2015 will be held in July and October (see dates elsewhere in this newsletter). We have some ideas for program topics for this year, but we always want to hear your program topic suggestions which can be sent to jlowery2@gmail.com. Also, the Board of Directors is submitting notices of the chapter program meetings to local news media. We would appreciate receiving from you the names of any local newspapers or news outlets that you think we should send our meeting notices to or any contact persons you know at those media outlets.

Interfaces with Other Entities and City Officials in Leeds This year, the chapter Board of Directors plans to connect with, and interface more with, historical organizations, economic development entities, and city officials in the Leeds area. We hope to increase their awareness of our chapter and our displays at the Leeds Historic Depot, and we hope to learn from them ways that we can work together to make what our chapter does more fully integrated into plans for the Leeds area.

eInformation Committee (Lead: Lamont Downs) - The Board of Directors has established an eInformation Committee to work on the Internet and social media aspects of the chapter such as the website, Facebook, and other interfaces. As we move forward with changes and additions to those information resources, we would appreciate your feedback concerning those aspects of our chapter.

PROJECT: Frank Ardrey Photography Exhibit (Lead: Marvin Clemons) - The video portion of the Frank Ardrey Photography Exhibit has been implemented -- be sure to view it when you are at the Leeds Historic Depot. Plans are to expand the exhibit with interpretive information and a "wall of photographs" devoted to Leeds and the Birmingham District.

PROJECT: Digital Archives (Lead: Donnie Strickland) - The Archives Committee, in conjunction with the William Boone Library at the Heart of Dixie Railroad Museum, is exploring establishing a permanent archive as part of an Internet portal for accessing historical and contemporary railroad information and photographs from across the state of Alabama.

PROJECT: Restoration of Baggage Cart from Birmingham Terminal Station - Board member Larry Kelpke is restoring a baggage cart from the Birmingham Terminal Station, and plans are for the baggage cart to be on permanent display at the Leeds Historic Depot.



PROJECT: Historic Birmingham Mineral Railroad Signs Project (Lead: James Lowery) The Historic Birmingham Mineral Railroad (BMRR) Signs Project is being funded partially through contributions to the R&LHS Friends Campaign and is a project of the Mid-South Chapter. The project is progressing nicely and on schedule as signs are being installed in the Birmingham, Alabama, area. The project has been endorsed by numerous local organizations and historical societies, some of which have “sponsored” signs through contributions at the \$100 or above level.

The project has been described in previous issues of the R&LHS Quarterly Newsletter, and the project coordinator, James Lowery, reports that the project has a beginning website at www.Bham-MRR.com. That website will be enhanced, and added to, as more historical resources are added that tell the story of the Birmingham Mineral.

The purpose of the project is to raise awareness among the general public, historians, teachers, students, and visitors regarding the locations and extent of L&N's Birmingham Mineral Railroad whose history covered more than a century of steam train freight and passenger service throughout the Birmingham area. The first rails were laid in 1884 and continued with additional branches being added and used until they were retired or abandoned over time. A portion of one branch continued to be used to handle light industrial materials until 1984 and one branch continued to be used to handle the movement of train cars until 1988. Even today, some segments of the century-long era of the BMRR roadbed are still in use as portions of active railroad lines in the Birmingham area.

One thing that has been created as part of this project and which already is reaching the general public are “Driving and Walking Tours” which a person can use to drive up to and see, and in some cases, to walk on the old roadbed. (The driving and walking tours are available on the project's website. Because the roadbed no longer is contiguous, it cannot be walked or bicycled as one complete trail; this is not a “rails to trails” project even though several walking trails in the Birmingham area use segments of the old roadbed. Because the roadbed is not contiguous, the project places signs at high-visibility locations for education of the general public.

The sign logo reflects the railroad's significance in hauling the three locally mined natural resources required as ingredients for making iron and steel: coal, iron ore, and limestone. Birmingham is one of the few places on Earth where all three of those ingredients are found in abundance in close proximity.

Installation of the first sign provides an example of the historical nature of some of the sign sites. The first sign was installed in Birmingham's Woodlawn community across the street from the site of the former L&N Woodlawn Depot, which has been moved to the Heart of Dixie Railroad Museum and restored as the museum's library. The property owner at the sign site purchased the location knowing that he was getting a part of the historic BMRR roadbed, and was delighted to place the marker.

