



The Mid-South Flyer

Summer 2017



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

July Meeting

Relics of Alabama railroads featured on film

In his classic homage to the passing of the American passenger train, *City of New Orleans*, singer-composer Arlo Guthrie sang about the “disappearing railroad blues.” Another herald of the American past, Glenn Wills has also recorded the disappearance of the country’s railroad legacy, in this case through timeless photographs of railroad relics scattered across the Alabama landscape.

A railfan himself, Wills has taken hundreds of photos of abandoned railroad artifacts as part of his larger work of documenting what he calls “forgotten Alabama,” which became the title for two volumes of photography of old and forgotten places and things across Alabama. Wills will be presenting a talk and slide presentation of his railroad subjects, followed by a book signing at the July 15 meeting of the Mid-South Chapter.



Abandoned AB&C “pay car” at Bessemer, Alabama

What started as a chance encounter of noticing an old car along the highway and not having a camera, became Will’s mission. Over the course of the last ten years, he has visited all of Alabama’s 67 counties, logged 30,000 miles and took close to 15,000 photographs. Be it an old house, an abandoned store, a derelict bridge or any number of other physical reminders of the past, all of these played a role in our lives at one point. Glenn felt the need to save those memories in a book, *Forgotten Alabama*. His Facebook page tells the story in his own words:

“The reminders of our past still remain even though they have abandoned and forgotten. I started this journey eight years ago (and) what was a chance encounter driving on US 280 became a passion. To document these reminders of the past while they still exist, I began to seek out what would turn out to be thousands of houses, stores, cars, bridges, churches, barns, etc. The summer of 2013 was when I laid out my plans. I spent about 300-400 hours carefully mapping the entire state of Alabama. I divided the state up into 16 manageable sections. I converted those into maps my GPS could read.



Glenn Wills

“I would only shoot in winter because the leaves are gone, the kudzu is temporarily abated and the skies tended to be dark and gloomy. My days would start before sunup and usually run 14 hours. Each trip was around 500 miles and there were many of these trips. I would wager I have seen more of Alabama than 99% of its inhabitants”

Join your fellow Mid-South members and guests this Saturday for the annual Chapter picnic at 12Noon, followed by Glenn Wills presentation and book signing beginning at 2PM.

Don't forget the Chapter picnic starting at noon Saturday, July 15th!

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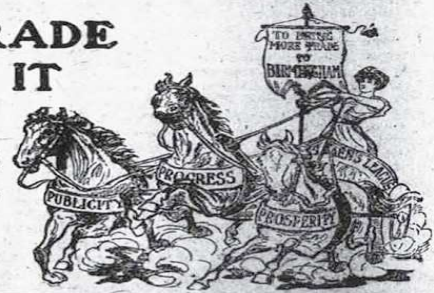
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The Mid-South Flyer

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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*. Membership applications for R&LHS and the Mid-South Chapter are available on the Internet at rlhs.org. Contributions, article ideas and reader comments are encouraged and may be emailed to:

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Editor's Corner

Summertime is a great time for kicking back and soaking up some good railroad writing. Nothing too heavy or mind-bending, just something light and casual for chilling out.

With that in mind, we turn our attention to some entertaining yet informative writing by two of our editorial stalwarts, Lyle Key and Stan Burnett. Lyle tells the story of "the wayward fan" with some insights into the Railway Express Agency. It will make you appreciate the value of today's parcel tracking!

Stan Burnett brings us a look back a memorable rail trip from the 1960s, when passenger trains still connected in the remotest of places and an overnight trip included rides in the vestibule and a sumptuous breakfast aboard a classic streamliner. Could it possibly have been almost a half century since it all went away?

Taking a diverging route from our usual original material, we're filling out this issue with the reprint of a great article on the Seaboard Air Line's Birmingham Sub by Birmingham native Jeff Harwell, reprinted by permission of the ACL-SAL RR Historical Society. Jeff's father, William, was on the scene in the 1960s to shoot some great photography around the Birmingham District. I know you will enjoy Bill's vintage photos and Jeff's well-written article on a personal favorite. Happy reading!

Marv Clemons, Editor





Mid-South Chapter Update

Reported by James Lowery, Chapter President

Remember to Visit and View...

Our wonderful website maintained by Lamont Downs.

Our wonderful newsletter produced by Marvin Clemons.

The Frank Ardrey photographs exhibit in the Leeds Historic Depot (work in progress)

The large-format historic railroad photographs and captions on the Baggage Room walls at the Leeds Depot.

The initial digital archives on Flickr ("Alabama Center for Railroad History and Archives") in process and being added to as more items are scanned. Be thinking about providing some of your own historic photographs or collections for the digital archives. Watch for more about this in the coming months.

Some of the 130 Historic Birmingham Mineral Railroad signs that have been installed in 6 counties throughout central Alabama.

SOON TO BE OPENED: The new Amtrak station in downtown Birmingham. When you go see the new station, take a look at the platform and shed (supports and roof structure above the platform). They were built in the early 1930's as part of the L&N Union Station, and they are still in use today.

Chapter Presence at Southeastern Region National Model Railroad Association Convention in Bessemer

Thanks to the generosity of event coordinator John Stewart, the Mid-South Chapter had an information and recruitment table at the recent SER NMRA Convention. John Troulias and Warren Jones did a great job of staffing the table throughout the entire two-day event and got to talk to a lot of attendees about our chapter and the national organization. Our thanks to you all.

At the convention, the Mid-South Chapter was further represented by chapter members John Stewart, Marvin Clemons, and James Lowery who made presentations on various historic railroad topics. Several other Chapter members also attended the convention and several Chapter members hosted the convention attendees at model train layouts in their homes.

Chapter "interfaces" with other historic facilities and groups

This is not really a specific part of Mid-South Chapter activities, but it is going on as part of the Historic Birmingham Mineral Railroad Signs Project, so I wanted to let you know about it. Local historians, historic Alabama depots, and local/county historical societies are benefiting from the historic research being conducted as part of the Historic Birmingham Mineral Railroad Signs Project. A tremendous amount of that research is being done by Chapter member Tom Denney who has found historic railroad and mining articles, documents, reports, advertisements, photographs, maps, underground mine maps, etc., of facilities that were located throughout Alabama. The amazing thing about his research is that he is finding resources and historic information about Alabama in publications all over the United States! As he finds those, I have been passing them on to the appropriate Alabama historians, railroad museums, local/county historical museums, individuals, etc. They all have appreciated getting these resources that they were not aware of. Thank you, Tom for your great research and historical knowledge.

