



November 2021

THE MID-SOUTH FLYER



Entering a New Decade of Service

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



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CHAPTER NEWS

MODEL RAILROADING FOR THE HOLIDAYS

This issue of *THE MID-SOUTH FLYER* features model railroading, a topic that has interested many of our readers since childhood. If you have an electric, battery-operated or static train setup, plan to get it out soon for the holidays, and think about keeping it setup for the winter season. Decorate the tree with your railroading ornaments and place the old toys on the mantle! Through model railroading, bring your fascination with locomotives and railways to life in your home for the holiday season.

THE TRAINS ARE COMING FOR THE HOLIDAYS!

Celebrate the Season with Model Trains at McWane Science Center — The holidays will be picking up steam at McWane Science Center on November 20, 2021, and continuing until early January 2022 with the return of the intricately hand-assembled **Magic of Model Trains** exhibit!! Designed by *The Wrecking Crew*, there is joy to be found all across the layout. See how many hidden scenes you can find in the model train layout.

Smokey City Rails — The amazing Smokey City Rails club is set up and running for the holidays and also throughout the year. The layout is located in Suite 378 at Grand River shopping center in Leeds. Open hours are 11:00 am — 7:00 pm on Saturdays and 12:00 noon — 6:00 pm on Sundays.

SHOALS MODEL RAILROADERS

This issue includes a feature on this Tuscumbia group with information on how and when you can plan a visit!

Member Moment

The Member Moment this month features Carey Ketchum. If you would like to be featured and tell your story, please contact Warren Jones (wjones1302@gmail.com). The story should total 400 words or less and ideally include a photo or drawing.

CHAPTER NEWS

Mid-South Chapter Meeting Update — The Mid-South Chapter is continuing to be cautious about returning too soon to in-person meetings, especially because our normal meeting location at the Leeds Depot does not lend itself to our being able to set it up for physical distancing. However, the Board is hopeful that we will be able to move toward having in-person meetings, perhaps starting with the new year 2022. Until then, we will continue to stay in touch with you through the e-Newsletters. See the Chapter News page for additional information.

Membership Renewal Time — It is time to renew your Mid-South Chapter and national R&LHS memberships for 2022 or to join if you are not already a member.

Alabama Magazine Holiday Issue — The November – December 2021 issue of *Alabama Magazine* features Mid-South Chapter Board member, Ken Boyd, with a historical review of Alabama watermills.

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 and the *MID-SOUTH FLYER*. Contributions, article ideas and reader comments are welcome.

Ken Boyd, Editor

kenboydphotography@yahoo.com



CHAPTER UPDATE

James Lowery, President

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL TIME

It is time to renew your Mid-South Chapter and national R&LHS memberships for 2022 or to join if you are not already a member. The total combined membership dues amount to join the national organization and the Mid-South Chapter remains the same for Year 2022. The amount for the national dues increased \$5.00, BUT the Chapter chose to reduce its dues amount by \$5.00, so the total remains the same. The web address to join or renew online or to print the application form is as follows: <http://rlhs.org/Membership/index.shtml> If you have any questions about membership or joining, contact Warren Jones (Membership Chair) at wjones1302@gmail.com.

CONSIDER DONATING TO THE CHAPTER WHEN YOU RENEW OR JOIN

Many of our Chapter members make a donation to the work of the Chapter at the same time that they join or renew. It is easy to include such a donation on the membership form and to include it with your membership payment. Recently, Chapter Membership Chair Warren Jones provided the following information about such donations that have been made to the Chapter this year:

Year 2021

Total membership: 71

Total members who added a donation: 18

Percentage of members who added a donation: 25%

The total amount of the added donations is a significant portion of the chapter's yearly income.

Thank you to all members who have supported the Chapter in this way throughout the years.

