



July 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

GENERAL RAILROAD NEWS

Railroad Watches? — Do you have an old railroad watch or an interesting watch you were given or picked up on a train trip or rail visit? Maybe you even have an old watch from your father or grandfather dating to the wars with an interesting history. The *MID-SOUTH FLYER* would love to hear your story! Please share your watch information with our readers by contacting the editor (kenboydphotography@yahoo.com).

National Infrastructure Proposals in Congress — With Amtrak celebrating 50 years of service this year and all the political discussion about railroad infrastructure, upgrades and expansion in Washington, please contact your representatives and encourage them to vote to expand passenger rail service in America!

Train Watching from the Historic Downtown Birmingham Viaducts — The March 2021 issue of the *MID-SOUTH FLYER* ran a feature on the history of the railroad viaducts through downtown Birmingham with a photo essay on the interesting and diverse rail traffic through the area. *Trains* magazine has expressed an interest in publishing a version of this feature in a future issue of their magazine. If you would like to see *Trains* include an article on railroading and train watching from the viaducts in Birmingham, please send a note to the magazine editor, Jim Wrinn (jwrinn@kalmbach.com).

Birmingham Mineral Railroad Sign Locations — In conjunction with the list on pages 4 and 5 of this newsletter, you can see the locations of the installed Historic Birmingham Mineral Railroad signs on a Google map using the link at the following website: <https://bham-mrr.com/sign/map-of-sign-locations/>.

Member Moment

The Member Moment this month features Karen R. Utz. 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.

WELCOME NEW CHAPTER MEMBER

We extend a hearty welcome to the following new Chapter member:

James Cortner,
Manchester, Tennessee

CHAPTER NEWS

Congratulations to Warren Jones — The Mid-South Chapter is very pleased to congratulate Board Member Warren Jones on his recently published article in the 100th anniversary issue of *Railroad History* (Number 224, Spring – Summer 2021). Warren grew up near the Southern Railway Depot in Gainesville, Georgia, and was a high-school licensed amateur radio operator who enjoyed Morse Code; so, it is not too surprising that he chose to investigate railroad history through the lens of telegraphy in this article.

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

ANNUAL REPORT 2020-2021

(Submitted to the Railway & Locomotive Historical Society Board of Directors)

Mid-South Chapter's Response to the COVID-19 Situation

During the time of staying home more than usual and trying to find things to help our Chapter members occupy their time productively and in order to stay connected with our members and for them to still be involved in the Chapter, we have been publishing a "Mid-South Chapter e-Newsletter" that is providing our members with information and links to historic railroading Internet sites (many of them with videos for watching) that they can explore on their own and at their leisure during this time of sheltering at home. Content for the e-Newsletter is being provided by members of the Chapter, and it has been very successful. It is short, simple, and informative. This is not replacing the regular *Mid-South Chapter Flyer* newsletter that is published throughout the year but instead is providing an additional resource for our members.

Even without having in-person meetings, the Chapter has had an outdoor, guided tour field trip with interpretive information at the local Sloss Furnaces National Historic Landmark (preserved historic iron production blast furnaces where a steam locomotive, a diesel locomotive, a ladle car, and some yet-to-be-painted railroad cranes and cars are on display). Also, an outdoor picnic for Chapter members was held on May 22, 2021, and that picnic meeting included a tour of an operational grist mill (watermill) about an hour south of Birmingham. Historically, that mill was connected to the local railroads because the railroad considered to be the second oldest in Alabama ran (and still runs) in front of the mill, the corn and grain to be ground were brought to the mill by that railroad, and the mill pumped water from the creek into a tank that provided water for the steam engines.

As is the case recently with many organizations, the Chapter has depended on Zoom meeting technology to conduct its Chapter Board meetings and program meetings. Even though the Mid-South Chapter has not been able to meet this year, the chapter officers have been active, and the chapter is still very healthy and has been adding new members throughout the year. The Board of Directors is anxiously awaiting being able to have our regular, in-person Chapter meetings again.

A summary of things the various Chapter Board members have been doing recently as part of the Chapter are as follows:

- John Troulias has continued to find outstanding resources online and to do excellent research about various aspects of railroad and mining history in this area. He and other Board members have kept a keen eye out for online resources and links that can be provided to the membership via the Chapter's e-Newsletters.
- Always on the lookout for a good train photography opportunity in the local area, Tim Smith was able to take the best photograph I have seen of the image of the Birmingham Terminal Station across the street from the front of the Birmingham Amtrak Station. He posted it on Facebook April 14th for all to enjoy. That is a very hard photograph to take because the image towers several stories above sidewalk level, but there is no way to back off directly across from it far enough to capture the full image straight on. During the recent restoration of the oldest parking deck in Birmingham (and still in use), the depiction was created by punching holes in the metal façade. Tim rightfully called it a "ghost image"!
- Ken Boyd has continued to produce excellent issues of the *Mid-South Flyer* newsletter.
- Warren Jones has continued to welcome new members that we have been getting nearly every month, and he has continued to coordinate with members for submitting experiences for the Member Moment in the Mid-South Flyer newsletter.

