



March 2019

THE MID-SOUTH FLYER



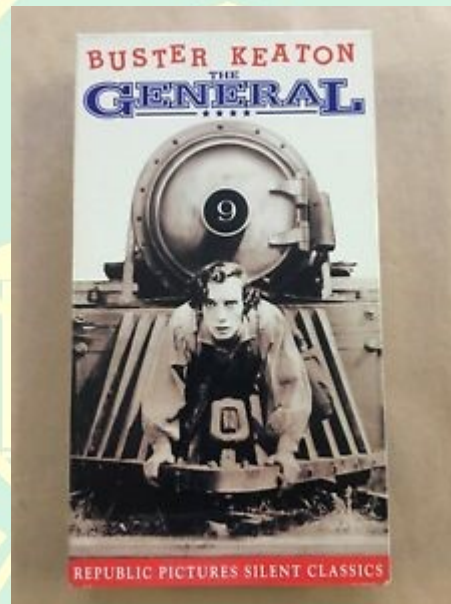
Entering a New Decade of Service

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

IN THIS ISSUE:

**Next Chapter Meeting — March 16, 2019, at 2:00 p.m.
Historic Leeds Depot**

**March Program — *THE GENERAL* Starring *Buster Keaton*
Viewing of the Classic 1926 Locomotive Film with Discussion**



Special Chapter Service Recognitions

**Alabama Fuel & Iron Company, Part II – Acton Mines
*John Stewart***

**Dramatic Train Robbery Took Place in Birmingham, February 19, 1914
*Donna R. Causey***

MARCH 16 PROGRAM—A VIEWING AND DISCUSSION OF *THE GENERAL* ONE OF THE GREATEST MOVIES EVER MADE!

The General is a thrilling 1926 American silent comedy action film starring Buster Keaton and released by United Artists. The film was inspired by the Great Locomotive Chase, a famous locomotive story from the American Civil War. MGM granted the film a huge production budget by 1926 standards, and it features extensive footage of classic locomotives in action with the best of Keaton's amazing but incredibly dangerous acrobatic stunts on moving trains and in spectacular settings. Today, the movie is generally considered to be one of the greatest ever made, it is archived in the Library of Congress and recognized by the American Film Institute as the 18th greatest film of all time.



CHAPTER NEWS

Message from the President: Support the Work of Your Chapter

In the last *MID-SOUTH FLYER* newsletter, I mentioned things that could be part of your New Year resolutions, and I have added to that list even more ways that you can be involved and can benefit from your membership in the Chapter. Consider the following:

- Renew your membership in the Mid-South Chapter and in the national Railway & Locomotive Historical Society.
- Make a donation to the Historic Birmingham Mineral Railroad Signs Project.
- Recommend to local historical and civic groups that they contact us for a program presentation about local railroad history.
- Volunteer to serve on the Mid-South Chapter Board of Directors.
- Attend as many of the Mid-South Chapter program meetings as possible.
- Invite others to attend the Mid-South Chapter program meetings or to join the Chapter.
- Offer to give a program at a Chapter meeting on a railroad history topic.
- Locate photographs (hard copy, slides, digital, etc.) that you have taken through the years of trains and railroads in Alabama, and loan or donate them to the Alabama Railroad Archives for scanning and making available through the online archives.
- Write an article for the *MID-SOUTH FLYER* Chapter newsletter.

2019 Chapter Program Meetings

March 16, 2019, at 2:00 p.m.

May 18, 2019, at 2:00 p.m.

July 20, 2019, PICNIC,
beginning at 12:00 Noon
and program afterward.

September 14, 2019, at 2:00 p.m.

November 16, 2019, at 2:00 p.m.

Recent Railroad History Work of the Chapter

The Chapter's support of the Historic Leeds Depot continues, most recently with the installation of a large print of the Birmingham Terminal Station mounted on the wall above the restored Terminal Station baggage cart in the Depot's former Baggage Room. The print was provided courtesy of Pam Packer.

Chapter members continue to make presentations on a variety of railroad history topics to historical and civic groups. Some of those presentations include book signings by two Chapter members (Marvin Clemons and Ken Boyd) who have authored wonderful railroad history books.

Chapter members are assisting Vulcan Park and Museum with creation of a Birmingham Terminal Station display in their gallery.

MID-SOUTH FLYER

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 annually and include subscriptions to the Society's twice-yearly magazine Railroad History, quarterly newsletter, and the chapter's e-newsletter, the *MID-SOUTH FLYER*. Contributions, article ideas and reader comments are welcome.

Ken Boyd, Editor
kenboydphotography@yahoo.com

TRIBUTE TO LAMONT DOWNS AND PAT HONSA

As you probably noticed when the annual officer elections were held at the January 2019 Chapter meeting, Lamont Downs is stepping down as Secretary and Membership Chair after serving faithfully in those offices and having been assisted by his wife Pat Honsa. At the January Chapter meeting, the Board of Directors and the Chapter membership recognized the wonderful work and support of these key members with the presentation of a plaque.

The plaque reads, "Presented in appreciation to Lamont Downs and Pat Honsa for their outstanding service to the Mid-South Chapter of the R&LHS, its members, and its Board of Directors."

Because many of our Chapter members may not be aware of all that Lamont and Pat have done for the Chapter through the years, the following are just some of the things they have done to benefit all of us:

- Served as Secretary and Membership Chair, fulfilling all the duties of those offices including providing minutes of all the meetings, maintaining membership information and lists, welcoming new members, providing brochures and membership materials to new and prospective members, managing meeting sign-in sheets, and following up after Chapter meetings.
- Maintained, and kept up to date, the Chapter website.
- Very seldom missed attending Board and Chapter meetings, driving back and forth from Wetumpka to attend the meetings.
- Provided, and paid for, refreshments at the Chapter meetings.
- Coordinated the annual Chapter Picnic.
- Created the 10th Anniversary logo.
- Provided, and paid for, the 10th Anniversary cake – twice – once at the beginning of the 2018 year and again with two cakes at the November 2018 10th Anniversary celebration.
- Presented Chapter programs.

Chapter President, James Lowery, made the presentations and stated that "I think I speak for the Mid-South Chapter Board of Directors and for the entire Chapter membership when I express our gratitude to Lamont and Pat for their tremendous commitment and service to the Chapter and to the Board of Directors."

Lamont plans to continue to maintain the Chapter's website, and they both will continue to provide refreshments at the Chapter meetings and will continue to coordinate the annual Chapter picnic. We very much appreciate their continuing to serve the Chapter in those ways.