Another interface with other groups and facilities that is occurring as part of the Chapter's projects and members' expertise is presentations to historical societies, library and museum groups, and general audiences on such topics as the Historic Birmingham Mineral Railroad Signs Project, Great Temple of Travel, Birmingham Rails, etc. I am sure that there are other presentations that I have not listed here. Thank you to all our members who are making historic presentations throughout the community.

Southern Railway's Finley Roundhouse achieves "Places in Peril" status, step towards preservation

The remains of Birmingham's Finley roundhouse, once the largest and most modern steam locomotive shop on the Southern Railway system, have moved a step closer to possible preservation.

The Alabama Trust for Historic Preservation and Alabama Historical Commission have listed the historic railroad structure as one of five "2017 Places in Peril." According to their announcement, much of Birmingham's early 20th century industrial architecture, such as the once magnificent Terminal Station, has been neglected or demolished. A handful of surviving railroad stations and maintenance facilities now stand derelict, and although much of what survives is in poor condition, some like Finley roundhouse require urgent attention lest the hand of time erase it from Alabama's landscape



Remains of Southern Railway's Finley roundhouse

The Southern Railroad Company built Finley Roundhouse in northwest Birmingham to service its locomotives in 1915, when the city's iron and steel production made it a hub of railroad operations. The Roundhouse and adjacent rail yard were named for the company's recently deceased president, William Finley.

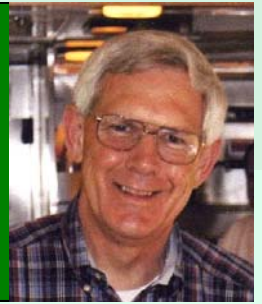
Like much other industrial architecture of the time, the Roundhouse was built with steel reinforced concrete walls and roofs. These provided large open spaces for working on enormous locomotives. A double band of clerestory windows under the elevated central portion of the nearly flat roof washes the 25 engine berths in the spacious interior with natural light. Although the railroad tracks inside the building and the 90-foot diameter turntable that sat in the semi-circular courtyard outside have been removed, the Spartan character of the cavernous interior remains as a testament to Birmingham's industrial might during the early twentieth century.

Steam locomotives were replaced by diesel and railroads were challenged by trucks. In 1952, the Roundhouse was converted into a cold storage warehouse and a rectangular warehouse was built adjacent to it. The evolution of containerized shipping changed Southern's business model and in 2003 the Roundhouse and warehouse closed. A decade later a tornado damaged the roof of the 1952 warehouse, but the monolithic Roundhouse continues to stand high and dry, a fitting legacy to the role of rail transportation in Birmingham's once prosperous iron and steel industry.

In 2012, a local teenaged railroad enthusiast, Khari Marquette, has started a "Save the Finley Roundhouse" group and social media campaign on Facebook. Over the years Marquette garnered support from a number of preservation-minded organizations, including the Mid-South Chapter of the Railway & Locomotive Historical Society, the Jefferson County Historical Commission, and the Jefferson County Historical Association, each of which have endorsed the significance of the Finley Roundhouse and recognized the urgent threat caused by its abandonment. Marquette is forming a non-profit group to promote the preservation and revitalization of the remarkable reinforced concrete structure, which is one of only two roundhouses left in Birmingham and the largest of its type in Alabama. For more information on this cathedral of industrial architecture, see "Save the Finley Roundhouse" on Facebook or contact Khari Marquette at kharimarquette@gmail.com.

RAILWAY EXPRESS AND THE FLOOR FAN

By Lyle Key (cdkrlk@comcast.net)



Before there was a UPS or FedEx, the Railway Express Agency and successor REA Express (collectively referred to as “REA”) were integral parts of the railroad scene. The company’s distinctive “red diamond” logo was displayed at railroad stations large and small as well as on the ubiquitous green trucks that were used for pick up and delivery. A few “elite” passenger trains like the *City of Miami* didn’t handle express shipments, but many of Birmingham’s workhorse trains like the *Sunnyland* were heavily laden with express and other “head-end” traffic while light on passengers. Among the head-end cars on those trains, one might see baggage type cars lettered “Railway Express Agency,” express refers, and express boxcars in the familiar green with the red diamond logo.



REA flourished in a time long before anyone dreamed of the overnight package service that everyone now takes for granted. Also, who could have imagined reliable tracking systems that shippers and receivers could access through their personal computers. Even so, REA was beginning to flounder by the ‘60’s despite its nationwide franchise and name recognition. Motor carriers were providing formidable competition with their less-than-truckload service, and Greyhound and Trailways were offering reliable express service with their buses. REA had built its business around the nation’s once expansive rail passenger service, and that service was contracting and getting less reliable just as the expanding interstate highway system was enabling the motor carriers and bus lines to provide tougher competition. To make matters worse, air freight had become a viable option for really “hot” shipments.

I graduated from Shades Valley High School in May of 1963 and decided to go ahead and start college that summer. There were lots of advantages to starting during the more relaxed summer quarter, but one major drawback was the heat and humidity of summertime in Auburn. For instance, ROTC was mandatory for freshmen, and in order to avoid the mid-day heat, we always hit the drill field at 0700. Since my dorm room at Magnolia Hall was not going to be air-conditioned, I took along a big, round floor fan that at least would keep the air circulating.

In late August, with the end of the quarter approaching, I decided that I would send the floor fan back to my parents’ house in Birmingham via REA Express. My father had stopped using REA altogether because of some badly delayed shipments, and he suggested that I use Greyhound’s package service instead. The idea of using Greyhound seemed very disloyal to an idealistic young railfan, and it didn’t seem possible that REA could foul up a shipment that was going a mere 129.7 miles. Determined to do my part to support a rail-related business, I found a large box, carefully wrapped the floor fan, and tendered it to REA for the journey to Birmingham. A few days later, I caught the westbound *Piedmont Limited* at the Auburn depot and rode it to Montgomery where I connected

with the northbound *Pan American*. The floor fan hadn't beaten me home, but I was confident that it would arrive before I returned to Auburn for the fall quarter.

Mid-September arrived, but the floor fan did not. I called REA and talked to a man who doubtless had heard many similar tales of woe. Since REA didn't have a system for tracking packages in transit, he was as much in the dark as I was when it came to the whereabouts of my floor fan. "Just be patient," he counseled, "It's bound to show up eventually." Needless to say, I didn't find his statement very reassuring.