- James Lowery has continued to install Historic Birmingham Mineral Railroad signs in the six counties served by that railroad. (See below for additional information about those installations.)
- We have stayed in touch with our entire mailing list through the e-Newsletters that have been published about every other week and the *Mid-South Flyer* newsletter that continues to be published every other month.
- There have been meetings with the graphic designer who laid out and installed the Birmingham Terminal Station exhibit at Vulcan Park and Museum and who will be helping do the same thing in one of our rooms at the Leeds Depot. (See next item.)

National Trust for Historic Preservation Grant Request Approved

The Chapter provided information to the Vulcan Park and Museum for submitting a grant request to the National Trust for Historic Preservation to fund planning and installation of the Birmingham Terminal Station Exhibit in the Exhibits Room at the Leeds Depot. That grant request has now been approved, and the Chapter is moving ahead with firming up plans for the layout and installation of the exhibit which will include historic photographs, interpretive information, historic artifacts from the Birmingham Terminal Station, and a 9-foot-wide model of the Terminal Station created by one of the Chapter members.

Center for Alabama Railroad History and Archives

The [Center for Alabama Railroad History and Archives](#) along with its digital Alabama Railroad Archives component is well underway and is based at the Heart of Dixie Railroad Museum. That museum is the primary supporter of that Center, and the Mid-South Chapter has been heavily involved in the creation of, and ongoing plans for, the Center and its digital archives. Scanning of already-acquired images by Heart of Dixie Railroad Museum volunteers is continuing, and the Center welcomes additional photographs for loan or donation to the Archives.

Historic Birmingham Mineral Railroad Signs Project

The Mid-South Chapter continues to install historic railroad location signs as part of the Chapter's Historic Birmingham Mineral Railroad Signs Project. The project has been very successful and has reached thousands of members of the general public – basically, anyone who drives, walks, or bicycles past one of the signs. The **Bham-MRR.com** website continues to provide historic information about the railroad and where the signs are located. The Chapter also maintains an email listing of people and organizations that have donated to the project and/or have shown an interest in it.

The Chapter appreciates the tremendous support of the project that members of the R&LHS have provided, especially through the R&LHS Friends Campaign.

Number of Historic Birmingham Mineral Railroad signs that have been installed thus far in the six counties served by the BMRR

A total of 174 signs have been installed as of June 3, 2021. More signs are planned for installation as additional funds are raised for purchase of the signs and hardware for installing them. All of the funds raised go to purchase the signs, hardware for installing, website support, and liability insurance. The Chapter's volunteer BMRR Project Coordinator installs the signs so there is no installation cost, and there is no project administrative overhead.

Seven signs have been placed at appropriate facilities and museums that feature the BMRR or that have a connection to its history.

I realize that the specific locations listed below may not be familiar to people who do not live in the area, but I thought that you may be interested in how many different towns, cities, and areas throughout central Alabama now have signs installed and the number of signs installed in each of those locations.

The following numbers of signs have been installed at, or near, the original BMRR roadbed (all locations are in Alabama):

Historic Birmingham Mineral Railroad Signs Project

Number of Signs	Locations
1	Adger
3	Altoona
8	Bessemer
2	Birmingham — Airport area
1	Birmingham — Collegeville Neighborhood
2	Birmingham — Eastern area
4	Birmingham — Eastwood Village area (formerly Eastwood Mall area)
1	Birmingham — Ensley
5	Birmingham — Gate City area
11	Birmingham — Montclair Road area
5	Birmingham — North Birmingham
2	Birmingham — Pratt City
5	Birmingham — Red Mountain Park
8	Birmingham and Irondale — Ruffner Mountain Nature Preserve
4	Birmingham — Southern border between Vulcan Park and Elton B. Stephens Expressway
12	Birmingham — Southwest area
6	Birmingham — Vulcan Trail
4	Birmingham — Woodlawn area
1	Bradford/Dixiana
1	Calera — Because Restored Woodlawn Depot is located there.
1	Fairfield
8	Fultondale
2	Gardendale
6	Helena
1	Homewood
5	Irondale (See also “Birmingham and Irondale” for Ruffner Mountain Nature Preserve signs.)
2	Ivatee (Etowah County)
2	Jefferson County (Unincorporated) — Birmingham Area (western Jefferson County)
2	Jefferson County (Unincorporated) — Johns Road
1	Jefferson County (Unincorporated) — Lynn Crossing (Graysville area)
4	Jefferson County (Unincorporated) — Pinson Valley
3	Lipscomb
2	Morris
6	Mountain Brook
8	Oneonta
10	Pinson
3	Shelby County
3	Tarrant
7	Trussville
2	Tuscaloosa
3	Village Springs community
4	West Blocton
3	Woodstock

MEMBER MOMENT

KAREN R. UTZ, DIRECTOR

SLOSS FURNACES NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK

As an Air Force “brat” traveling the globe with my family, it was always difficult finding temporary housing suitable for five rambunctious kids. While my siblings and parents were more concerned about school systems and large yards for swing sets, my one request was always a home within sight of a train. I was told I developed my admiration for all things trains while living in old RAF housing outside of Oxford, England. We rode trains to the market, to church, to visit beautiful English villages and iconic British landmarks. We fell asleep to train whistles and took turns guessing where each might be heading.