James Lowery
President and Treasurer
Mid-South Chapter



Pat Honsa, Lamont Downs and James Lowery

SPECIAL RECOGNITION FOR MARVIN CLEMONS

As the Mid-South Chapter began a second decade of service at the January meeting, Mr. Marvin Clemons was recognized for his outstanding contributions to the Chapter and the railway community. The following were highlighted at the meeting by Chapter president, James Lowery:

- Founding the Mid-South Chapter.
- Serving as the first president.
- Providing leadership throughout the chapter’s first decade.

Marvin was presented with an appreciation plaque that features the Terminal Station image shown below. A second, identical plaque will be permanently displayed at the Leeds Depot.

In addition to a long and very successful professional career, Marvin grew up around railroads and actually worked at the Birmingham and Atlanta Terminals for a time. In 2007, he co-authored a widely acclaimed book entitled *Birmingham Rails—The Last Golden Era* with Lyle Key. In 2016, he published an internationally distributed book, *Great Temple of Travel, A pictorial History of Birmingham Terminal Station*. He is highly in demand as a speaker and lecturer on historic railroading topics.

His most recent work has involved the creation of a commemorative exhibit of the historic Birmingham Terminal Station to be featured at Vulcan Park and Museum from May to December 2019. The exhibit will include a large model of the Terminal Station, preserved items from the station and various pictorial and artistic renderings.



Marvin Clemons and James Lowery

All of these and other efforts by Marvin through the years have advanced our Chapter’s goals of educating the general public, railfans, and railroad historians about the railroad history of this area.

A very special congratulations and thank you to Marvin for all his wonderful work through the years!



Terminal Station, showing Fifth Avenue Entrance and Subway, Birmingham, Ala.

ALABAMA FUEL & IRON COMPANY PART II – ACTON MINES

John Stewart

In the late 1960's John Harbert began acquisition of land for development of the Riverchase community which would become one of the first "top end" mixed-use developments in metro Birmingham. This land had been the site of the first of Alabama Fuel & Iron Company's (AF&ICo) three coal operations in the Cahaba Coal Field. It was known as "Acton," after the Acton family who had been in the area for generations and owned much of the land.

Development at Acton in 1906 represented a continuation of development in the Cahaba Coal Field that began in the southern limits of the coal field well before the Civil War. After the Civil War, development continued south of Helena with spurs extended southward from the South & North Alabama subdivision of the L&N. As noted in Part I of this four part series, the Cahaba Field was mapped extensively by Joseph Squire. Henry F. DeBardeleben acquired coal property as part of the DeBardeleben Coal and Iron Company in 1890; these lands were sold to Tennessee Coal & Iron (TCI) in 1892 before much development was done.

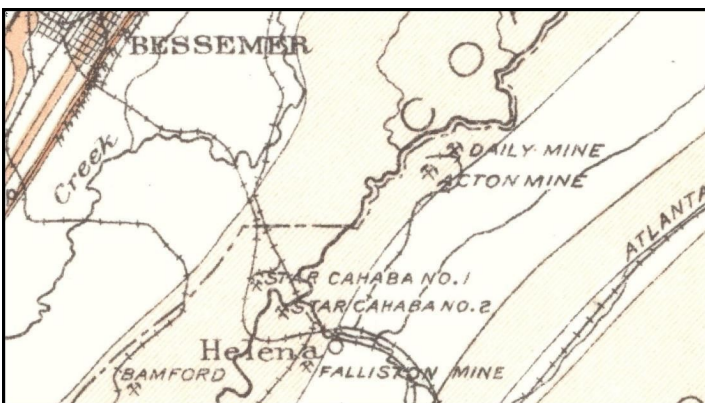
To the Acton Basin coal, a rail spur was built from Helena for about 8 miles. From Helena, it paralleled north of today's SR-261 and then curved north along Hale Bailey Branch (the line of today's US Hwy 31) toward the Cahaba River. Development on the property began in 1906, a year ahead of the AF&ICo's area that

Louisville & Nashville—T. O. Harrison, assistant engineer, Birmingham, Ala., advises that grading is in progress on a branch of the South & North Alabama Railroad from Helena, Ala., to Acton Basin, eight miles, the contractors being Dunn & Lallande Bros. of Birmingham. This branch is being built for the purpose of developing the coal property of the Alabama Coal & Fuel Co. in the Acton Basin, which is the coal field lying just south of the Cahaba river and about eight miles east of Helena. W. H. Courtenay, chief engineer, Louisville, Ky.

became Margaret and Acmar and will be discussed in Part IV. *Railway Age* reported the spur line in February, 1907. The corporate records of AF&ICo reviewed at this point begin with the year 1916. Corporate records of the earlier years from 1906 through 1915 have not been found.

SUMMARY OF OPERATIONS AT ACTON MINES					
Based on the data found to date. Note the change from No. 4 Mine to No. 5 in the fourth column, and tons to dollars profit in the third column.					
Year	No 1	No 2	No 3	No 4	Total
1907	2 Slopes Combined		No	--	25,000
1908	192,000	19,000	Data	--	211,000
1910	142,000	101,000	Found	4,000	247,000
1911	167,000	83,000		3,000	253,000
1912	151,000	88,000		7,000	246,000
1913	111,000	78,000		--	189,000
1915	64,000	46,000		--	110,000
1916	79,000	60,000		--	139,000
1917	90,000	64,000		--	154,000
1918	64,000	47,000		--	111,000
1919	44,000	40,000		No. 5	84,000
1920	--	41,000		40,000	81,000
1921	--	38,000		24,000	62,000
1922	--	53,000		4,500	57,500
1923	--	* \$29,000*		--	
1924	--	* \$47,000*		--	
1925	--	* \$10,000*		--	
1926	All Acton Operations Abandoned				

"Alabama Coal Mine Inspection Report 1908," Denney, Samford Library, "Coal Mines 1910," published by B. H. Rose (Google Books) and "The Coal Mine Statistics for the State of Alabama, 1911," published by the Alabama Mineral Map Co. (authors collection) provide helpful information. For 1910 and 1911, Acton



produced about 250,000 tons of coal. This was about 800 tons per day or 25 daily carloads at 30 tons per car. For 1911, AF&ICo was shown as the fifth largest Alabama coal producer with about 750,000 tons total production; two thirds of this amount came from the mines at Margaret and Acmar.

In 1911, the Acton No. 1 & 2 Mines worked for almost the full year, some 300 days, and the No. 4 less than half of that time. Cost per ton for mining was listed at 50 cents for No. 1 and 2 and 65 cents for No. 4. These data indicates that 50 to 65 miners worked in each mine. All three mines were ventilated by fans, which was important as the mines were "gassy" and good ventilation was a key safety factor.