IN-PERSON MEETINGS ARE BEGINNING TO RETURN

The Mid-South Chapter is continuing to be cautious about returning too soon to in-person meetings, especially because our normal meeting location at the Leeds Depot does not lend itself to our being able to set it up for physically distancing. I anticipate that the Chapter Board of Directors will be discussing this at an upcoming Board meeting, and I am hopeful that we will be able to move toward having in-person meetings, perhaps starting with the new year 2022. Until then, we will continue to stay in touch with you through the e-Newsletters. Let us know if you have any items to suggest for those e-Newsletters.

Along those same lines, we are happy to report that the recent Smokey City Rails Model Railroad Club & Magic Valley TCA Train Show & Sale was a great success and was held at the Helena Sports Complex large meeting room. During the Saturday morning period, twelve Mid-South Chapter members were seen displaying materials or attending and enjoying the model train layout and sales tables.

We understand that several of our Chapter members who have written railroad history books are once again having book signings and are giving in-person presentations about their books. There may be others who are doing the same, but we are aware that Marvin Clemons and Ken Boyd are welcoming invitations to have book signings and presentations based on their books.

"FROM BIG TRAINS TO LITTLE TRAINS AND EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN"

Carey Ketchum

My fascination with all things trains began when I was a child. My grandfather was an agent and telegraph operator for the Seaboard Railway Company in the depot at Wildwood, Florida, and ironically was later struck and killed by a Seaboard train while performing his duty of hanging a mail pouch on the hook of the mail crane.

While my mother would visit my grandmother in Wildwood in the 1950s and 60s, my father and I would go to the depot and watch trains for many enjoyable hours. Wildwood was a crossroads for the colorful trains of the SAL, SCL, etc.



Carey Ketchum

Many years later, after moving to Birmingham, Alabama, I would often visit Norfolk Southern's Norris Yard in Irondale - or any other railfanning site - to watch trains. A highlight of my hobby was a retirement trip in 2015 to Alaska where my wife and I rode on the White Pass and Yukon Railway. Incredible scenery!

Somewhere along the line, I also became interested in model railroading. I started collecting rolling stock in approximately 1985 and became an NMRA member in 1990. It wasn't until the year 2000 (I was a world class procrastinator - especially since I had no construction, mechanical or electrical skills!) when I actually started building my first layout, which was a 2000-era layout featuring train lines primarily from the southeastern US - including the ACL, FEC, GM&O, L&N, SAL, SCL, and Southern among others.

I started attending meetings of the Mid-South Chapter in 2015 and became a member in 2019. I started building a second layout in 2020, this one a 1955-era layout, again with train lines primarily from the southeastern U.S. Both layouts are extremely detailed with numerous "mini-scenes" to capture your eye. I have some 550 pieces of rolling stock, either on the layouts, displayed on shelves on the train room walls, or, unfortunately, stored in their original boxes in my "train closet." I have hosted numerous open houses/layout tours over the years, some coinciding with NMRA SER conventions, and welcome any train aficionados to my home at any time!



HEART OF DIXIE RAILROAD MUSEUM

OFFICIAL RAILROAD MUSEUM FOR THE STATE OF ALABAMA

Hard to believe we are already into November. Christmas and the New Year are just around the corner. Last month, Pumpkin Junction saw good train ridership numbers. We are now transitioning from pumpkins to Christmas. Our popular North Pole Express has pretty much sold out and ticket sales for our daytime, Christmas at the Station, are doing well. This is an extremely busy time for the museum. Volunteers contribute many long hours over five packed weekends. Additional volunteers are always needed, so if you have a little time, please come and join us as we spread the Christmas Train Magic to thousands of visitors.

Don't forget our museum gift shop this Christmas season. We carry many train related toys and gift ideas for that special train fan. Inventory is limited as we face the same struggles as other retail stores. All sales help support museum operations!!

Restoration Project News:

- ◆ 1926 L&N RR Tavern/Lounge Car "Alabama Club" interior painting is slowly progressing.
- ◆ 1952 CB&Q RR dining car "Silver Cuisine" fall events have slowed progress.
- ◆ 1959 GE center cab locomotive, former Alabama Power #107, repairs on one of two motors planned for this winter.
- ◆ 1951 MOW Flat Car (former DODX) work continues with new wood decking.