I returned to Auburn shortly after my unenlightening conversation with the man at REA, and by early October, I had given up on seeing my floor fan again. The only thing left was to file a claim for the lost shipment, but by late October, I still hadn't found time to go to the depot to attend to that matter. Then toward the end of the month, I received a letter from my mother with the startling news that REA Express had delivered the floor fan! It had taken two months to transport the floor fan just 129.7 miles, and I often have wondered where it was during that time. Perhaps it was placed in a dark corner of the freight house in Auburn or Opelika and forgotten for several weeks or perhaps it got misrouted to some far away place like Miami, San Francisco, or Bangor, Maine. At least the REA man in Birmingham was prophetic when he said, "It's bound to show up eventually."

After my experience with the floor fan, I wasn't at all surprised when REA Express went out of business in November 1975. It always is sad when a long-lived institution like REA passes from the scene, but at least companies like FedEx and UPS have filled the breach with nationwide and even worldwide delivery service that's fast, reliable, and easy to track. Even so, many of us old-timers still miss the express cars on passenger trains, the bright red diamond logo, and all those green REA trucks.



In October 1968, a REA Express car containing refrigerated produce awaits its connecting train at Birmingham Terminal Station. (Don Phillips photo, Marvin Clemons collection)

(Reprinted with permission from the ACL-SAL RR Historical Society)

What Ever Happened to Seaboard's Birmingham Subdivision?

by Jeffrey A. Harwell

At the turn of the 20th Century, two railroads built routes over Braswell Mountain in northwestern Paulding County, Georgia. Each of these two routes even included a tunnel at their respective summits, not something you normally associate with Georgia railroads. But by the end of the 20th Century, the fate of each rail line was entirely different.

The route belonging to the Southern Railway has prospered to such an extent that its new owner (Norfolk Southern Corp.) not only had to daylight the tunnel, but added double track over the mountain

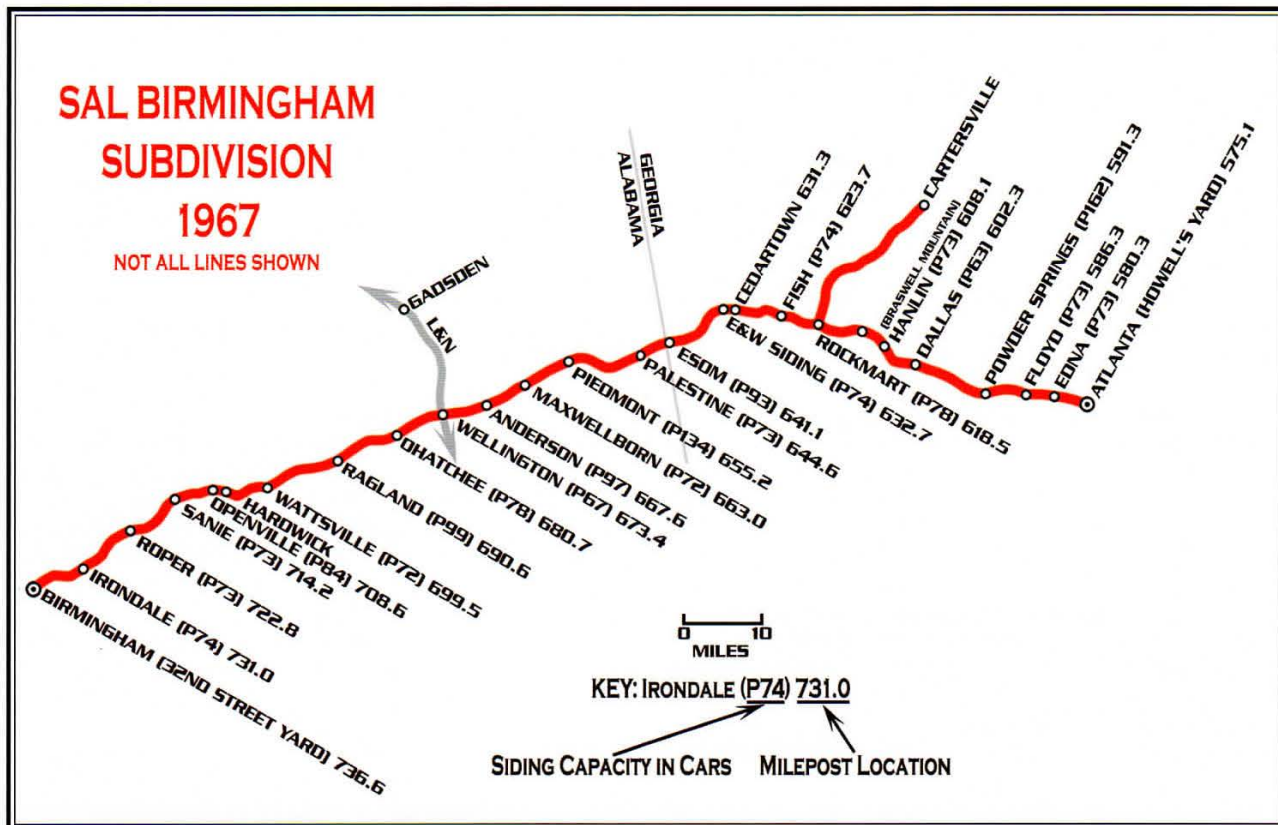
Below: This map of Seaboard Air Line's Birmingham Subdivision shows the main from Birmingham to Atlanta as it existed in 1967. —Map by Jeffrey A. Harwell

just to keep up with the ever-increasing tonnage figures. There have even been manned and unmanned helpers as NS tries to squeeze every bit of capacity out of one of its key southern mainlines.

A few hundred yards away, the right-of-way belonging to the Seaboard Air Line has lain dormant for almost two decades now — an unfortunate victim of corporate downsizing in the 1980s. According to the press releases at the time from new owner CSX Corporation, there just wasn't enough traffic on the ex-SAL route between Birmingham and Atlanta to justify multiple main lines in its southern territory. What were the circumstances that led management to even consider abandoning a once vital piece of the SAL system? To answer this question, we must first study the progression of events that unfolded during the

last decade of the route's existence.