Mining was accomplished by pick and shovel, and the explosives used were black powder and Monobel. ["There are also produced the "Monobel powder" and "carbonite," which are specially designed for use in fiery coal mines, as they contain a lower proportion of nitro-glycerine than dynamite, and, in addition, cooling mixtures." *Scientific American*, 1907] This was judged be typical of most mines in the District based on a review of 1911 data.

On November 18, 1913, at 3:21 pm, the Acton No. 2 mine suffered a large explosion which killed 24 of the 29 men in the mine at the time. Tragedies of this scale were not common, but the Company, the Bureau of Mines and the explosives manufacturers and a rescue train of the TCI company were prepared and responsive. Rescue efforts began by about 9 pm, and special rescue suits were used to enter the mine. A full investigation followed.

Thomas Denney provided the author a copy of the accident investigation and report which he obtained through his extensive research of the mining activities in the Birmingham District.

The explosion was reported to have been caused by a black powder "shot" [to remove in place coal] which ignited coal dust in the air, methane gas and additional kegs of black powder. The Chief Mine Inspector was quoted as saying that the basic cause was the use of black powder explosives for 1 to 3 shots being "badly placed." This was understood to mean that the shots "blew out" of the coal face exposing the coal dust to the explosion; methane gas was reported as a contributing but minor factor.

It is understood that the practice at this time was for individual miners to place and fire explosives in their particular working areas. Although the timing of the shot firings was coordinated, there was no overall supervision of this work. Thus a careless or poorly trained miner might be placing and firing shots.

It was stated in the reports that the AF&ICo management was very cooperative and wanted to improve safety. It is understood that black powder was banned after this event, and that other safety and training methods were employed by the AF&ICo.

Despite the severity of the explosion, the mine workings themselves were not badly damaged and work was resumed within weeks after the explosion and follow up investigation.

The next view of the operations at Acton was for the year 1916, from the Reports to Stockholders (1916, forward, Hoole). These reports are well written narratives that put the Company's operations into perspective rather than the data of the Mine Statistics reports.

The year 1916 reflected three major concerns for the Company: the national economy, labor issues, and shortage of rail cars. The market was flat in the first part of the year, but improved for the second half. However, the Alabama mines were in a slow period, while the mines of the eastern region were booming. Alabama miners were being recruited to the Kentucky and West Virginia mines. AF&ICo was forced to recruit "green" farm labor and train them, resulting in a loss of production efficiency. Finally, the railroads were not providing the cars needed to ship coal that was being mined at any given time, causing work stoppages.

The significant response to the labor shortage was twofold. One being a raise in wages at three points during the year. This was reported as being "district wide" rather than limited to AF&ICo. Second was an effort to provide the miners with better living conditions through the use of mules to plow gardens and fenced yards. It is not clear how much of this was done at Acton versus Margaret/Acmar. This policy was implemented to build loyalty.

It is also clear that by 1916, the Acton mines were playing out. A review of figures provided indicates that the investment at Margaret and Acmar was close to \$1 million in book value while that at Acton was about \$250,000.

The statement was made that equipment was slowly being removed from Acton and moved to Margaret/Acmar. It was also stated that Acton property may have had about two more years of production -- by 1916 it had been worked for about 10 years.

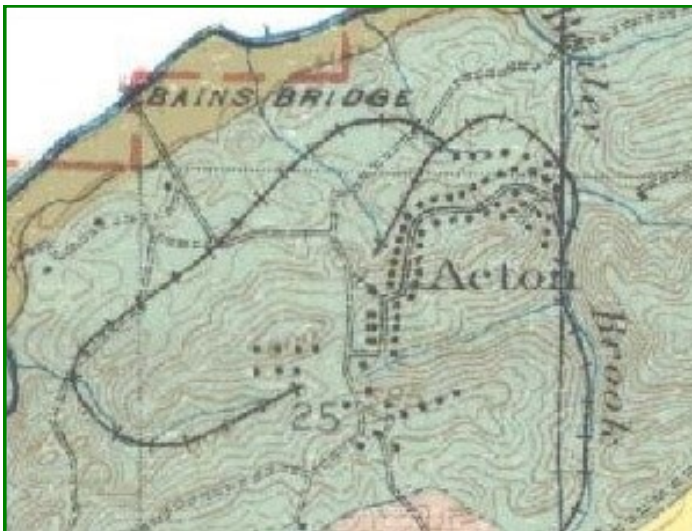
The Company engaged the miners through several programs targeted at self improvement and mutual benefits for the Company and the miners. One was through First Aid training and competition. The miners had (mandatory) safety meetings and first aid training on a regular basis, plus the Company entered teams in Districtwide First Aid demonstration contests. It was noted that the Company had been self insured for "the last three years" against accidents.

Production at Acton totaled 113,000 tons for 1916 (all figures rounded) which was down from 132,000 tons for 1915. Profit on the other hand was somewhat higher at \$47,000 (1916) vs. \$42,000 (1915). This production was generated by No. 1 and 2 mines, with no mention of No. 4.

It should be noted that this profit figure comes from three sources: sale of coal, rents to miners, and sale of merchandise from the Company store (commissary). Of this \$47,000 profit, about \$31,000 was from sale of coal, \$11,000 from merchandise and \$5,000 from rent. Thus, fully a third of profits were generated from charges to the miners themselves. No mention has been found that the miners were paid in Company scrip or "clacker," but it seems that this was the general practice. Examples of AF&ICo clackers may be found online.

Coal sale contract renewals for Acton coal were being made at what were viewed as favorable terms. It is noted that sales contracts seem to have been made by coal name; i.e., "Acton" separately from another mine properties. For example, it appears that Acton coal was sold to the L&N, which served Acton, but not the Central of Georgia, which served Margaret/Acmar.

The map below is dated 1917 and was produced by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS). Their maps are generally found to be surprisingly accurate, so the village or "camp" is suggested as a reasonable representation. (The rail spur is not correct.) The Cahaba River is at the top, the Shelby County line shows in red. Bailey Brook is close to the alignment of US Hwy 31 today; Bains Bridge was located near today's Old Montgomery Highway. Much of the area of this map is today part of the Riverchase mixed-use development. Acton No. 1 mine would be right of the "n" in Acton, and No. 2 mine would be to the left of the "25" Section number.



For historical context, the United States declared war on Germany on April 6, 1917. Soon after that, the United Mine Workers entered Alabama stating (according to the shareholders report) that they wanted to organize the miners to assure that the U.S. would get the best production for the war effort and to assist Washington in reaching that goal. It was stated that there had been no Alabama union activity since the defeat of the unions in 1907 and 1908, and the AF&ICo made every effort to keep the union at bay and to convince the miners to have nothing to do with the union. This included "discharging all who showed any desire for the union." Very few had to be discharged.