We would like to have any chapter members who are doing historic railroad projects or activities to come forward, let us know about your projects or work, and consider sharing with the chapter membership information about what you are doing. Join us for our Chapter program meetings, bring a friend, and learn more railroad history!



Historical Research

What is the Chance that Vance isn't Vance?

by John Stewart

Woodward Iron Company was the largest “merchant iron” manufacturer in the United States, and they were based at Birmingham, AL. The Woodward family first bought land in the area in 1869, before Birmingham became a town, and they were in business for close to 100 years after building their first furnace in the 1880's. They made iron that others made into products or into steel in some cases. The company was operated by 4 generations of Woodward's and the most colorful was A. H. “Rick” Woodward (1876-1950), baseball team owner and locomotive engineer. Woodward closed in 1973.

There is a wonderful resource for those that want to learn about the Woodward Iron Company and the Woodward family. That is the Woodward Family Papers and Photograph collection online at the University of Alabama's online archive -- 22,000 items including 2,000 photos and the one below.



Apparently Rick Woodward was a fan of photography. It isn't clear if he took the photos or had them taken. In any event, there are wonderful pictures of the Woodward Company's operations and construction projects. It is clear that anything to do with the company's railroad “The Woodward Iron Company RR” was a popular target for the camera, including the Woodward Co.'s private business car.

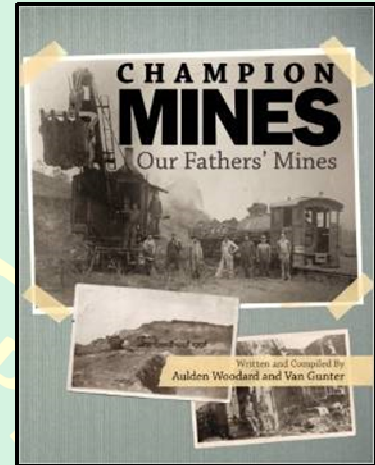
As you likely know, iron is made from three key ingredients: iron ore, coke and limestone. The iron ore typically includes “hard” red ore, “soft” red ore and a smaller amount of “brown” ore. The red ore came from Red Mountain, where Woodward operated a total of 5 mines, including two shaft mines, one of which, Pyne, was located in Shades Valley. A typical mix might be 45% hard and soft and 10% brown.

The Brown Ore sources for many of the Birmingham iron makers was located in Tuscaloosa and Bibb counties near Woodstock, AL, which is close to the present day Vance, AL, of Mercedes Benz fame. You may not know where Woodstock was, but you likely know where Vance is located. Or so you may think.

Woodward operated a brown ore mine at a location called Docray, or Doc Ray in the Woodstock brown ore area. The L&N who served the pit mine with its washer called it Docray, but the locals called it Doc Ray, even the telephone exchange was "Doc Ray # --". A Dr. Ray was apparently an original property owner of the site. Most of the local big four, TCI/US Steel, Sloss, Woodward and Republic had brown ore pit mines and washer operations in this area served by either the L&N or the AGS/Southern RRs.

There were other brown ore "districts" as they were called around the state. One was at Champion and at Tait's Gap, near present day Oneonta, the name given to the end of the L&N branch that reached the area in 1889. A local industrial historian, Van Gunter has completed a book (see Amazon.com) about Champion mines along with Mr. Aulden Woodard (no second "w"). Today Van Gunter lives on a large tract of the former Champion mine land, which was owned by both TCI and Sloss companies.

Van Gunter spent part of his life growing up at brown ore mine site Doc Ray, where his Daddy worked for Shook & Fletcher, who was a large contract brown ore mining company in Alabama. These contract companies would operate mines for the iron makers, and in some cases developed their own mines, selling on the open market, particularly in the latter years of the iron industry in the Birmingham District.



Another brown ore district was located near Russellville, AL in Franklin County, 20 miles south of Sheffield. This area is the site of the oldest known iron furnace in Alabama, dating from 1815, and located a couple of miles southwest of Russellville, AL. The author has some familiarity with the Russellville area, having completed a highway project there for the ALDOT in the 1990's.