The SAL route between Birmingham and Atlanta was completed in 1904 by taking parts of the existing East & West Railroad and adding to it to bridge the 162 miles between the two cities. While some might consider the Birmingham Subdivision a "mountain" railroad (at least by southern standards), there were no substantial grades to speak of, at least none in excess of one percent. Occasional helpers were reportedly used in adverse weather conditions for heavy eastbound trains leaving Birmingham's 32nd Street yard up to Red Mountain. The tonnage ratings on the Birmingham Subdivision were either equal to, or greater than, those between Atlanta and Hamlet. For example, the 500-series SAL GP30s were rated at 1,800 tons per unit east of Atlanta, and 1,900 tons west of





Atlanta on the Birmingham Subdivision.

Even though the Birmingham Subdivision didn't have the stupendous grades that you might find with other mountain railroads, it did have three tunnels — the only tunnels on the entire SAL system. Besides the one previously mentioned at Braswell Mountain in Georgia, there were two in Alabama on the far west end of the line (Rooper and Hardwick). Granted, the tunnels weren't significantly long, but they just weren't what you'd expect from a railroad located so close to the Gulf of Mexico.

If you visited the subdivision in the early 1960s, you'd find it fully equipped with Centralized Traffic Control, controlled by the SAL dispatcher at Howell's yard in Atlanta. In the 1970s the office moved down the road to Louisville & Nashville's Tilford yard and joined dispatchers from the other Family Lines member roads. The new console for the Birmingham Subdivision was set up to allow the dispatcher to also handle the former ACL Lineville Subdivision between Manchester and Birmingham during off-peak periods.

Employee timetables showed two scheduled freights, the *Silver Comet*, and a

local passenger train in each direction.

The Seaboard had a few crack merchandise trains that warranted names in addition to their assigned train numbers, and the Birmingham Subdivision had one such train. Several sources list No. 27 as the *Capital* operating between Hamlet, North Carolina, and Birmingham. Train 27 remained in the SAL timetable right up until the 1967 Seaboard Coast Line merger and was allotted three hours and 35 minutes between Atlanta and Birmingham during those final years.

In looking at the bigger picture, the *Capital's* route between Hamlet and Birmingham reflected the important role of the Birmingham Subdivision. That role consisted of funneling traffic between the east coast and connections in Birmingham with the Illinois Central, and especially the Frisco, for Midwestern and Western destinations. And that role continued well into the SCL years.

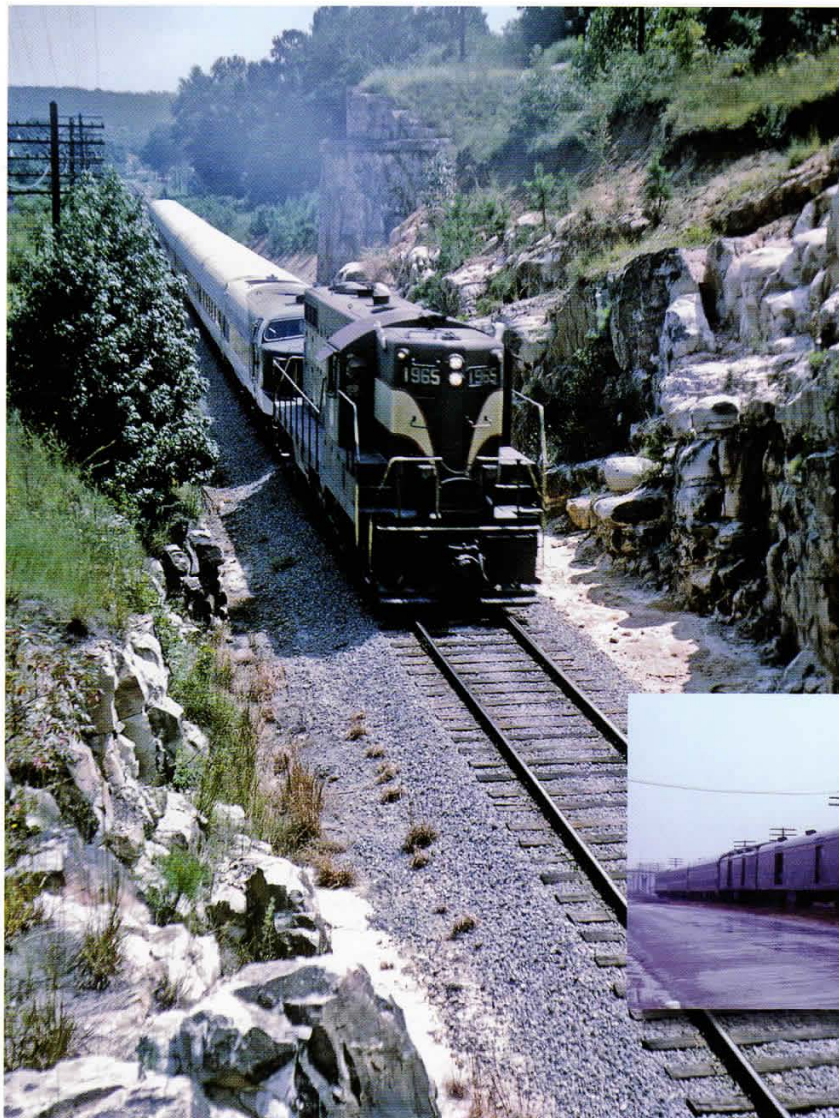
In fact, the importance of the Frisco/Illinois Central connection was illustrated in the early 1970s when SCL began running four Birmingham Subdivision trains (two each direction) directly into the joint Frisco/Illinois Central East Thomas yard in west

Above: The consist of Train 34, the eastbound *Silver Comet*, is making a back-up move at Atlanta's Howell Tower on July 21, 1962. —William W. Harwell, Jr. photo

Birmingham. There was enough traffic at this time to also operate four Birmingham Subdivision trains (two in each direction) into the joint SCL/L&N Boyles yard in north Birmingham. The former SAL 32nd Street yard in downtown Birmingham was pretty much being phased out during this period.

So with eight through trains and various locals to occupy space on this picturesque southern mainline, you'd think that life would be good enough to not even warrant mention of the "a" word (abandonment). So what was the trigger that got officials considering doing something that drastic?