In addition, the government was regulating the price of coal [and nationalizing the railroads]. It was stated that the operators in the Birmingham District were increasing wages rapidly, which impacted the cost of producing coal. The AF&ICo took an "active part in all of the hearings and negotiations in Washington with the Fuel Administration" and was "probably more responsible for the increase [in coal sale price] ... than any of the other companies."

It was noted that accidents increased due to the "green" labor mentioned the previous year. The Company made "settlement" payments for accidents of varying amounts depending on the severity. Apparently this considered the miner's loss of earnings, as the wage increases were felt to have increased the outlay for settlements -- some \$10,000 over all properties, less than 10 percent being at Acton.

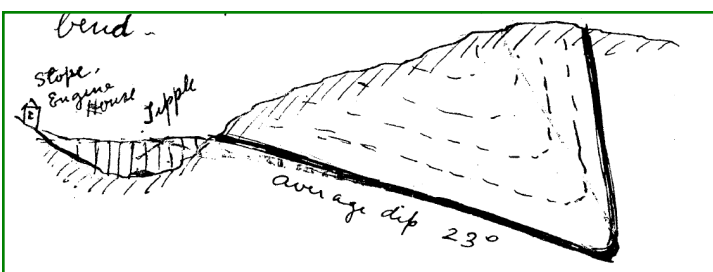
Notwithstanding all of the issues mentioned above, the Company profit for 1917 was over \$500,000. Acton No. 1 produced about 90,000 tons while No. 2 produced about 64,000 tons. Including coal, rents and merchandise as noted above, the total profit for Acton was about \$140,000 versus \$47,000 for 1916.

No significant further comments are offered for Acton except to say that the mine was "gradually being exhausted." Coal being mined was "from pillars and faulty places that heretofore were considered unworkable." It was predicted that another year of operation could be expected but at "reduced tonnage over 1917."

It was also noted that there were many "faults" in the coal seams. When a fault was encountered it meant that the coal seam was interrupted vertically -- sometimes the seam turned vertical and could not be mined. Thus, many mines were limited by fault lines when they were encountered. Mines might extend left or right from the main access, but at some point this increase in distance could impact efficiency and cost.

At Acton, the seams were followed from the outcrop at ground surface, usually on the northern face of a ridgeline, and then sloping downward to the southeast. Mining followed the seam downhill, with entries being extended to the left and right.

The sketch below is from the 1913 explosion investigation at Acton No. 2, and it illustrates how the coal seam “dips” down (here at 23 degrees, or one foot down for 2.3 feet forward). At the end of the seam, the coal layer turns vertical. This would end the productive working of the seam. Not every fault would end the work. In some cases, the seam would be displaced vertically but would continue beyond the fault with only a slight change in elevation. This enabled the miners to continue to work while adjusting their elevation to follow the faulted seam.



The report to shareholders for 1918 indicated a continuation of government regulation and union attempts to organize labor at AF&ICo, which fought hard against unionization.

In order to resist the unions -- who were successful at organizing other Birmingham District companies -- AF&ICo was either forced by the government or by circumstances to give concessions. Many companies were operating on an 8 hour day by this time, while AF&ICo was still on a 10 hour day. Government cost accounting “justified” a lower selling price for the 10 hour day due to lower cost, and the opposite for the 8 hour competitors. This placed the Company at a price disadvantage in terms of cost, but it would seem that the lower selling price might have made the coal more attractive in the market. It was understood that AF&ICo contracted much of their sales rather than being in the open market, so the overall impact is not clear.

The report of 1918 showed Acton with a profit of some \$67,000 from No. 1 and No. 2, including about \$11,000 for commissary and about \$3k for rents. Thus some 80 percent of profits derived from sale of coal.

The Company made great efforts to have the miners work harder for the good of the war effort -- which was also good for the Company. It was stated in the report that after the Armistice in November 1918, that the miners became very lax in their efforts. In addition, the worldwide flu epidemic of 1918 hit the mining communities in October and this also impacted productivity.

For the year, Acton No. 1 produced about 64,000 tons and No. 2 about 47,000 tons. All of this production was noted as being from “pillars and stumps in a retreating operation.” It is interesting to note that these robbing operations and the ensuing settlement caused cracks and paths for surface water to enter the mine workings and slow the work, requiring extra pumping. In addition, the robbing was noted to have required a systematic organized approach, which reduces the number of work areas, and therefore reduced production. This was noted as being more hazardous with a resulting increase in injuries and fatal accidents -- 90 accidents with 5 fatalities.

Given the short remaining life expected at Acton, maintenance was reduced, and housing and other structures that required maintenance costs were put off.

In an effort to prolong the operations at Acton, prospecting was done and successfully located a new seam (Thompson) 125 feet below the current seam being worked. A new mine (No. 5) was started beneath No. 1 mine and was expected to produce 450 tons per day or about over 100,000 tons per year. It was stated that cost of development should be no more than \$50,000.

Meanwhile, the year of 1919 saw the impact of postwar production cuts, returning troops impacted the labor market and worker strikes. Consumer demand for Birmingham District coal was down and stockpiles at commercial customers were large. Many producers resorted to price cutting even below the government wartime prices. In response to this, the Company outsourced their sales to their former sales manager who operated on a straight five-percent commission. This arrangement was found to be satisfactory, although it was ended by 1925.

In a further effort to stabilize the market, AF&ICo helped to organize a Statistical Bureau of the Birmingham Coal Operators. Any member had access to compiled market conditions for decision making rather than relying rumors.

Later in the year 1919, the railroads and others began renewing contracts. Many of these were at reduced rates, but the AF&ICo rail customers, Central of Georgia, L&N and Frisco, were willing to renew at government prices with wage clauses helping to protect AF&ICo from wage increases. Rail car shortage continued to be a problem particularly with the L&N, and this impacted Acton operations.

In addition, a national coal strike was called for the first of November 1919. AF&ICo was not unionized, and it was stated that “we threw every safeguard possible around our operations, holding mass meetings with our men, and worked up a very strong spirit among them against the Union and the strike call.”

This resulted in an increase in production, but the Company also had to anticipate that a wage increase was likely to be granted by Washington. In response, a 14-percent wage increase was given, much to the surprise and pleasure of the AF&ICo workforce. The Fuel Administration agreed that for contracts with valid wage clauses, the full wage increase could be passed on to the customer. As might be expected, the railroads did not like this but eventually were expected to agree.

Overall for 1919, Acton No. 1 and 2 produced a profit of about \$52,000 including over \$9,000 for commissary sales or about 17 percent of the total. No. 1 mine produced about 44,000 tons and with that was exhausted. No. 2 produced about 40,000 tons.