Remaining 2021 Train Rides:

North Pole Express

Nov 19, 20, 21, 26, 27, 28

Dec 3, 4, 5, 10, 11, 12, 17, 18

- ◆ *C&S Departure Times:* 5pm, 6:30pm, 8pm.
- ◆ Event **Sold Out**.
- ◆ S&S Train will not be running at night.
- ◆ Event details posted on our web site.

Christmas at the Station

December 4, 11, 18

- ◆ *C&S Departure Times:* 10:00 am & 1:00 pm
- ◆ S&S Train departs every 20 minutes
- ◆ Ticket price is \$19 and includes both train rides.
- ◆ Photo opportunity with Santa on museum grounds

HoD & Model Trains?

Visitors have requested it for years. This summer, the museum received a very generous donation—a significant HO model-train collection. The collection is currently stored in a climate-controlled storage unit thanks to the donating family. HoD volunteers, the family, and local modelers are discussing options on how best to house and display the collection. Lot of planning has taken place, with much more to come. Select groups and agencies are being invited in as potential stakeholders. Planning consultants are being researched. Future fundraising efforts will be required to help fund this rather large capital campaign. Stay tuned!

SHOALS MODEL RAILROADERS

A REGIONAL DAY TRIP ON YOUR OWN



Most *MID-SOUTH FLYER* readers are familiar with the historic Tuscumbia Depot and the wonderful exhibits and displays inside the depot and around the site. However, most are not aware that the Shoals Model Railroaders have constructed an outstanding model layout in a building adjacent to the depot.

The extensive layout loosely models the 1950s and the region around Tuscumbia, north Alabama and into Tennessee as far to the east as Chattanooga. Southern and Norfolk Southern rolling stock are represented.

The Shoals Model Railroaders and their layout are also near the restored commercial district of Tuscumbia, Spring Park and waterfalls, restaurants, historic churches, libraries and, of course, the world-famous Helen Keller estate and gardens. A visit to Tuscumbia with a stop at the Shoals Model Railroaders layout makes for a perfect daytrip for anyone from across the northern half of Alabama, southern Tennessee or eastern Mississippi.

The Shoals Model Railroaders meet the first Tuesday of every month at 206 W. Fifth Street (next to the Tuscumbia Depot) in Tuscumbia, Alabama, at 6:00 p.m. for a business meeting. On the remaining Tuesday nights of the month, the Railroaders meet at the same location at 6:00 p.m. to work on the layout and run trains on the HO-scale layout.

Visitors and new members are always welcome. Parking is easy along the street. Contact Neal Jeter at 256-800-8147 for more information, or the president, Chuck Cullum, at 617-699-7060.



Overall layout in main display room. (Photo by Ken Boyd.)



Shoals Model Railroaders are located adjacent to the historic Tuscumbia Depot and Museum. (Photo by Ken Boyd.)

SHOALS MODEL RAILROADERS

A Brief History

<https://shoalsmodelrrdrs.weebly.com/history.html>

The Shoals Model Railroaders were formed in the spring of 1992. The first meeting was at the home of Bob Brooks in Florence, who initiated the club as an HO-scale layout. In 1993, the club was asked to build a display layout for the Right Track Restaurant. This restaurant was located in the old Southern Railway Sheffield Depot next to the Norfolk Southern mainline. Whenever a train went by, work on the layout stopped to watch the train! (Photos from this layout can be seen on the club's website.) The Right Track closed, but a new restaurant opened, The Olive Tree, and they asked the Railroaders to continue work on the layout.

One Tuesday, club members showed up to work on the layout, and the doors were locked and the power meter had been pulled from the building. Members were able to gain access, disassemble the layout and save the wood for later.