Following his last assignment at Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines, my father packed up the family for one last move to his hometown of Lexington, Mo. We purchased a large historic home on Main Street, within walking distance to friends, family, and train tracks. Many summer afternoons were spent on the hills watching trains carrying their freight on the rail lines that ran parallel to the Missouri River.

After college came marriage, kids, and a return to traveling. When I found out we had been transferred to Birmingham, I asked, “Birmingham, England?” However, once we landed in the city that sits at the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, and discovered its rich history of industry and rail, I never looked back. I finished my MA in History at the University of Alabama at Birmingham—and ended up staying for twenty-five years as an adjunct history instructor. In 2002 I discovered Sloss was looking to hire a Curator. Realizing the connection the site had to the history of Birmingham railroad and industry, I applied and was accepted. In 2018 I was appointed to the position of Interim Director.

While the majority of my time is spent on site management, I have had the opportunity to oversee some significant restoration projects, including the restoration of the historic Frisco Locomotive. Thanks to volunteers like Dr. Richard Neely, both the Baldwin Locomotive, used on the Sloss site from 1948-1971, and the Frisco Locomotive that graces the entrance to the Sloss site, have been brought back to their former glory. My goal, before I retire in August 2022, is the placement of a cover over the historic Frisco. Hopefully the friends and supporters of Sloss can make this happen!



Karen R. Utz with Frisco No. 4018, USRA Light 2-8-2 "Mikado" Steam Locomotive, at the Entrance to Sloss Furnaces.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE MID-SOUTH CHAPTER, R&LHS

September 28, 2020

Marvin Clemons

(Reprinted from Railroad History, No. 224, Spring – Summer 2021)

In the summer of 2009, several events conspired to create what was to become the Mid-South Chapter. Then-R&LHS president Parker Lamb was in Birmingham visiting his old friend and fellow photographer, Frank Ardrey. A mutual friend, Marvin Clemons, invited Parker to present a slide show to a group of local railfans at the restored 1884 Southern Railway depot at nearby Leeds. After presenting to a standing room only crowd in the depot's baggage room, Parker quipped that there were more than enough people in attendance to start a local R&LHS chapter. After some discussion, a vote was taken, and the Mid-South Chapter was born at what was to become its home at Leeds depot.

The new Chapter received its charter in November 2009 and elected its first slate of officers. Marvin Clemons served as the Chapter's first president, with Ron Mele as vice-president and Stanley Burnett as secretary-treasurer. Thirty-two charter members were recruited, with a majority coming from Birmingham and surrounding areas, together with others from across Alabama and neighboring states.

To keep the new membership informed about Chapter activities and educated about local railroad history, the Chapter launched its newsletter, *The Mid-South Flyer*, with Marvin Clemons serving as editor.

The Chapter's early years were marked by restoration work in the depot agent's office and the creation of displays of railroad artwork and artifacts in the main waiting room. For its bi-monthly programs, the Chapter featured presentations by various railroad historical societies representing Birmingham railroads. To publicize its activities and new member recruiting, the Chapter held an annual open house in conjunction with the John Henry Festival held each year in downtown Leeds.

A highlight of the Chapter's early years came in 2012 when it was honored to host the annual R&LHS convention. The two-day agenda featured bus tours of the Birmingham District, a train ride at the Heart of Dixie Railroad Museum, and multiple presentations by local railroad historians. The Chapter earned high praise from attendees, and, according to reviews, the meeting raised the bar for future R&LHS conventions.

In 2013, the Chapter was part of the R&LHS Friends Campaign to receive donations for a planned exhibit honoring long-time R&LHS member and noted photographer Frank Ardrey. The funds were used to purchase a video monitor showing a montage of Frank's Birmingham photography, surrounded by a selection of professionally mounted and framed black and white photographs featuring some of his most recognizable photographs.

After five years of steady growth, the Chapter entered a new era of leadership under James Lowery and a fresh slate of board members. New Chapter initiatives have included the "Birmingham Mineral Railroad Signs Project" spearheaded by Lowery, with the placing of signs marking locations of the L&N's Birmingham

Mineral Railroad's multiple branches around the Birmingham District. Funding for the project has included the R&LHS Friends Campaign, and contributions by R&LHS members around the United States have been a big part of the success of this project.

In 2019, the Chapter celebrated its 10th anniversary with a variety of programs highlighting the Chapter's first decade. Additional displays of historical photographs from the Leeds area and a restored Birmingham Terminal Station Railway Express wagon were placed in the depot baggage/meeting room, which also serves to educate visitors about the history of the depot and railroads.

To cap off its 10th anniversary celebration, the Chapter supported a regional exhibit at Birmingham's foremost visitor attraction, Vulcan Park and Museum, recognizing Birmingham's iconic Terminal Station. Considered an architectural masterpiece and the grandest railroad station in the Southeast at the time of its construction in 1909, Terminal Station was demolished in 1969 to make way for a failed government building project.