The new mine (No. 5) under No. 1 was stated to have high expectations for replacing No. 1, but the seam was only 42-inches thick. Production at the end of 1919 was about 150 tons per day with equipment being relocated from No. 1 and a new No. 5 tippie being erected on the same rail spur serving No. 1.

As a result of the anticipated success of the new No. 5 mine, a general renovation was performed on the housing in Acton. Total development costs for No. 5, which were expected to be \$50,000, turned out to be about \$85,000. Production from No. 2 mine was expected to hold for the new year (1920).

The report for 1920 started with an update on the National Strike. President Wilson settled the strike with the appointment of a Bituminous Coal Commission which disregarded the previous 14-percent increase and replaced it with a 27-percent increase effective April 1, 1920. Wage clauses in sales contracts protected the Company, although it was stated that inefficient production cost some 10 cents per ton.

The United Mine Workers saw all of this as an opportunity to strike again in May, forcing the operators to recognize the Union. The Coal Operators responded by forming a committee to fight the strike and assessed members 10 cents per ton to create a fund for the member operators.

The report stated that by the end of the year 1920 the Operators had won a complete victory over the Union and eliminated the threat of the Mine Workers for years to come. The cost of this effort to the Company included the (10 cent per ton) assessment of some \$39,000 as well as cost of "guns, extra deputies, etc.," for "our own protection."

During the summer and fall of 1920, there was increased demand and a "runaway market" with prices skyrocketing. The Company refused to sell at these high prices and stuck to its contract prices, realizing "these high prices would react and prove

harmful to the industry" in the long run.

During 1920, Acton No. 2 produced a profit of about \$30,000 including commissary sales of about \$3,500. As stated above, No. 1 mine had been exhausted the previous year and the new No. 5 mine had started production but was not stated to show a profit although nearly 40,000 tons were produced. The Company's bookkeeping standards would charge the development costs against production, but profits were expected in 1921. There were no fatal accidents reported for 1919 or 1920, although a total of 86 accidents were reported at Acton in 1920.

The report for 1921 indicated a poor market and strong competition for the year. It was reported to stockholders that many coal operators made no profits for the year.

The Company continued to pay its assessment to the operators strike fund. It was noted that many operators, lowered wages after the victory over the union, in spite of "the promise to their labor, the public and the Governor." AF&ICo made "one slight reduction" and assured employees that there would be no further reduction until April 1, 1922, agreed to in the strike settlement by the government.

It was stated to the stockholders (by DeBardleben) that although holding wages worked a hardship as far as profits, it would go a long way to retaining loyalty of the workers. Total profits for the year were just over \$400,000 on about 690,000 tons mined.

Acton No. 2 produced about 38,000 tons in 1921 and No. 5 about 24,000 tons, but these totals were based on about 150 days of production or about half time.

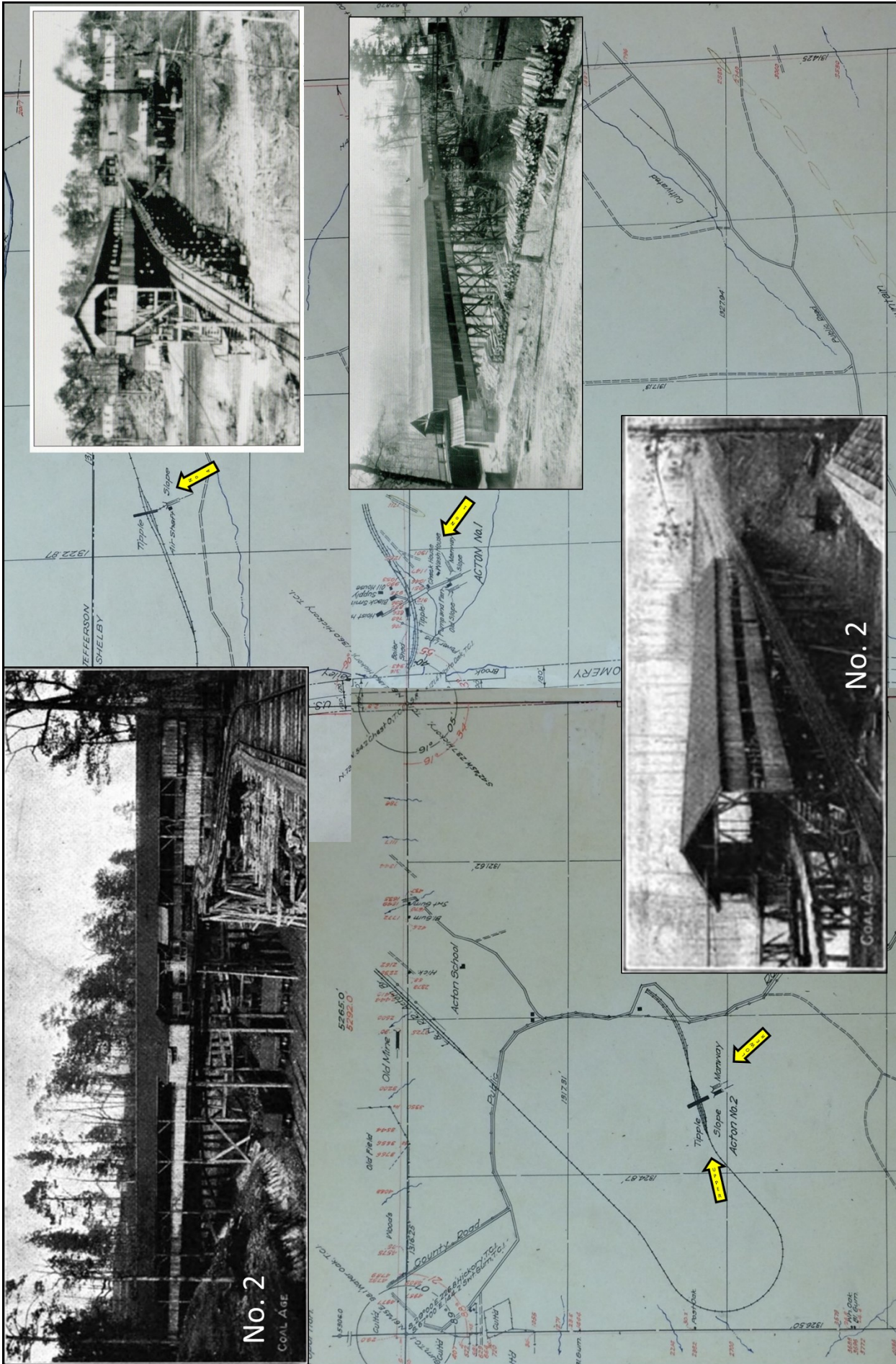
Acton No. 5 was shut down due to the higher cost of operation and coal from old No. 1 outcrop was handled over the No. 5 tippie; it would reopen when "the market takes a healthy turn."