In the fall of 1994, the Railroaders moved to the old Brewster School in the Village in Sheffield. The facilities included a small museum with artifacts in one classroom, and work on a new club layout began in another classroom. Work progressed on the layout over the next several years. On January 20, 2000, the school was broken into and major damage to the layout and the museum occurred. Eventually, the juveniles who caused the damage were caught and tried. The judge ordered them to pay restitution, and the club was able to recover the monies to help rebuild the layout. In the fall of 2000, the club decided to construct a larger layout, and plans to move to the cafeteria of the school.

A little later, a movie production company expressed interest in buying the school, and eventually the school was sold, and the club had to move again. The layout in the cafeteria never really got started. At this time, the Shoals Model Railroaders were asked to move to the Tuscumbia Depot, and everything was moved in the summer of 2001 on a very rainy Saturday! Construction on a new layout began. This layout reached the most complete stage of all the layouts built to date. The layout was ready for open house in the summer of 2002, and the first open house was held during the Creek Indian Removal Festival in May 2002 and repeated during the Helen Keller Festival in June 2002.

During this era, the City of Tuscumbia applied for a grant to renovate the depot. The grant was approved, and once again the Railroaders had to move. This time and in the fall of 2004, the move was to the old skating rink building in Spring Park. The layout there never reached the level of completion that had been achieved with the layout at the Tuscumbia Depot.

In the fall of 2007, the Railroaders moved once again. The skating rink building had been leased, and the club moved to the present location at 206 West Fifth Street in Tuscumbia, which is next to the Tuscumbia Depot. This building had been the old Homemakers Club building. The main layout room is a little larger than the space in the depot, so the length of the layout was extended.

All layouts built to date have been HO scale and run DCC using a Digitrax system.



Incredible model of the nearby 1820s Helen Keller estate. (Photo by Dori Boyd.)



Southern / Norfolk Southern Shop and Roundhouse. (Photo by Ken Boyd.)

MODEL RAILROADING AND RAILROAD HISTORY

John Stewart



Figure 1. 1955 Lionel Advertisement.

What would model railroading have to interest a member of the Railway and Locomotive Historical Society (R&LHS)?

Another way to look at this question would be to ask why would a model railroader be interested in the R&LHS? So, let's look at why model railroaders make models of railroads?

There are a lot of different reasons stated by members of this interesting hobby. Some are:

- ◇ I've always loved trains, and I just like to fool with model railroad stuff.
- ◇ I like to build railroad models that remind me of trains or places I saw as a child.
- ◇ My father built us kids a Lionel/American Flyer/HO

scale layout when I was little and I loved it.

- ◇ I've always been interested in the [fill in the blank] railroad so that is what I model.
- ◇ I want to represent a certain place and time in history that interests me.

There are a lot more possible answers, and you may be able to think of others. But I believe that anyone who loves trains will find that railroad history and model railroading can fill a personal interest or need that provides enjoyment.

Now, there are many "types" of model railroaders. At one end of the scale are collectors of model train equipment, and at the other end there are builders of finely detailed models related to trains whether equipment or



Figure 2. Malsbury Layout by the late Chris Burch, UK, models a real village station, based on historical research and includes fiddle tracks.





Figure 3. Nicho Young's Lawrenceburg & Nicholasville and Dave Housman's Denver & Salt Lake Both of these layouts are operations oriented, one is small room size and the other is large house size. Both are a lot of fun to operate.

buildings. In between are all sorts of activities that model railroaders enjoy.

Collectors of model trains may like to run them on layouts for the sheer enjoyment of watching them run. The folks who love modeling may enjoy building model scenes of towns and the trains are just a part of the scene. In other words, sometimes trains are background to a scene being modeled, or sometimes the scene being modeled is background to the trains.

In Great Britain, a popular style of model railroad will model a very detailed scene of a particular station, like a stage, and then trains are managed off stage to run through the scene stopping at the station or "shunting" (switching) cars (wagons) or coaches (carriages) to replicate actual operations at this particular location. These layouts tend to be relatively small, and are often portable to be taken to "expos" to be shown for and enjoyed by others. It seems that this type of model railroading has been driven by a lack of space at home or in the popular "shed" in the backyard or garden.