The Vulcan Park and Museum exhibit was based on the book "Great Temple of Travel," the first published history of the station written and edited by Chapter member Marvin Clemons. The exhibit featured a scratch-built O-scale model of the station crafted by Chapter member Gene Clements.

Following the close of the Terminal Station exhibit in January 2020, Vulcan Park and Museum donated the exhibit materials including photographs, posters, and signage to the Chapter for display at the Leeds Depot. In conjunction with the Leeds Historical Society and the City of Leeds, the Chapter is working to establish a permanent exhibit dedicated to Terminal Station. The exhibit centerpiece will be the eight-foot-long Terminal Station model donated by Gene Clements.

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Chapter's Board of Directors realized that it would be important for the Chapter to stay in touch with its members during the many months when in-person Chapter meetings could not be held. To this end, the Chapter continued to publish its newsletter of historical railroad information. The Chapter also initiated a weekly e-newsletter providing members with historical railroad information and links to related information online that members could access while sheltering at home.

Looking ahead in its second decade, the Mid-South Chapter will continue to strengthen its relationships with the Leeds and Greater Birmingham communities, while offering interesting programs about local and regional railroad history to its members and guests.

Editor's Note: Marvin Clemons was the first president of the Mid-South Chapter and served from 2009—2014. Mr. Clemons was also editor for the *MID-SOUTH FLYER* from inception until 2018.

REPORT OF MID-SOUTH CHAPTER PICNIC AND GRIST MILL TOUR

By James Lowery

Photographs by Ken Boyd

The Mid-South Chapter had a very successful bring-your-own-food picnic and watermill tour to Childersburg on May 21st. Members of the chapter were joined by several members of the Vestavia Camera Club. Chapter members enjoyed being able to gather outdoors in person to enjoy the picnic atmosphere and visiting with fellow train enthusiasts. Our thanks to Ken Boyd for making the arrangements for this outing and thanks to all our members and guests who attended.

Why have a railroad society picnic at a grist mill? After Ken Boyd's excellent Mid-South Chapter Zoom presentation about watermills of North America, we decided to have a chapter picnic at a nearby watermill that has active railroad tracks running past it.

What is unique about this particular grist mill?

1. The mill was served by a railroad spur from mainline tracks running in front of the mill. That railroad is considered to be the second oldest railroad in Alabama and those tracks still carry an active railroad. Using the spur, the railroad brought to the mill the corn and grain to be ground, and the mill pumped water from the creek into a tank that provided water for the steam engines.

2. When we think of an historic watermill, what often comes to mind is a big, visible waterwheel as part of the mill building and running the machinery inside. However, the Kymulga Grist Mill is somewhat unusual in the sense that it was built with metal turbines mounted in the rushing water underneath the building. Those turbines provided the power to run the belts and pulleys throughout the multi-story facility.

3. Another unique feature of this watermill is the thousands of friendly honeybees that live in the wooden walls of the mill! The hives of those bees originally were outside nearby, and their beeswax was harvested to use as the lubricant for the wooden





gears and shafts throughout the mill machinery. In later years, the bees moved into the walls of the mill and continue to supply abundant honey which is sold in the mill's Gift Shop.

4. The mill property has an historic covered bridge crossing the creek just upstream from the dam. This covered bridge is unique in that it is the only covered bridge in Alabama with its original construction still intact. Grooves worn into the wooden roadway of the bridge by the wagon wheels rolling on it years ago are still visible as you walk through the bridge.

Ron Smith, the watermill's miller, was a wonderful host and tour guide. He shared with us his wealth of knowledge and information about the mill, its workings, its history, and its original builder/owner.

The following is summary information about the mill from Ken Boyd's book:

"Kymulga Grist Mill, Childersburg, Alabama, 1864

At one time, the four-story Kymulga Grist Mill facility featured three turbines, five sets of millstones, including two sets of French buhrstones, and electricity-generating equipment. Most of the mill structure is of hand-planed timber and assembled with wooden pegs. The bins and grain elevators can hold 3,200 bushels of shelled corn. During the Civil War, the Union army missed this mill while burning most structures in the area. The mill still grinds corn and is open for tours. A restored covered bridge crosses Talladega Creek just above the dam and overlooks the mill. Maintenance and restoration efforts are ongoing at this historic site, which is owned by the City of Childersburg."

Source: **Historic Watermills of North America – A Visual Preservation** by Ken Boyd page 161.



Author's Note: If you want to plan a trip on your own to the mill, in addition to touring the mill and visiting its gift shop, you can enjoy other things on the property such as the covered bridge, extensive hiking trails through the wooded area across the creek, fishing, canoeing, swimming in the creek, picnicking, campground, Tuesday evening Fish Fry (every other week with live music, call 256-378-7436 to confirm events), visiting a historic house in Childersburg that is open to the public, and visiting nearby Desoto Caverns. As always, check times of operation before you go.