Accident costs were being handled (since 1920) under the State Workers Compensation Act, which the Company found to be very satisfactory. Acton had only 19 accidents although there was one fatality -- considerably less tonnage and fewer work days and workers contributed to the decrease in accidents.

The report for 1922 stated that the Company was on partial time operation through the month of May due to limited market. However, because of a strike in the "central competitive field" [not clear but assumed to be KY/WV], beginning in June, business increased dramatically. The rest of the year was on full time operation except at Acton where L&N rail car shortages reduced workdays. Apparently coal mined was never stockpiled on site.



This map shows the current development at Riverchase with the Acton Spur overlaid in red. There were spurs built, likely by the AF&ICo, to serve the No 4 mine and the Mines at No. 1, No. 3 and No. 5. The shaded areas indicate the coverage of the mine headings. Mine maps used are courtesy of Thomas Denney. No 1 is estimated from the No. 5 map. Note that No. 1 mine was in a seam above the later developed No. 5 mine, which was about 125 feet lower than No. 1. No information has been found for the No. 3 mine to date. The coverage of No. 2 mine is most likely only partial as the information is taken from a 1913 map relating to the explosion in that year which killed 24 miners. It is expected that the coverage of the No. 2 mine is larger in area.



This map reflects the same coverage as the map on the previous page. The map utilizes Tennessee Coal & Iron plat maps for the Acton property. The plat sheets show detail for the plant layout mines at No. 1, No. 2 and No. 4. This enables the determination point of view, indicated by the yellow arrows. The tippie structure images for No. 2 come from *Coal Age* magazine, provided by Thomas Denney from local library research. The No. 4 image are published in both Penhale and Skaggs books, and No. 1 images are published in Skaggs.

Acton No. 2 produced about 53,000 tons, but No. 5 only about 4,500 tons. No. 2 operated less than 180 days and No. 5 less than 50 days. Nevertheless, the Company overall shipped over 1 million tons of coal in 1922. The Acton division showed a total profit of only about \$21,000 with about 60 percent coming from coal, about 29 percent from commissary and 11 percent from rents. No profit was reported for No. 5 and the cost per ton was about \$4 versus about \$2.60 for No. 2. No. 5 was not performing well.

Acton's 1922 accident experience was less than 1921 with no fatalities. A severe gas explosion at Acmar resulted in a decision to abandon open lights for the miners in favor of battery operated lights. Each miner was charged 10 cents per day for the Company to maintain and charge the batteries.

Acton was reported as being on a "robbing basis, producing from 250 to 300 tons per day" and expected to continue on this basis for about another year. Because of the shortage of rail cars, it was recommended to idle the No. 5 mine.

In 1923, Acton produced a profit of about \$35,000 with 83 percent coming from coal, 11 percent from commissary and 6 percent from rents. Acton accounted for only 6 percent of the total profit of the Company.

The first half of 1923 was reported to have all locations at full time work and good profits. The market slumped in July and "mines were forced on partial time." This increased cost of production in the face of falling prices. Earnings for the second half of 1923 were only about half of the first half.

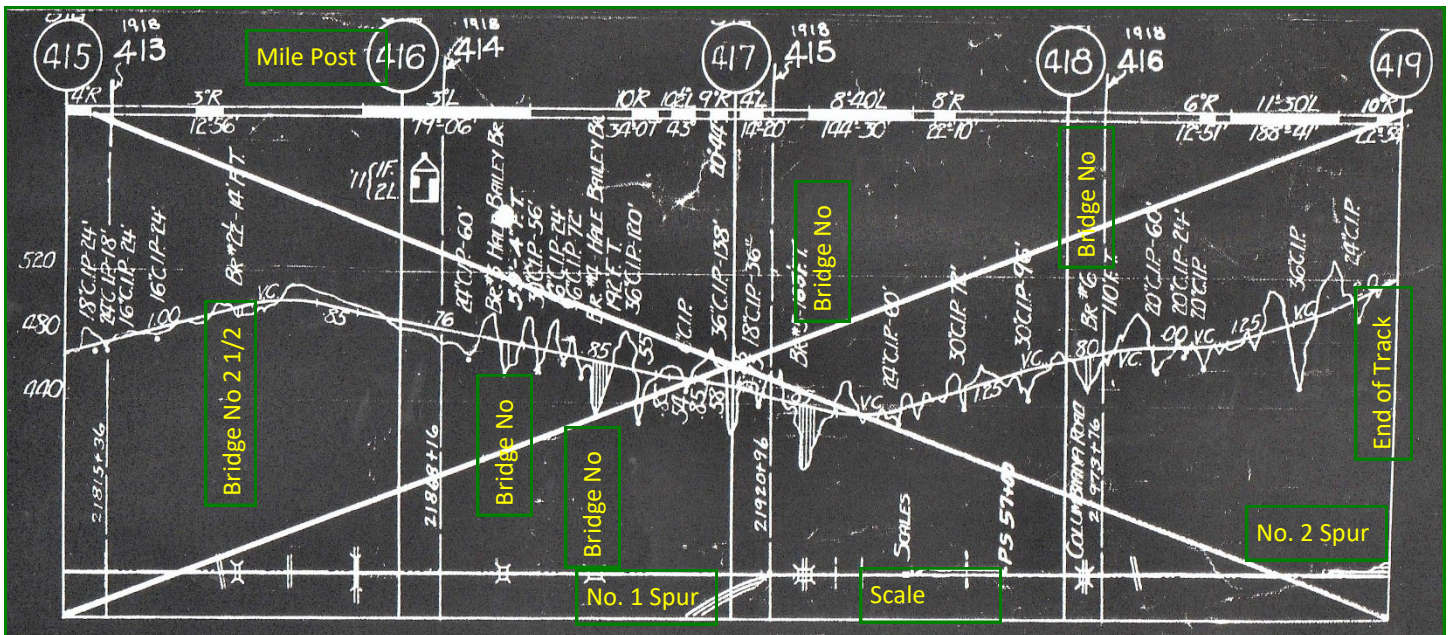
In 1924, Acton No. 2 produced a profit of about \$56,000, with 85 percent from coal, 8 percent from commissary, and 7 percent

from rents. Acton accounted for about 8 percent of Company profits. Acton No. 5 did not operate. Depreciation for both of the Acton mines was charged against the operations of No. 2.

Market conditions were reported as being "extremely bad for the first six or seven months" -- competitors were noted as being in the same circumstances. Demand for coal improved however throughout the second half with heavy demand by year end.

A new practice implemented in 1924 was presentation of Five-Year (increment) Service pins to hourly employees. Over 600 employees Company wide were noted as qualifying for these pins for which the Company spent \$2,650.