Typically, brown ore mining was done in shallow pits, using drag lines or steam shovels in the earlier years. Some operations in Alabama used railroad shovels like the big Marion or Bucyrus shovels that helped dig the Panama Canal. The ore mined would be taken to a washer, to separate the clay and gravel from the ore nodules. These ranged from pebble size to large boulders that had to be broken up with dynamite.

Van Gunter contacted the author with a request for information about Doc Ray mining operation in the Woodstock area where he had grown up. I responded

that the UA Archive had a bunch of great pictures at the Woodward Vance brown ore mine process plant, built in the late 1920's which I figured was likely the name given to Doc Ray at a later time, since it was about 7 miles from Vance, AL.

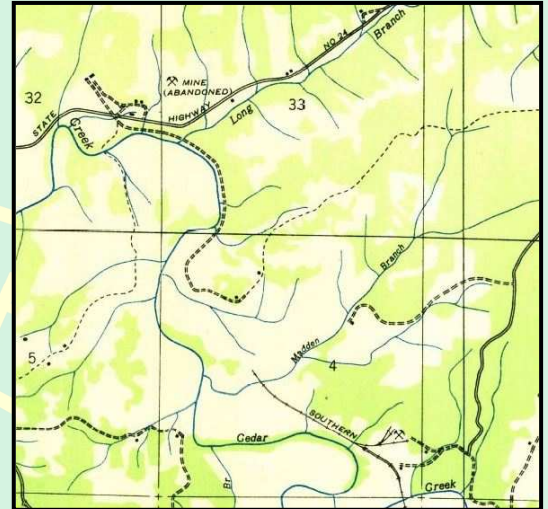
Van Gunter reviewed the "Vance" photos and came back with the observation that there was nothing like the Vance pictures at Doc Ray. He further suggested that the terrain and even the limestone evident in the construction photos of Vance brown ore mine were not consistent with the lay of the land around Doc Ray. If Vance Mine wasn't at Vance, AL, in the vicinity of all that brown ore, where was it?

The author suggested that the University of Alabama identified the site as being in Tuscaloosa County, and the photos themselves are labeled as "Vance Brown Ore Mine". I began to look for other sites in the vicinity that might have been developed in the late 1920's. It was well documented that Doc Ray had been opened in 1905 and developed after 1908 by Woodward Company. There were a number of different brown ore mines in the Tuscaloosa County, Woodstock/Vance area going back decades, but no mine operation could be found that was actually called "Vance".

In a few days, the author received an email from Van Gunter that he had found “Vance Mine” – it was in Franklin County near Russellville, AL. Van found a web archive about mining, www.mindat.org showing Vance brown ore mine was developed by Woodward Iron Company and was located with range, township and section data (R6W, T12S, S32-33). That is, there was a specific location given for the “Vance” mine and it was nowhere near Tuscaloosa County or Vance, AL.

Having worked as a civil engineer in the area of Russellville and made numerous trips there I was somewhat familiar with the location noted on the mindat.org website. The UA Archive photos of the construction of the Vance mine indicated a plant to handle the brown ore, a railroad line being extended to serve the site, and that the site was north of a “highway”.

Using the US Geological Survey (USGS) online map archive (Google “USGS map store”), the author used the range, township and section data to identify a likely location for the “Vance Mine” plant and rail spurs in the area. Construction was dated by the UA photos as 1928 and 1929; USGS mapping was available for 1936 and 1945. The Russellville district didn’t generate the attention for development so there were few additional maps found (unlike the Birmingham District which has many historic commercial maps).



Some of the intriguing UA photos show a Woodward locomotive and work train with a derrick on a bridge over a good size creek. Like other Woodward projects involving railroads, this bridge was a proper plate girder bridge with good solid concrete abutments.

Another angle of investigation was local property mapping used by County governments for tax purposes. The Franklin County online mapping showed “Southern” rail spurs from the old Northern Alabama Ry. line that ran from Sheffield down to Parrish, in Walker County. This line had been built to serve the iron industry that flourished in Sheffield in the last of the 19th and early 20th century.