HEART OF DIXIE RAILROAD MUSEUM

OFFICIAL RAILROAD MUSEUM FOR THE STATE OF ALABAMA

Rider attendance continues to go well each Saturday at both Calera and the Ozan Winery stops. The Mother's Day event saw some of the best numbers HoD has experienced. Upcoming in June, the museum is sponsoring Father's Day and Rail Safety Day events. July will bring the Stars & Stripes Day and Wild West Day events. The staff is also working to get North Pole tickets ready for sale in July!

In other news from May, the HoD trustees have agreed to accept a rather large model train collection from Mr. John Acken and his family from South Carolina. The collection is set in the time period of late summer 1954 with the Louisville & Nashville Railroad making up the majority of the collection. HoD is currently working with the Acken family to bring the collection to Alabama. Tentative planning has started on fundraising needs and options for a future home here in Calera.

Current Restoration Projects

- ◆ 1926 L&N RR Tavern/Lounge Car "Alabama Club" hoping to start soon with interior painting of car.
- ◆ 1952 CB&Q RR dining car "Silver Cuisine" roof repairs making headway.
- ◆ 1959 GE center-cab locomotive, former Alabama Power #107, being evaluated for future operation.
- ◆ 1951 MOW Flat Car (former DODX) work slowly continues with new wood decking.

Upcoming 2021 Train Rides:

Operating Every Saturday

Now - December 18

- ◆ C&S Departure Times: 10:00 am and 1:00 pm.
- ◆ Regular Ticket Price \$13 for adult or child.
- ◆ S&S Train departs every 20 minutes.
- ◆ S&S ticket price \$3.50; or All Day pass \$10.
- ◆ Special events may alter price and times.

Stars & Stripes Day

July 3

- ◆ C&S Departure Times: 10:00 am & 1:00 pm.
- ◆ S&S Train departs every 20 minutes.
- ◆ Ticket prices and event details will be posted soon on our website.

Wild West Day

July 17

- ◆ C&S Departure Times: 10:00 am and 1:00 pm.
- ◆ S&S Train departs every 20 minutes.
- ◆ Ticket prices and event details will be posted soon on our website.

Visit www.hodrrm.org to learn more about our events.



Rail Safety Day

HoD is partnering with Operation Lifesaver of Alabama once again to provide rail safety education and free train rides to visitors who attend the safety training. This will be a one day event only and will be held on Friday, June 25, from 9am until 3pm. Calera & Shelby train rides will be provided throughout the day. The Shelby & Southern RR will also be fired up. Visitors may purchase a ticket for \$3.50 for a single ride or \$10 for an all day pass. Visitors are also encouraged to visit other community safety booths, vehicles, and displays on the grounds.

OLD TOWN HELENA, ALABAMA

A REGIONAL DAY TRIP ON YOUR OWN

James Lowery



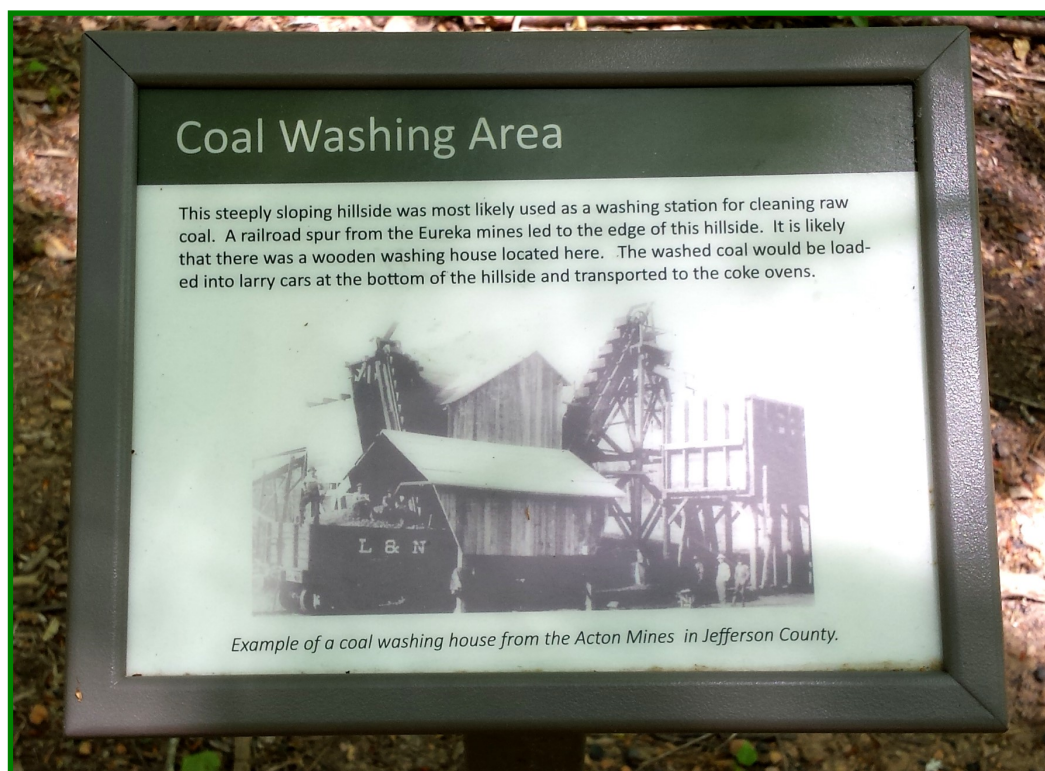
Old Town Helena, Alabama, with CSX No. 4034 crossing Highway 261. (Photo by Ken Boyd.)