All railroads at one time or another have considered selling off or abandoning certain routes to save money and improve the bottom line. Norfolk Southern has at times tested giving up on the mainline over Saluda, North Carolina, and the former Central of Georgia route between Birmingham and



Left: An unusual visitor to the Birmingham Subdivision was the ex-New York Central *Explorer*, making an appearance in Irondale on September 6, 1965. Apparently the “train of tomorrow” was ahead of its time since an SAL diesel had to be added to get the train to its destination. By this date the train was owned by J.F. Jones of Pickens, South Carolina, and used for excursions. —William W. Harwell, Jr. photo

Below: The ACL/SAL merger is not quite a year-and-a-half old as the remnant of the *Silver Comet* makes its way into Birmingham’s 32nd Street yard on a gloomy November 11, 1968. The Birmingham section would be gone within two months, and the remaining Atlanta-Washington segment within a year. —William W. Harwell, Jr. photo



Columbus. In the mid-1980s CSX gave up on the former SAL route north of Raleigh. In each of these cases, there were still multiple trains running over the mainline. Officials just felt other routes could handle the added trains.

But further research indicates the Birmingham Subdivision was different. Even as late as October 1982, there were still six through freights a day operating over the Birmingham Subdivision, and four of those still operated directly into and out of East Thomas yard (by this time owned by Burlington Northern).

But when train schedules were revised in March 1983, there were some eye-popping changes — significant for what was missing rather than what was added.

The Birmingham Subdivision was suddenly down to two trains a day, Nos. 228 eastbound and 229 westbound. And these lone remaining trains operated into and out of Boyles Yard in Birmingham, not East Thomas. A look at the blocking scheme of westbound Train 229 out of Howell’s yard showed that this train was a “jack of all trades.” It was a local freight to keep the local road switchers in business. On the head end were four different blocks to set out along the way at Rockmart, Cedartown, Wellington, and Ragland. And it was also a through freight with blocks on the rear for Birmingham Boyles Yard, Birmingham Boyles auto facility, and Birmingham BN. So how could all that BN interchange traffic suddenly dry up to the point that it could

be consolidated into one small block at the rear of the two remaining trains?

With the freedom brought about by the Staggers Act of 1980, railroads were poised in the early 1980s to set their own course in a deregulated market. But there was just one problem. By 1982 the country was in the midst of a full-blown recession, one of the worst since the Great Depression of the 1930s. In 1982, U.S. railroads were showing significant decreases in every traffic category except piggyback, and traffic interchanged between the SCL and Frisco/BN in Birmingham at this time was geared more toward general carload traffic, not piggyback.

The Frisco in the 1970s was a key bridge carrier between railroads on the east and west ends of its system. One of the more important Frisco routes stretched between Kansas City and Birmingham. Union Pacific was the key interchange partner in

Right: On December 1, 1962, a Seaboard Geep (at far right) pulls the *Silver Comet's* Atlanta section power and cars past Howell Tower down to Terminal Station. E8 3058 will lead tonight's northbound train. —William W. Harwell, Jr. photo

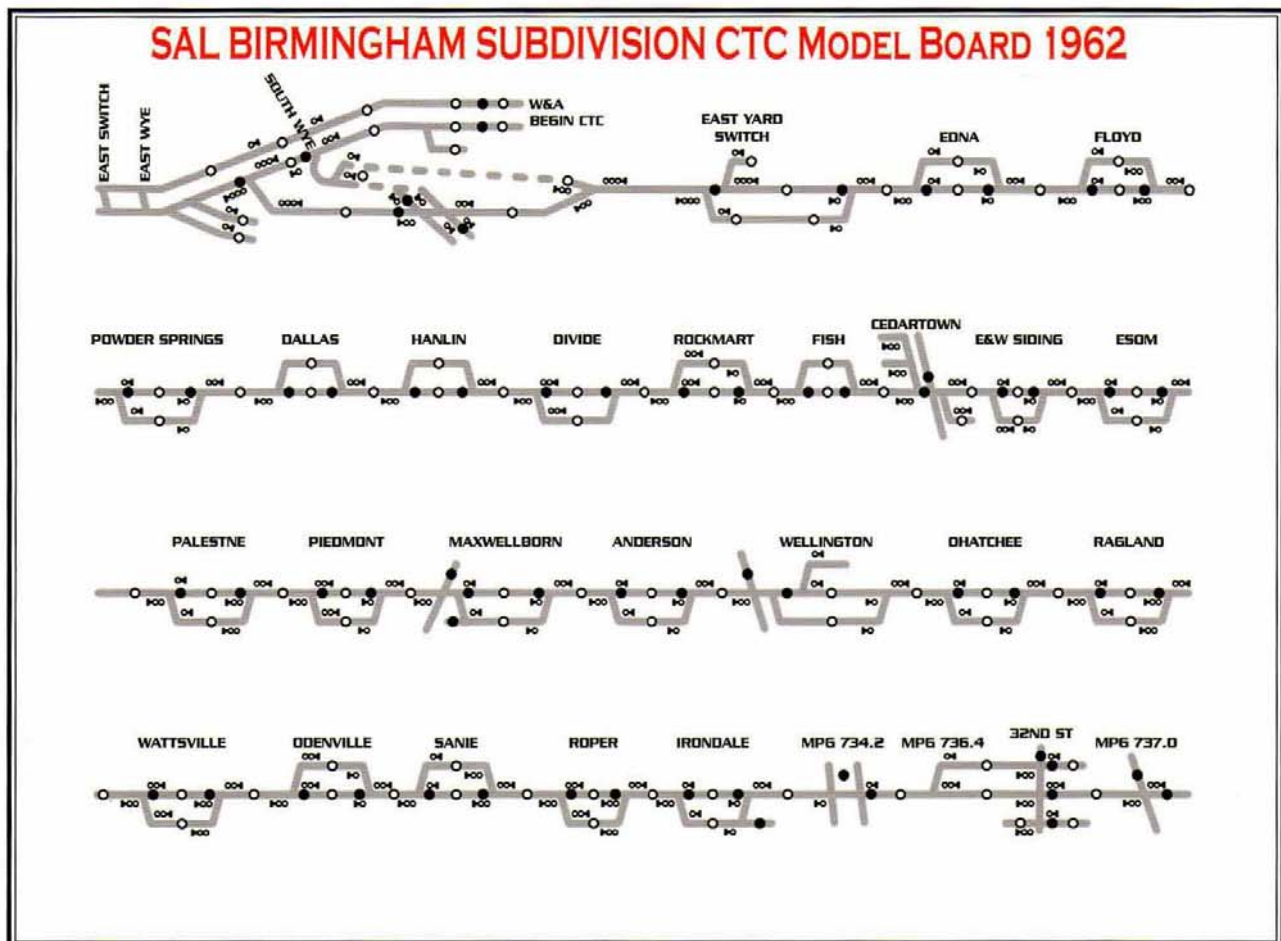


Kansas City, with SCL being the key interchange partner in Birmingham. This was a rather significant route for run-through trains that were developing at the time. In fact, in 1969, SCL, Frisco, and the UP inaugurated the longest run-through train at that time. SCL marketing folks called it the *Coast-to-Coast Express* (CCX). SCL handled the train between Jacksonville and Birmingham, Frisco handled it between Birmingham and Kansas City, and UP handled it between Kansas City and North Platte, Nebraska.