Using the 1936 and 1945 USGS maps and the property maps it was pretty clear that a rail spur had been extended from Isbell, AL, (south of Russellville) on the Northern Alabama/Southern main line, due west to Rockwood, the site of a large limestone quarry which still produces cut limestone for buildings. At Rockwood, a “Southern” spur extended northwest toward the apparent Vance Mine site, and crossed Cedar Creek, a large creek in the area. There was a site “north of SR-24” consistent with the photos.

Many times, old USGS maps will show a rail spur and subsequent maps will show a dashed line trail if that line has been abandoned. USGS maps also show mine sites with a symbol of a crossed pick and shovel. There were

two on the maps along the trail that went to the supposed Vance mine plant site. And on the 1936 map, the likely site of Vance mine plant was labeled “mine – abandoned”. But the construction photos were dated as late as March 3, 1929 – why would the mine have been abandoned as soon as 1936 even to the point that the rail spur was not shown so soon after construction?

The 1920’s were a boom time in the United States, supposedly with across the board postwar prosperity and every one that could speculated on the stock market. However, in Alabama there were economic storm clouds in the industrial sector during the 1920’s. In the early ‘20’s the coal market went soft and many mines and miners in the Warrior fields were idled. In 1926 and 1927 there was significant softness in the iron and steel market. So, there

were indicators of economic problems before the fabled “Great Crash” in October, 1929, six months after the “bridge picture” was taken by Woodward Company.

Was the Vance mine a victim of the Market Crash? Why would the Woodward’s have put money into the Russellville District in the late 1920’s even after the soft iron market of 1926-27? Was the Doc Ray mine not producing enough brown ore to meet the needs of the typical mix of red and brown ores required for iron making? Why did the Woodward’s build a plant which pictures indicate was far more substantial than most other plants for handling brown ore? The washer at Doc Ray, even in the 1940’s was mostly wooden, according to Van Gunter, like the washers at Champion, and both these sites were operated by Shook & Fletcher into the 1960’s.

The internet is an amazing resource in so many ways. For the Woodward Company the UA archive is a wonderful source. But there are other sources as well for those of us that enjoy this sort of thing.

Continued research on the UA “Woodward Family Papers” site revealed that the Woodward Company went into “reorganization” during the Great Depression. Essentially they went bankrupt, although the company was well run. It appears that the long term debt of the company became a burden that they couldn’t maintain. Like home mortgages in recent years, they were “underwater” on their long term debt, even though they had substantial assets and even cash in the bank. Research found court cases involving tax payment disputes from the period of the reorganization which helped sort out what happened, along with company reports on the UA Archive.

Researching this material it was found that the venture into the Russellville District had been made by Woodward through a wholly owned subsidiary company called Pewaibic Mining Company incorporated in 1927. (A second subsidiary, Industrial Land Company was used to hold land at Woodward, AL for plant expansion.) Apparently Pewaibic purchased about 2,200 acres as well as building the rail access and the ore processing plant in Franklin County. Woodward’s reorganization plan was approved in 1936 and implemented by 1937. It appears that they basically refinanced their long term debt for 25 years to the year 1962. By the way, “Vance” was likely H. E. “Hank” Vance, from a family of Woodward investors.

There is no indication that Woodward stopped their business throughout this process, although they were hard hit by the depression in terms of business volume as were most heavy industries in Birmingham. Pewaibic Mining and Industrial Land Companies were dissolved in the 1937 reorganization. It appears that the total spent by Woodward in the Russellville District was some \$250,000 for land and some \$500,000 for plant, for an apparent total of three quarter million dollars.

What is left of the Vance brown ore plant? Again, the internet is a wonderful resource. Google Earth aerial photography indicates that “something was there” at the apparent location of the plant, but there is no indication of buildings. On the other hand, the rail lines are pretty well indicated by tree row lines and curves that show on aerial photos to help intrepid rail history buffs along their way.

It was the last investigation along the tree lines and field boundaries that led to a fascinating “find”. Our Woodward photos indicated a plate girder bridge of some 90-100 feet in length with concrete abutments at a large creek – likely Cedar Creek. What would Google Earth show today at that location along the Vance Mine spur north of the Rockwood Stone Plant?

The bridge is still there! Google Earth clearly shows a bridge in place at the location of the rail line where it crossed Cedar Creek even after 85 years! The author hopes to make a field trip to see this site in the near future. The bridge’s “skeleton” of two plate girders, floor beams and stringers are visible.