For anyone with an interest in train watching and historic railroad sites, Old Town Helena, Alabama, is an interesting destination. Some sites to visit there include:

1. L&N red caboose on display beside active CSX tracks on former L&N roadbed.
2. Depot Deli across the street from the caboose. It is a restored Helena depot moved to this location. Only open certain days a week and certain times of the day — check website.
3. Penhale Helena History Museum a block away — open currently only on Saturdays. Great historic photos and railroad and mining artifacts inside as well as other historic artifacts on second floor.
4. Historic Birmingham Mineral Railroad signs in several locations around Helena.
5. Cahaba River Park — A new 1800+ acre park at confluence of Shades Creek and the free-flowing Cahaba River. As one of Earth's most biodiverse rivers, the Cahaba is home to the world-famous Cahaba Lilies. The park offers hiking, canoeing and kayaking.
6. Current active railroad tracks on north and south sides of Buck Creek.
7. Water flowing over the dam across Buck Creek and the ruins of an historic watermill that produced electricity as part of the dam.
8. Hillsboro Trail in the Appleford subdivision area on Highway 52 on the former Birmingham Mineral Railroad roadbed.
9. While in the Hillsboro area visiting the trail on the former BMRR roadbed, also visit Lee Springs Park that is next to the trail entrance in the Appleford subdivision. The park is on the site of some of the coal mining operations of the Helena area. Some of the raw minerals involved in iron making are on display there, and interpretive signs throughout the park explain the history and some of the facilities that were there. Walking paths and a playground for children are other features of the park.



Displays and mineral exhibits as Lee Springs Park.
(Photos by James Lowery.)



**Additional displays at Lee Springs Park.
(Photos by James Lowery.)**

LIGHT PAINTING PHOTOGRAPHY FOR LOCOMOTIVES

Ken Boyd



Woodward No. 38 Light Painted at the Heart of Dixie Railroad Museum in Calera.

Misty blue background from street lights. (Photo by Ken Boyd.)

Light painting is a creative photographic technique for adding light, and often color, to a subject photographed in low light or at night. Although many different techniques and subjects have been approached over the years, vehicles, including locomotives and railcars, remain among the most popular classic subjects for light painting.

The master locomotive light painter was O. Winston Link. Link pioneered the technique back in the late 1950s by using lighting equipment available at the time to illuminate, freeze and capture spectacular Norfolk and Western Railway scenes at night. His lighting equipment included old-time flash bulbs and electronic flash – a technology first demonstrated in 1931 and developed during World War II

to illuminate the sky at night and reveal enemy aircraft during aerial raids. Link had a remarkable vision for using flash photography on a large scale to photograph locomotives at night in a way that had never been done before. His now-famous images looked unworldly at the time and are still quite incredible in the 21st century! Who has not marveled at *Hotshot Eastbound*, a photograph of a drive-in theater at night with an airplane on the big screen and a massive locomotive thundering by in the background?

In the decades following Link, light painting came to be used in advertising photography and by some experimental photographers working with color slide films. Light sources in the late 20th century ranged from various electronic flash



Durango Roundhouse. Notice the period-dressed “actor” included in the scene. (Photo by Ken Boyd.)

setups to bright quartz lamps. With flash, and more recently with LEDs, color can be added by placing colored gel filters over the light sources. The heat from scorching quartz lamps prevent the addition of filters with these lights, but

colors have sometimes been introduced at the camera.

In recent years, the photographic transformation from film to digital and improvements in electronic flash and LEDs have made light painting much easier than in Link’s era.