The railroad landscape changed rather significantly in December 1982 when UP

merged with Missouri Pacific. If you're UP following the merger, you could still hand all this southeastern traffic off to the BN in Kansas City, or, you could capture a greater haul by routing the traffic over former MP

Below: This 1962 version of the CTC model board works westward from Atlanta (upper left) to Birmingham (lower right). —Map by Jeffrey A. Harwell







lines into St. Louis or Memphis. And since MP already enjoyed a healthy interchange with the Southern Railway in Memphis, it could divert even more traffic to the Southern through this gateway. (There's some evidence to indicate this shift started well before the official 1982 merger date.)

Also at the end of December 1982, SCL and longtime ally/marketing partner Louisville & Nashville were officially merged to form Seaboard System. These two mergers in late 1982 pretty much knocked BN out of the picture altogether. L&N already reached both Memphis and St. Louis. For example, a UP/Seaboard System Kansas City-to-Atlanta routing via St. Louis, Evansville, Nashville, and Chattanooga had a mileage total of 888. The Kansas City-Atlanta routing via BN/Frisco and the Birmingham Subdivision was 872 miles.

Opposite page: A westbound extra freight is arriving at Seaboard's 32nd Street Yard in Birmingham on December 20, 1962, with a typical GP9 in the lead. —William W. Harwell, Jr. photo

For an extra 16 miles, UP and Seaboard System could bypass middleman BN for a greater piece of the pie.

There was even enough bridge traffic in the 1970s to warrant a solid run-through train between the SCL in Birmingham and the Santa Fe at Quanah, Texas (and later Avarard, Oklahoma). Once again the Frisco fulfilled its primary role as a bridge carrier to move these trains (QLA and CTB in Frisco nomenclature) over its route between these interchange points. A good portion of this traffic traveled over the Birmingham Subdivision to and from Hamlet. So where did this traffic go?

Union Pacific wasn't the only western rail carrier to serve Memphis during this time period. Southern Pacific reached Memphis through its subsidiary St. Louis Southwestern (Cotton Belt). And in the 1980s, the Cotton Belt experienced a major shift in traffic, with all St. Louis traffic moving over to the former Golden State route through Kansas City. That left a lot of excess capacity on the Cotton Belt through Arkansas and Texas which could be filled

Above: Train 34, the *Silver Comet*, is captured from the Howell Mill Road overpass on May 13, 1962. Leading the passenger train is E4 3008. Howell yard extended to the right while the tracks at top left led down to Howell Tower and eventually Terminal Station. —William W. Harwell, Jr. photo

by trains handled through the Memphis gateway. Thus, the Cotton Belt found willing interchange partners in Memphis in the form of Seaboard System successor CSX, and especially Southern successor NS. A quick look at the railroad map revealed that Santa Fe couldn't reach Memphis directly without getting BN involved, which put them at a significant disadvantage.

Yet another factor in the demise of SAL's Birmingham Subdivision was the retrenchment of the Illinois Central Gulf's line into Birmingham from the northwest. In the 1970s, ICG usually ran up to three trains a day each direction between Corinth, Mississippi, and Birmingham. By the mid-1980s, ICG President Harrison



Above: Seaboard's 32nd Street Yard was still in business back on February 25, 1973 when this photograph was taken at the west end of the yard. A Frisco/ICG transfer run was dropping off cars from the joint East Thomas Yard in west Birmingham. The transfer has a Gulf, Mobile & Ohio SD40, an ICG SD40, and an ICG GP10 for power. —William W. Harwell, Jr. photo

Top right: A rather colorful consist leads this westbound manifest arriving at Birmingham's 32nd Street Yard on October 1, 1972. A trio of 1500-class SCL GP40s are up front. Behind the Frisco GP38AC is an SCL SDP35 and another Geep. The units have finished their 162-mile run from Atlanta over the Birmingham Subdivision. —William W. Harwell, Jr. photo

Left: Not everything ran smoothly on the Birmingham Subdivision as evidenced by this picture taken on October 7, 1974, near Ohatchee, Alabama. It seems a pipe load shifted on a westbound train and took out one span of the truss bridge over the Coosa River, sending 22 cars into the water below. An Illinois Central box car hangs precariously on the severed span. It's hard to say whether the guys in the boat are fishermen just passing through or railroad investigators checking out the debris. —William W. Harwell, Jr. photo



Hunter had his eye on a core system, and the Birmingham gateway was not part of that core plan. When the ICG exited Birmingham altogether in 1988, there was just one lone freight into and out of Birmingham. The same mergers that had decimated the Frisco had also taken their toll on the ICG. The Birmingham Subdivision had lost yet another interchange partner on its west end, and it wasn't coming back anytime soon.

Following the drastic train reductions in 1983, Seaboard trains 228 and 229 remained the lone trains on the Birmingham Sub for the next five years. The only minor change came following the 1986 creation of CSX, when these trains were renumbered 678 and 679. New owner CSX was anxious to rid itself of what it felt was excess line capacity in the southeast. In 1987 it tried to downgrade the former ACL Lineville Sub between Birmingham and Manchester

Below: Westbound freight No. 83 is shown arriving at Birmingham's 32nd Street Yard on November 24, 1962, with GP9 1971 in the lead. —*William W. Harwell photo*



by rerouting traffic over existing lines via Atlanta or Dothan, Alabama. However, that experiment was unsuccessful, and the Lineville Sub was quickly reopened for through business.