As a follow up, and wanting to “nail this thing down” the author found a resource at the Birmingham Public Library in the government documents collection. This is a 1948 Bureau of Mines study “North Alabama Brown Iron Ore”. Although aimed at explaining methods of drill-based prospecting for brown ore, there are some maps and photos included. On one map the “Woodward” site is clearly marked at the site assumed based on the author’s map studies and “guess-timates” of the rail spur location.



The 1948 Bureau of Mines document also shows a photo of a steel framed brown ore washing plant being erected in 1945 at one of the Sloss Pit mine sites east of Russellville. Could it be that the Woodward Company's plant and equipment were sold to Sloss and resurrected at their No. 14 mine? Who knows, but it might be an interesting question to research...

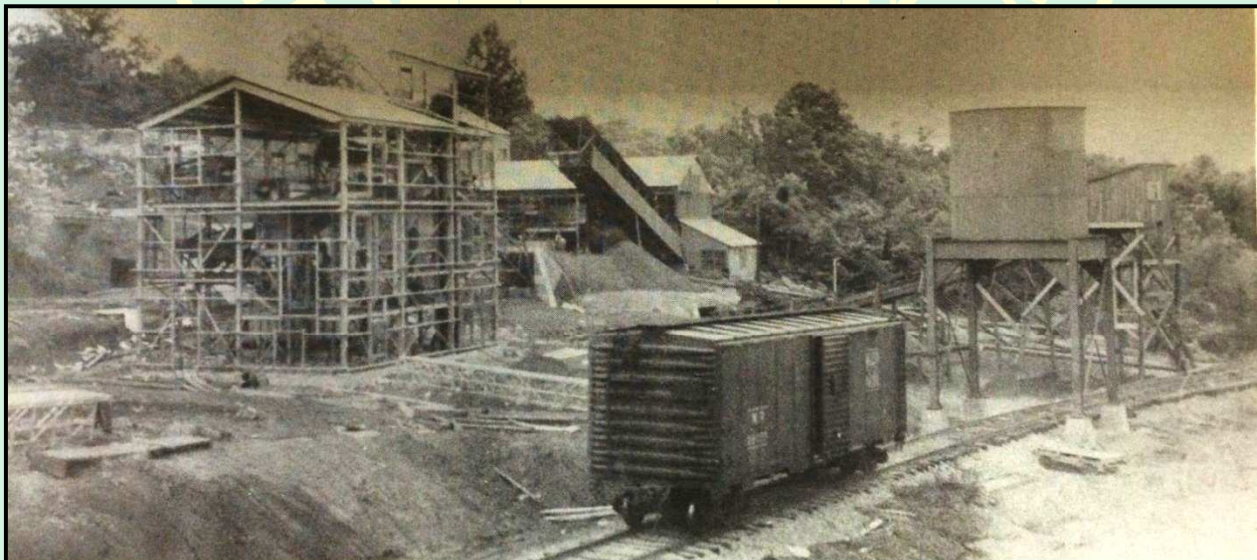


Figure 22. - View of uncompleted Sloss No. 14 washer near Russellville. The heavy-media plant is in the foreground across the tracks, washer proper in the background.

Class J 611 homecoming to kick off Norfolk Southern 21st Century Steam excursions

(From Norfolk Southern news report) -- The 611 is going home again, coming back from its second restoration to headline Norfolk Southern's *21st Century Steam* excursions in 2015.

A red, rounded rectangular banner with a white border containing the text "21st CENTURY STEAM!" in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters.

Sixty-five years after the Class J 611 was built at Norfolk & Western Railway's shops in Roanoke and placed into service for the first time May 29, 1950, the locomotive is scheduled to return under steam May 30, fulfilling the dreams of its Virginia Museum of Transportation owners and rail enthusiasts worldwide.

Chairman and CEO Wick Moorman, who launched plans for 21st Century Steam in 2010, and President Jim Squires will be aboard a J-powered train from Spencer, N.C., where the 611 has been undergoing restoration at the North Carolina Transportation Museum since June 2014.