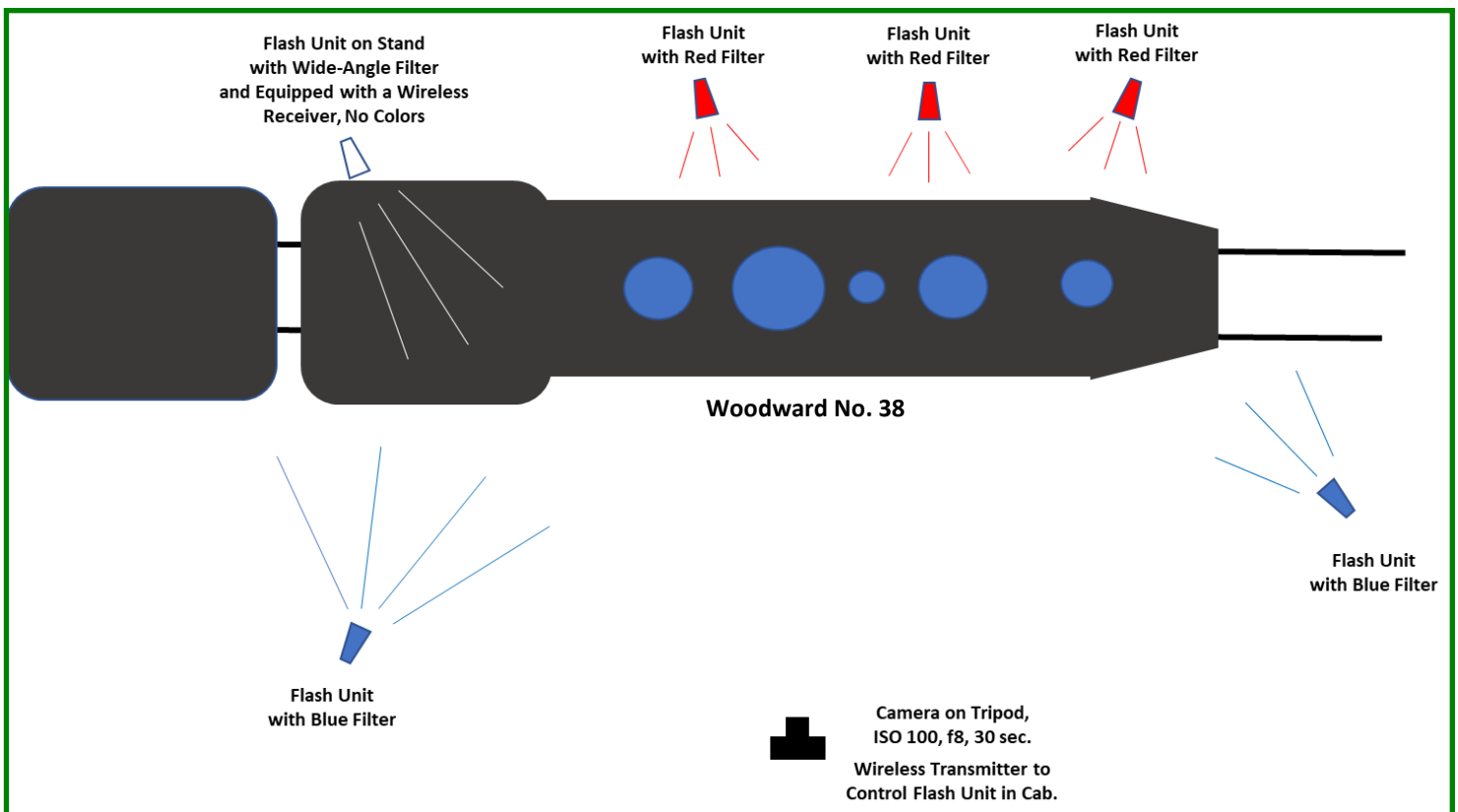


Diagram for Camera and Lighting Setup to Produce Image on Previous Page.



Light Painting Railcars at Calera. (Photos by Kevin Boyd.)

Today, equipment for creative light painting can be compact, lightweight, relatively inexpensive and easy to use.

In theory, the light-painting process is simple, and it is certainly fun once the basics are understood.

Most light-painted images require at least a few seconds and sometimes up to a minute or more to complete. Therefore, the ambient light level must be low enough to allow time for the “painting” to be completed without over exposure from the ambient or “available” light. This means it must be done at night. Most work starts at dusk and continues into total darkness, with exposure times beginning at a few seconds and extending to a minute or more as darkness falls. Several people are typically involved as a team to operate cameras and multiple lights.

To light paint a parked locomotive, plan to arrive before dark. Decide on the composition for the photograph, and

set the camera up on a sturdy tripod. Prefocus and lock the focus. The camera is set to full manual operation at an aperture of f8 or f11 and ISO 100. The shutter speed is the variable in the process and will need to be extended as darkness falls. Four seconds is about the shortest exposure time that can be used for the process described here. Bring flashlights to make camera and flash equipment adjustments in the dark.

With the camera(s) ready, attention can turn to the flash units. Typically, several electronic flash units are used, each with a filter in red, blue, green, purple, yellow, etc. Lighting assignments are made to each member of the team.

To be clear, the flash units are not mounted on the camera hotshoe as for conventional flash photography. Instead, the flash units are handheld and aimed by individuals assisting with the painting or the units can be attached to stands, placed on the ground, positioned under the locomotive,



Forquenot PM No. 340, “smoke” and some lights added in Photoshop. Mulhouse, France.

(Photo by Ken Boyd.)

propped in the cab or located on the track in front of the locomotive.

LEDs can be used, but electronic flash units are generally brighter. After total darkness falls, LEDs can be used, but twilight images work better with flash.

With the camera and flash units in position around the locomotive, the flash units are turned on and set to full-power manual mode. Because the camera shutter will be open for an extended period of time while the light painting proceeds, synchronization between the camera and flash units is not required. The flash units can be fired or tripped at any time or even multiple times while the camera shutter is open.

The electronic flash units are each fired manually by pressing the test button on the back of the units. After a few seconds and when a flash unit has recharged, it can be fired again, either from the same location or quickly moved to another part of the scene. (Remember that most flash units with fresh batteries will require a few seconds to recharge

before they can be fired again.) Practically speaking, an individual can usually manage no more than two flash units for light painting.