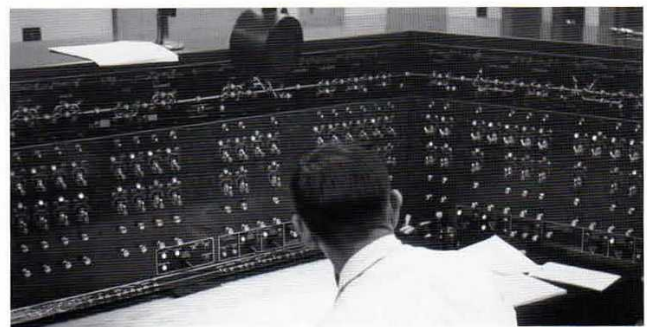
In March 1988 a track reconfiguration project in LaGrange, Georgia, signaled the official end of the Birmingham Subdivision. With a new connection in place at LaGrange, trains 678 and 679 were rerouted over the former Atlanta & West Point between Atlanta and LaGrange, then over the Lineville Sub between LaGrange and Birmingham. Soon thereafter the Birmingham Subdivision was severed as a through route, and several substantial segments of roadbed were pulled up. Mileage for Nos. 678-679 increased from 162 miles to 246, making it much more difficult for a single crew to handle the train.

While the Birmingham Subdivision was officially terminated as a through route, much of the trackage survived following its closure. The whole westernmost 63 miles between Birmingham and Wellington remained in service to access a former L&N branch serving Gadsden, Alabama. There were also 16 miles kept in service between

Cedartown and Rockmart, Georgia, to serve local industries (access to this island segment was via the former SAL branch between Rockmart and Cartersville). And similarly, there were five miles left intact from Howell's yard out to Edna. So instead of abandoning all 162 miles, CSX really abandoned only around 78 miles.

Why is this significant? While traffic doesn't come back overnight, patterns do change over time. But have they changed enough to consider the abandonment a mistake? Were there other options at the time to consider rather than outright abandonment? What engineering factors figured into these decisions? These are all intriguing questions that warrant further research. But that's a project and debate for another time. 🗺️

Below: The signals are dark at the Powder Springs, Georgia siding. This view of the abandoned line was taken on July 21, 1990. Powder Springs was one of only two sidings on the Birmingham Subdivision with a capacity greater than 99 cars (Piedmont was the other). —*Jeffrey A. Harwell photo*



Above: In this May 1962 view we're looking over the shoulder of the SAL Birmingham Subdivision dispatcher based at Howell's Yard in Atlanta. Dallas siding is on the far left, while Wellington siding is on the far right. —*William W. Harwell, Jr. photo*

Railfan Ramblings

A Local, the *Humming Bird*, and a Kentucky ham & egg breakfast

By Stan Burnett (stan7742@otelco.net)



In a previous edition of the *Mid-South Flyer*, I recounted a story about an unplanned trip to New Orleans on the L&N's last *Sugar Bowl Special*. Back in the day, a fellow railfan, Marvin Clemons, and I made a number of such impromptu short weekend trips on trains that ran out of Birmingham. It's hard to imagine now, but in the early 1960s you still had more than one departure time on any passenger train route out of Birmingham, and you could make connections not only at terminals, but also at smaller towns and cities along the route.

On this particular weekend in 1965, we wanted to see some new "track mileage", and did not have much time available. Glancing at the L&N timetable, we noted that one possible trip, which could be done in much less than 24 hours, would be an overnight trip to Huntsville using the L&N from Birmingham to Decatur, and then riding the Southern from Decatur to Huntsville. The connection in Decatur would be with Southern's *Tennessean*, a passenger train we had never ridden, over mileage that we had not yet covered.

The trains involved would be the L&N's local, *Number Four* from Birmingham to Decatur, connecting to the Southern *Tennessean* to Huntsville. After a short wait in Huntsville, we would ride the *Tennessean* back to Decatur, and then connect to the *Hummingbird* in Decatur for the ride back to Birmingham. It's really incredible, compared to today, what you could do by rail even as late as the 1960's.

We hurriedly prepared for the trip (not too much to do but get a tooth brush and borrow \$20.00 from your family), and rushed down to the L&N station, located where Amtrak still calls today. We bought our tickets then headed upstairs to catch *Number Four*.

SOUTHBOUND—Read down				NORTHBOUND—Read up			
The South Wind	The Humming Bird	The Pan-American	Miles	The Pan-American	The Humming Bird	The South Wind	
15 See Note 1	1 Daily	5Δ Daily	99 Daily	98 Daily	6Δ Daily	4 Daily	16 See Note 1
	PM 11.15	PM 6.45	AM 9.00		PM 9.30	AM 8.05	PM 1.30
	11.24	6.54	9.09	Lv Cincinnati, Ohio, ET	9.06	7.50	12.43
	11.57			Lv Ohio River			12.04
				Lv Covington, Ky.			
				Lv Walton			
				Lv Verona			
				Lv Glencoe			
				Lv Sparta			
				Lv Worthville			
				Lv Campbellsville			
				Lv Pulman Coach			
				Lv Streamliner			
				Lv Anchorage			
				Lv Louisville			
				Lv Louisville			
				Lv Shepherdsville			
				Lv Lebanon Junction			
				Lv Lebanon Junction			
				Lv Elizabethtown			
				Lv Muntorfville			
				Lv Horse Cave			
				Lv Cave City			
				Lv Park City			
				Lv Smith's Grove			
				Lv Bowling Green			
				Lv Bowling Green			
				Lv Memphis			
				Lv Bowling Green			
				Lv Woodburn			
				Lv Franklin, Ky.			
				Lv Mitchellville, Tenn.			
				Lv Portland			
				Lv Gallatin			
				Lv Nashville			
				Lv Nashville			
				Lv Lewisburg, Tenn.			
				Lv Athens, Ala.			
				Lv Franklin, Tenn.			
				Lv Thompsons			
				Lv Spring Hill			
				Lv Columbia			
				Lv Pleasant Grove			
				Lv Lynnville			
				Lv Pulaski			
				Lv Prospect, Tenn.			
				Lv Athens, Ala.			
				Lv Tanner			
				Lv Decatur			
				Lv Hartsville			
				Lv Falkville			
				Lv Vinemont			
				Lv Cullman			
				Lv Hanceville			
				Lv Garden City			
				Lv Hayden			
				Lv Trafford			
				Lv New Castle			
				Lv Birmingham			

The trip north from Birmingham to Decatur was probably routine for the train crew, but not so for us. There weren't many passengers on the train, so the flagman had plenty of time to share stories about the "old days." Then, as we pulled into a siding just north of Cullman, he invited us out into the rear vestibule for our meet with the southbound *South Wind*.