Neither progress of rail industry dieselization nor ravages of time spent lying dormant on display for decades could defeat the 611, which survived the scrap heap of other steam locomotives and two retirements to take its place among a trio of iconic engines that will power 21st Century Steam this year. The others are Southern Railway 4501 and Nickel Plate Road 765.

VMT is a new sponsor with Norfolk Southern, joining the Tennessee Valley Railroad Museum and the Fort Wayne Railroad Historical Society to operate excursion trips between June 6 and Oct. 11. Tickets and schedule details will be available on the websites of trip sponsors.

Here is the schedule. All excursions are round trips:

*Weekend of June 6—Manassas to Riverton Junction, Va. **N&W J 611***

*Weekend of June 13—Lynchburg to Petersburg, Va. **N&W J 611***

*June 27th—Bristol, Va. To Bulls Gap, Tenn. **SOU 4501***

*June 28th—Bristol to Radford, Va. **SOU 4501***

*Weekend of July 4—Roanoke to Lynchburg and Walton, Va. **N&W J 611***

*Weekend of July 18—Fort Wayne to Lafayette, Ind. **NKP 765***

*Weekend of July 25—Youngstown to Ashtabula, Ohio **NKP 765***

*Weekend of Aug. 1—Buffalo to Corning, N.Y. **NKP 765***

*Weekend of Aug. 8—Allentown to Pittston, Pa. **NKP 765***

*Weekend of Aug. 15—Scranton, Pa. to Binghamton, N.Y. **NKP 765***

*Weekend of Sept. 12—Jersey (TVRM) to Cleveland, Tenn. **SOU 4501**
Scranton, Pa. to Nicholson, Pa. **NKP 765***

*Weekend of Oct. 3—Macon to Tennille, Ga. **SOU 4501***

*Weekend of Oct. 10—Atlanta to Toccoa, Ga. **SOU 4501***

Some operating notes on the 21st Century Steam locomotives:

Southern Railway's 4501 was the pioneer locomotive in Norfolk Southern's initial steam excursion program that operated from 1964 to 1994. The 4501 returned to excursion service in 2014 after being rebuilt at TVRM's Chattanooga shops. Nickel Plate Road 765 was built in 1944 by Lima Locomotive Works at Lima, Ohio, and has been used in excursion service since 1979.

But it is the powerful sleek N&W Class J 611 with its bullet nose and tall-as-a-man driving wheels on a 4-8-4 configuration that many associate with the halcyon days of steam railroading. Its initial restoration in 1982 after two decades of retirement was occasion for a movie, "[Going Home](#)," produced by Norfolk Southern. "The J being alive of course is the greatest joy that we true rail fans have had in many many years," an appreciative fan says in the movie. The resurrection kept the J chugging in excursion service until 1994, when Norfolk Southern concluded its steam program, and 611 was retired a second time and put on display again at VMT.



SOU 4501 at rest at Birmingham Terminal Station, 1968 (Jim Gibson photo)



N&W J611 making track speed through Whitney Jct. heading home to Birmingham. Yes, those were the days! (Marvin Clemons photo)

Norfolk Southern's 2010 announcement of plans to operate 21st Century Steam prompted hope that the 611 might ride the rails yet again. In 2013, VMT launched a study and then a capital campaign, "Fire Up 611!" to fund restoration of the locomotive. Norfolk Southern donated \$1.5 million from proceeds of sale of a Mark Rothko abstract expressionist painting. The 611 was towed to the North Carolina Transportation Museum in May 2014 for display among a group of historic locomotives, and the restoration began there in June.

Golden Era Classics



Once in a great while we'll run across a pair of photos permitting a "then and now" comparison. Take for example the above sepia image of the "Smokey City" from John Stewart showing the turn of the century "railroad reservation" as viewed from 21st Street viaduct looking southwest. A busy L&N freight house appears to the right, along with the original Union Station train shed with the 1891 Morris Hotel in the background. A half century later photographer Ed Dismukes stood just a few steps to the left on 21st Street viaduct to grab a shot of L&N Local #4 pulling out of the "new" L&N Station. Remnants of the old L&N freight house are still visible in the foreground as is the old Morris Hotel, at least for a few more years. Rising in the distance is the landmark Thomas Jefferson Hotel, signifying that the modern age has arrived in Birmingham.