In the United States, model railroads come in all shapes and sizes, but bigger seems to be better for many! Model layout themes may be driven by a particular railroad ("I'm a Pennsy fan") or a particular part of the country – "I like western railroads." Model layouts may be driven by a theme – coal hauling, serving a steel mill, paper mill or other large industry, representing a port setting, and so many others. Again, this is often driven by one's childhood memories or exposure to a setting in a workplace or career.

There is also a consideration of age. Model railroading

seems to be an older person's hobby. A typical modeler's summary is "well, I loved trains as a kid, we had a setup at home growing up, but then I got interested in girls and cars, and college, career and family intervened." In this situation, one often comes back to model railroading later as an adult when demands for time begin to allow one to focus on a hobby.

These days, it seems to me to be a lucky person who can be active in a hobby like model railroading when they have a family and involve their kids and spouse in various aspects of the hobby. But that often seems to be the exception. Some manage to do this, and may, for example take model projects with them on business trips and work on them in a motel in the evenings. Rock star Rod Stewart reports that he works on projects when on the road touring. A few in the hobby have turned it into a business venture so that "work" is also "hobby."



Figure 4. Kathy Millatt of the UK is the YouTube host of a fine modeling channel.



Figure 5. Denny Whitaker's layout in Cleveland models that city's steel industry.

For that matter, not all railroaders, model or otherwise are men. Women have been involved in the hobby and possess many great skills which apply to the hobby and leadership in the various organizations. For example, there are several YouTube channels about modeling and layout building hosted by women.

Many modelers will tell you that the hobby provides great fellowship with like-minded “train nuts.” In fact, it seems common to see a gathering of model train folks around a layout talking trains while the models sit by behind them.

However, the other aspect of sharing the hobby with others is the opportunity to learn about, well, anything to do with trains, and modeling. And there are “experts” in everything, who will be happy to tell you more than you might want to know. If that sounds familiar, then you begin to realize that model railroaders are very much like railroad history folks (and vice versa)!

Model railroaders pursue a wide variety of interests and

shape their hobby to suit. There are “rivet counters” who demand that their work is as precise and close to prototype as possible. At the opposite end of the spectrum are those to whom “CIGE” (close is good enough); a corollary to this is the three-foot rule: “if it looks good at three feet, then it’s OK with me.” There are those who require operation by precise timetable using “fast” clocks, and those who operate on “smoke signals” – y’all keep out of each other’s way. Compare this to the modeler who hand lays every tie and rail, but never runs a train among his models. Some modelers scour the internet for the best price on the latest super detailed injection molded plastic or even brass model, while others scour train shows for old “blue box” kits for a few bucks, take these low priced “rescue cars” home and fix them up to run on their layout.

Some model train layouts are based loosely on a prototype, but mostly are designed just for the fun of making a miniature world fitting the owner’s imagination. Other layouts are built to represent a particular place, on a particular date

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ACTUAL SIZE

Figure 6. An ad for Athearn HO products from the 1958 *Model Railroader Magazine*.

in history. Old maps and photographs are used to create as accurate a representation of prototype scenes as possible, so that the layout closely models a real place and time. In between are those who develop a set of scenes, like beads on a string which are caricatures of places of interest to the modeler.

Many modelers complain that the hobby has grown too expensive, and one may spend a lot of money if desired. A popular boxcar kit that sold for \$2.00 in 1955, would sell for about \$20.00 in today's funds. The author recently bought and built four very nice plastic boxcar kits which exceed the 1955 kit's quality by a bit, and yet only cost about \$19.00 retail, and were purchased online for \$15 each. At the same time, there are plenty of kits available for more than that, and RTR (ready to run) models between \$50 and \$100 each. In general, the quality and range of products available today is far better than 50 years ago. A \$300 steam locomotive today runs better and most likely includes smoke, lights and sound that could hardly be imagined for a \$30 locomotive available years ago. So, yes, the hobby may be expensive to some, but it partly depends on one's taste and choice of what to buy.