In 1925, Acton accounted for \$23,000 in profit with 44 percent from coal, 39 percent from commissary merchandise and 17 percent from rents. Capital expense at Acton was about \$25,000 which is assumed to have been charged to the operation and reduced the profits. Record output of the Company was over 1.2 million tons.



In 1926, it was noted that “we have permanently abandoned our Acton operation, having exhausted the original seam of coal.” Further, the effort to establish a new No. 5 mine, “one of the smaller under-seams, proved to be not only unprofitable, but we could not establish this coal on the market” due to poor quality.

It was noted in the report that not only equipment but 39 houses were moved to Acmar and Overton.

The right to mine remaining coal at Acton was leased to an operator who paid a royalty of 30 cents per ton, operating a “wagon mine” (no railroad). It was stated that this would likely produce about \$200 per month income for about a year or more.

As noted in Part I of this series, the L&N Railroad received permission from the Interstate Commerce Commission to close the Acton spur line in September 1927. (ICC FD 6463). It is assumed the track would have been removed at that time.

The Acton Spur of the L&N was abandoned 90 years ago. Several areas of roadbed are visible -- one is used as a golf cart path. A track scale pit has been located, as well as a bridge abutment. A roadbed cut is located adjacent to US Hwy 31. The track chart on the previous page covers the Acton end of the spur and was provided by Thomas Denney, courtesy of Univ. of Louisville. The track scale pit image is by the author with location help from Bill Dixon of Riverchase.

Sources

A number of individuals and sources have supported the research for this series of articles. Thomas Denney has provided many documents from his extensive research online and in the Samford and Birmingham libraries. Ken Penhale has shared material with the author, as have Marv Clemons, Jeff Newman and others.

Ken Penhale and Marty Everse have authored *Helena, Alabama*, published by Arcadia Publishing in their *Images of America Series*. In addition, Heather Jones Skaggs' *Riverchase*, part of the same series by Arcadia, is a useful reference. Dr. James Sanders Day's *Diamonds in the Rough*, (U of A Press, 2013) mentioned in Part I is a fine reference on the entire history of the Cahaba Coal Field and is a key reference for this area and era of Birmingham District's history.

The Hoole Library at the University of Alabama (Hoole) in Tuscaloosa holds the corporate papers of the AF&ICo. Research by Denney as well as the author have provided much information which was recorded in the annual Reports to the Stockholders of AF&ICo. These reports provide very readable narrative as well as financial and operational data on AF&ICo operations.

Editor's Note: This article is Part II of a four part series by John Stewart. Part I was published in the November 2018 issue of *THE MID-SOUTH FLYER*.

DRAMATIC TRAIN ROBBERY TOOK PLACE IN BIRMINGHAM

Donna R. Causey

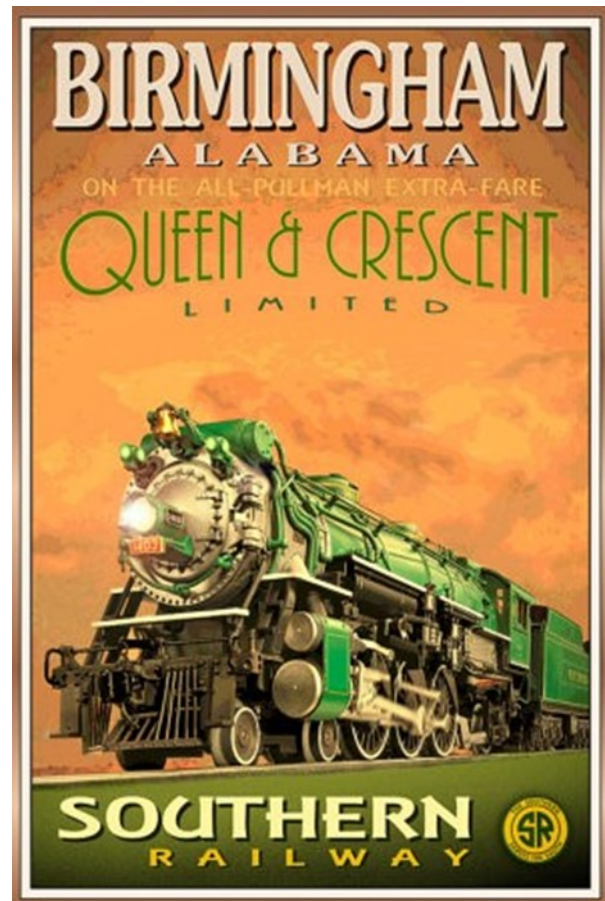
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The night of February 19, 1914, was an ideal one for train robbery. It was dark, and drizzling rain. The fast Queen and Crescent Cannon "Ball" was forty minutes late, with one of the best and swiftest engineers on the road at the throttle. This train makes only two stops between Chattanooga, Tennessee, and Birmingham, Alabama, one hundred and fifty-six miles. Everything was going merrily as the great locomotive shot through the dense darkness of night. The four other clerks in the car were busy distributing the big mail, received from three large connections: Cincinnati Southern R. R., Southern from Washington, and the N. C. St. L. R. R. from the West. I was checking up the registered matter and arranging it for delivery, not in the least dreaming that a pair of evil eyes was on top of my car, watching where I put everything, with intent of robbery when the right time came.

Just as the train swung around a sharp curve in a deep cut, Engineer Murphy felt something cold, like steel, jab him in the left ear. He had every nerve and eye strained watching ahead, for he was now running over sixty miles an hour. Murphy did not look around then, but, thinking his fireman had punched him with the engine-rake, said, "What do you mean? Keep that rake out of my ear!"

On finding that the steel was pressed tighter, he turned to see a masked man with a large Colt's extra-long-barrel gun looking into his face, and another man with one covering the fireman. The robber



said, "Do you think that you can do as I say?" The engineer said, "I will try." The robber said, "Don't shut her off yet. I will tell you when I want you to stop."

After they had run about three miles below Trussville, Alabama, in a wild, mountainous country, the robber told the engineer to slack her down, and when the engine stopped the robber ordered the engineer and fireman off the engine and back toward the coaches.

But as soon as the fireman, a young man about twenty years old, hit the ground, he started to run around the front of the engine. One of the robbers ordered him to stop or he would kill him on the spot, at which he stopped and was taken back toward the coaches.