I'm not sure what month or time of year we made this trip, but I believe that the *South Wind* still had it's long winter season consist. And what a passenger train it was, with a pair of ACL diesels and lots of tuscan red Pennsylvania Railroad passenger cars, all flash and speed as it roared past us in the siding!

Soon we were in Decatur, and shortly after debarking we hopped aboard Southern's *Tennessean* for the brief ride to Huntsville. Immediately after leaving the Decatur station we crossed the Tennessee River on the Southern's impressive bridge. The route from the north end of the bridge to Huntsville is along level river bottom on tangent track, where we made great time. Along the way we sauntered back through the Pullman for a look out the rear window, but were quickly escorted back to our coach seats by a not so friendly conductor. "So much for 'Southern' hospitality," I thought.

Arriving in Huntsville, we had some time to kill before the arrival of the westbound *Tennessean*, and wondered what we would be able to do for the next couple of hours. The depot agent wasn't interested in our company, so we struck up a conversation with the driver who delivered the mail off the passenger trains to the Huntsville post office. The driver used his own pick-up truck, which made it an official postal vehicle.

With nothing better to do, we hitched a ride with him to the Post Office to deliver the mail off the *Tennessean*. We'd only traveled a few blocks when we were pulled over for turning right on red, which was not permitted at the time. Our new friend pointed to the post office sign on his truck, and the officer waved us on. Needless to say, we were elated by our new found importance as guardians of the U.S. mail!



View of joint L&N/Southern Decatur depot looking south. L&N track to Birmingham curves left, Southern to Memphis curves right. (Clemons collection)



Southern's historic Huntsville depot (Clemons collection)

Without further delay, we delivered the sacks of mail and picked up more sacks for the westbound *Tennessean*. Since the driver had some time before the train's scheduled stop in Huntsville, we cruised into an all night beanery for a cup of coffee. After the short ride back to the depot, we thanked our new friend for the adventure and boarded the westbound *Tennessean* for the quick trip back to Decatur.

A real treat awaited us in Decatur, the return to Birmingham on the L&N's deluxe *Hummingbird*. The "*Bird*" soon arrived off the bridge for its stop at the Decatur depot. We boarded the train and, having looked at the timetable and talked to the conductor, hurried to a nearby vestibule for the scheduled meet with the northbound *South Wind*. As we held the end of the double track at Decatur Yard, the *South Wind* showed up on the mainline, running like its name implied. It had three Pennsylvania diesels and plenty of Pennsy equipment, including a round-end observation car.



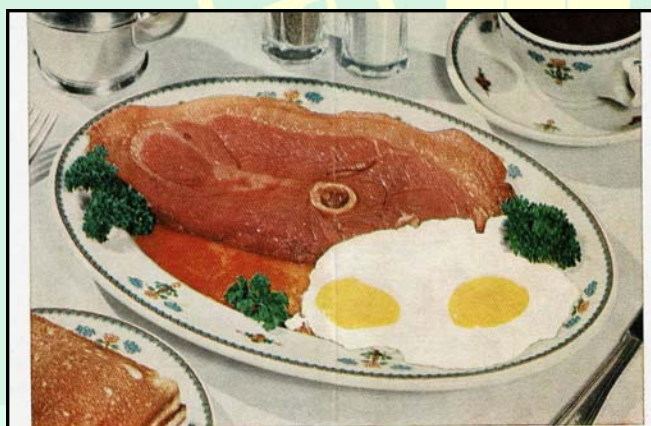
The northbound *South Wind* led by PRR diesels meets the L&N's *Hummingbird* at the south end of double track at Decatur Yard (Marvin Clemons photo)

In stating that the two *South Wind* trains were the highlights of the trip, I do not at all mean to imply at all that the *Hummingbird* was any secondary player. First of all it was a long train, and had to make two stops at the Decatur station to accommodate passengers. The train carried coaches and Pullmans from St. Louis to Montgomery, Chicago to Mobile, and Cincinnati to New Orleans. And then there was the full-length diner featuring L&N's delicious "Kentucky Ham Breakfast," a photo of which was prominently displayed on the back of L&N's public timetables.

We were concerned that the short trip back to Birmingham might not permit us time to eat, but learned we would if we answered the first call to the diner. And I'm sure glad we did, because my country ham breakfast was the culinary highlight of my entire railfan experience! Well, OK, maybe the griddlecakes on the Illinois Central's *City of Miami* could share honors.

But it was the "accompaniment" to breakfast that made the experience so memorable. Seated in the dining car as our long train wound through the hills of north Alabama in the early morning mists, while enjoying a delicious breakfast on a crisp white linen tablecloth with a live flower in the window vase, was almost too much for the senses, and a memory to cherish forever!

One of the things that is so amazing to realize is that all I've described was a matter of routine back then. It was not unusual, and could be experienced on any day. Marvin and I count that trip as one of the best short trips we ever had. We both made other trips that were longer, but mile for mile, that trip could not be surpassed.



NOW . . . More Famous Than Ever!
L&N's Country Ham Breakfast . . .

These hams are carefully selected and cured especially for the L&N Railroad on a farm at Pence Valley, Kentucky, where they are properly aged to assure that old-fashioned "salt-cured" flavor. Then, expertly prepared according to our own recipe by experienced chefs, served with real red gravy, hominy grits, fresh eggs cooked to your taste, and choice

of hot bread, this is a breakfast you won't forget! Equally Famous is the L&N SEAFOOD PLATTER— Available on our New Orleans trains, this rare treat includes soup du jour, soft shell crab, oysters, Jumbo shrimp, fried trout or broiled mackerel, and other delicacies...fresh from Gulf Coast waters. Try it!



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LOUISVILLE & NASHVILLE R.R.

Golden Era Classics



Cutting through the morning mist — While not the *Humming Bird* described in Stan Burnett's previous article, this early morning shot of the *Pan American* coasting down grade near Hayden, AL certainly captures the feeling. Credit Hugh Comer with this ethereal photo from March 1946. Below, another atmospheric shot shows the southbound *Humming Bird* during its stop at the L&N's Union Station in Birmingham in July 1954. Introduced in 1947 as an all-coach streamliner, the L&N later added Pullman sleeping cars to its consist. (Photo by L&N Staff Photographer Norman Beasley, Marvin Clemons collection)