Model railroading has come so very far in terms of technology as well as the range of model equipment that is available. In the 1930s, model train enthusiasts built much of their train equipment from scratch if not from complex kits. Machining parts was not uncommon and soldering components of models was standard practice. In the 1950s plastic molding began to replace metal castings, and production of plastic and metal locomotives began to fill the market. Small high-quality electric motors became available as a result of wartime technology. The National Model Railroad Association (NMRA) emerged in 1935 to support learning and standards for the hobby and really came into its own in the 1950s.

The technology of the space race years led to miniaturization of components and to printed circuit boards, as well as solid-state devices becoming commonplace. Stores like Radio Shack became a model railroader's source for lots of items used in the hobby.

Model train control began to rapidly change in the late 1960s using transistorized circuitry to improve control and performance. This replaced direct current control with complex switching required for single train "Cab Control"



Figure 7. An Atlas Products model of an ALCO HH 660 which includes sound and sells for less than \$200.

as the train moved through a layout. Slowly but surely new systems emerged which allowed multi-train control on a section of track. By the early 1990s, these systems were more affordable and common design standards were promoted and developed under the guise of the NMRA. These systems, called “Digital Command Control” or DCC dramatically changed model train control, and for the most part, greatly simplified the wiring of layouts. It must be said however, that DCC does have many facets which, when pursued by some folks, become a world unto themselves in terms of complexity. For example, DCC enables a layout to be connected to a computer, so that not only locomotive control but turnouts, signaling and train automation are possible.

But, it must be said that DCC has enabled model trains to produce sound and lighting effects which were only dreamed of in the 1950s and 60s. Recently, the author was showing a sound equipped ALCO switching locomotive to a railroad enthusiast who was not a model railroader. He was fascinated and said that the sound of the ALCO prime mover was as good as the real thing.

So, it seems that both rail modelers and rail history folks

are very much alike. They share a fascination about a subject which has endless potential for learning and enjoyment, whether prototype or model. After all, if you love steam locomotives, for example, it may be hard to have a real one at home, but it is possible to have a super realistic model of your favorite locomotive. Yes, the same applies to diesels, although some of us can’t understand why!

So, how do the two hobbies enrich each other? It seems safe to say that the rail history buff loves trains, just as the model rail buff loves trains. The overlap and shared devotion to railroads is the common thread. And from that starting point, there are as many “patterns and types of wool in the sweater” so to speak, as one can imagine. It seems that both groups constitute “birds of a feather,” and should, therefore, “flock together.”

If you are a model railroader, seek out and enable history folks’ ability to help you learn about your area of interest in modeling. If you are a history person, use your model railroad friends and events to enjoy a representation of the prototype history, sights and sounds that you enjoy. Each hobby adds a new dimension to the other. The opportunities are endless and the fellowship is most worthwhile.

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR, JOHN STEWART

John Stewart is a retired Civil Engineer who moved to Birmingham in 1992 on a company transfer. John has had a life-long interest in model railroading, and he wanted to learn about Birmingham Industrial and Railroad History in order to design a new model railroad for his home in Birmingham.

Stewart's historical research led to the creation of a website, www.bhamrails.info, which helps to document Birmingham industry and railroads. Today, Stewart continues his interests with his second Birmingham model railroad with a steel mill theme, steam era equipment and operations oriented for more fun. John hosts operating sessions about once a month to run model trains with a purpose – to feed the steel mill.

John and his wife, Nancy, live in Riverchase in Hoover and have three grown sons, two grandchildren and two dogs. In retirement, John drives a school bus for Spain Park High School. He continues to research local industrial and rail history, writing articles and giving presentations to interested groups.

John R. Stewart, Supt.
lstew@bhamrails.info

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THE MID-SOUTH FLYER



Ken Boyd

N-Scale Locomotives

From the Collection of Ken, Kevin and Kathy Boyd. (Photo by Ken Boyd.)