Had to let them in mail car

After leaving the engineer and fireman with one robber, the other two came into the mail car. (We had to let them in. for they were preparing to throw sticks of dynamite through the windows after shooting them out.) Two of the robbers came in, ready to shoot the first man who resisted. They asked, "Who is the 'Boss-man?'" to which one of the clerks, pointing to me, said, "There he is." I said, "I am the clerk-in-charge. What do you want?" The robber said, "We want what you have got, but before we get it, we want all these other men to vacate at once." The men did so, with their hands up and guns stuck against their ribs. The robbers took them back where the engineer and fireman were stationed, and about that time the old negro porter came on the scene to see what was up, only to find a gun thrust in his face, and to be ordered to uncouple the mail car from the rest of the train. As soon as the porter uncoupled, the heavy set robber ran down to the engine, climbed up in the cab, opened the throttle, and off we went; myself, with two robbers in the car, rifling the sacks of mail, and one acting as engineer. It may be funny to some, but I now had an entirely new crew out and out. The new engineer ran the train down about two and a half miles farther, nearly to Irondale, Alabama, and then stopped and came back into the mail car.

I had not told them what they wanted to know, and they said, "Wait until the big chief comes in. He'll cut your d – d throat if you do not tell." I tried to keep them off the registered pouches, and this big chief bulldozer stabbed me in the arm and kicked me around and abused me unmercifully, saying that he intended to kill me when they had got all they could.

I know as much as you do

One of them said, "By G—d, I know as much about this business as you do," and proceeded to locate the registered pouches. He cut straps and transferred the contents to another sack he had provided for the purpose. He also remarked that he had had a d – d long, cold ride, not to have got anything. One of them said, "Get his d – d watch"; but another, a little better man, said, "Oh, no, don't do that." When the two others were in the other end of the car, I asked this one if he had any manhood, and appreciated my position to get them not to kill me, and he did so. After they had rifled and taken all they could see, and the car looked as if a cyclone had struck it, they left the car and got on the engine, after uncoupling it from the mail car, and ran about three miles to where they had an automobile waiting. Here they got off the engine without shutting off the steam, got into an automobile and made their escape into Birmingham.

Wired the chief of police in Birmingham

As soon as the conductor knew what was up, he ran back to the first telegraph station and wired the chief of police at Birmingham, and in twenty-five minutes after the robbers got out, two high-speed automobiles came with a dozen police and a doctor. They passed the robbers on the way to the mail car and did not know it. It seemed to me ages while the robbers were in the mail car, tearing and rifling mail pouches, but it was only forty-five minutes. Incidentally, they were punching me in the stomach with their guns, and making me turn with my face to the wall while they kicked me, threatening to cut my throat, and gouging me with a dirk. It seemed a long time there all alone with those desperate men. After the robbers left, I had to stay there thirty minutes before anybody came. The police came first, then two of the clerks ventured to come up and call for me at a safe distance, and I answered and had them come in. By this time the railroad men had got up the scattered train, and collected the crew together. We were six hours late, and proceeded on our journey, a wearied set of men.

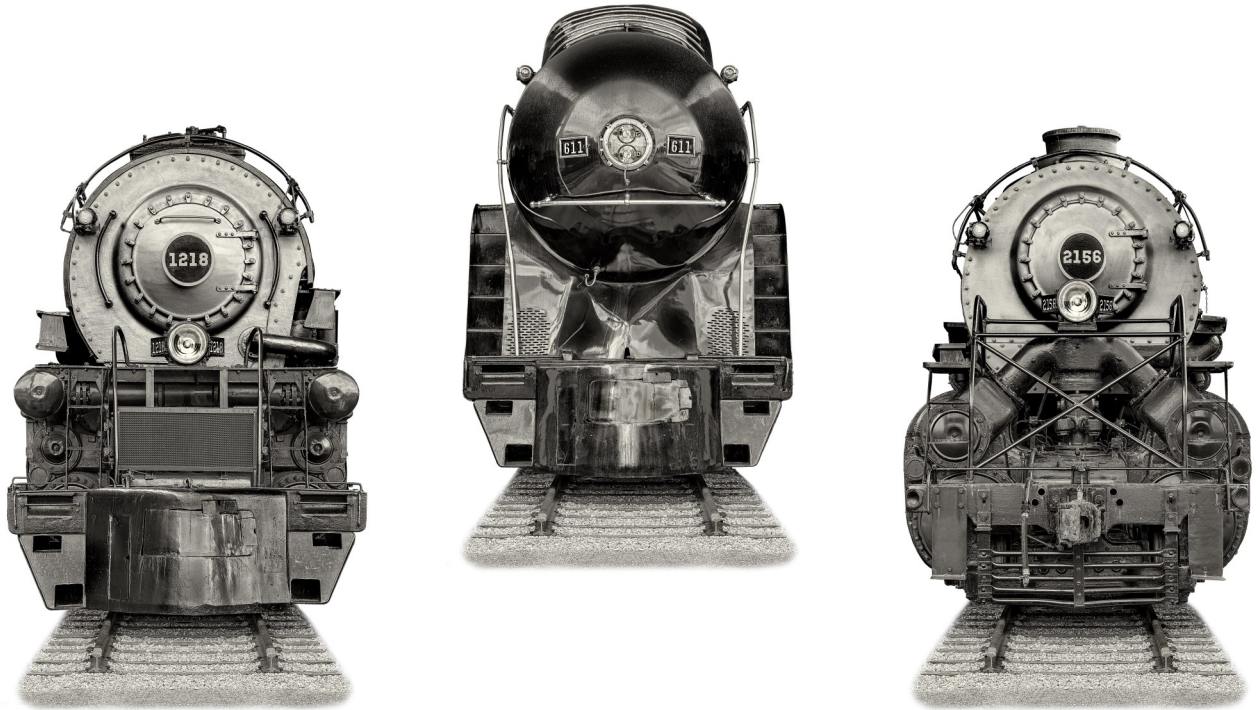
Humorous Features

A train robbery frequently has some humorous features. The robbery of the A. G. S. train near Irondale Thursday night, has resulted in one good joke.

Chief of Police Martin Eagan, with his squad of men, dashed up to the Irondale telegraph office in an automobile and rushing in, asked the surprised operator at Irondale where the robbery occurred and where the train was. It was the first the operator had heard of the robbery and he made hasty and frantic efforts to locate the train but his wires wouldn't work.

After a fruitless effort he gave up, "I guess they have been cut, I can't get any answer," he said. Then, just as the officers were leaving the office, the operator remembered. He jerked his thumb over his shoulder and remarked to the crowd: "Say, don't you reckon I'd better wake up this 'cop' back here. The members of the Birmingham force laughed and the snoozing section of the Irondale force was brought from the slumbers to assist in the search for the train robbers.

THE MID-SOUTH FLYER



KEN BOYD

Norfolk & Western Stablemates:

- No. 1218, 2-6-6-4, 1943
- No. 611, 4-8-4, 1950
- No. 2156, 2-8-8-2, 1942