To reduce the total number of individuals required and/or to add even more lights to the setup, wireless transmitters and receivers are sometimes used, if available. Wireless equipment can be controlled from the camera location. (Sets of wireless transmitters and receivers are relatively inexpensive with a good transmitter and two receivers often costing less than \$50.) Each flash unit to be operated wirelessly requires a receiver, but one master transmitter can control multiple flash units with this technology.

With everything set and everyone in position, the photography commences as soon as it is dark enough to try an exposure with the settings described earlier – ISO 100, f8 or f11 and 4 seconds. When the camera shutter is opened for the exposure, all the flash units are fired. After the exposure, the resulting image is reviewed on the camera, adjustments are made and additional exposures follow. This is, to some extent, a trial-and-error process.



Lackawanna No. 664 at Spencer.
(Photo by Ken Boyd.)

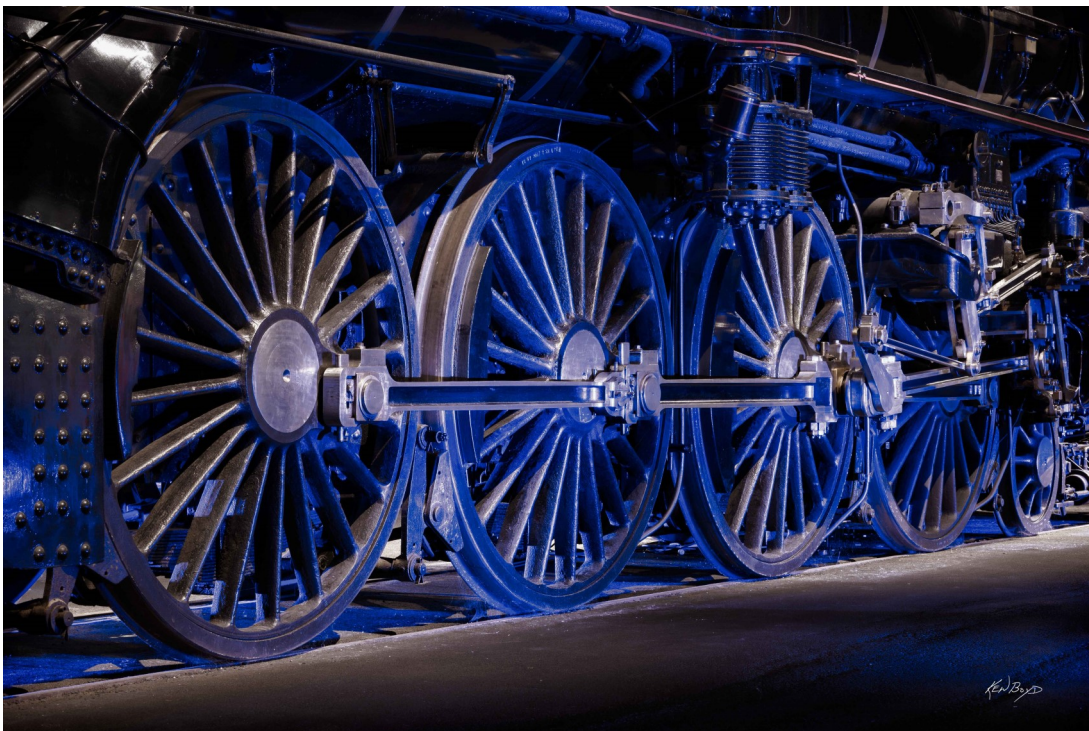
As the ambient light level continues to drop, the exposure time is increased first to 8 seconds and then 10 second and then 30 seconds and longer. With longer exposure times and more time for light painting, the results generally improve. By 10 seconds, each flash unit will have time to recharge and can be fired two or three times and often reaimed toward different parts of the locomotive for even better lighting.

The tradeoff as it gets darker is with the deep blue light in the sky. Photographers call the period of about 20 minutes at the edge of night “the magic hour.” This is the time when artificial street and window lights begin to show, a little of everything else in the scene is still visible and the sky is a beautiful rich blue color. When the magic hour is over, the sky photographs as black and most locomotive details are visible only if illuminated by flash, which is generally not as visually appealing in photographs. As the light painting proceeds, the team must work fast to get several good images during the limited time available for a blue sky.

When it gets dark, LEDs become a good option. Because they provide continuous lighting, the results can be somewhat previewed and adjustments can be made with less experimentation than with flash. One photographer can actually manage this process alone, or several photographers can work together.

In recent years, some railroad museums have offered nighttime workshops and light painting events. Photographers can sign up and take pictures with lighting equipment provided and set up by the museum. These events often use bright quartz lights to illuminate overall scenes and photographers can move around and photograph whatever they like. LEDs are sometimes offered to provide color for certain images. The Heart of Dixie Railroad Museum is a great location for light painting, and a museum-sponsored workshop is under consideration.

Anyone with an interest in railroad photography should give light painting a try. With digital cameras, the results rarely disappoint. As with the famous Link images, expect results to be eye catching, dramatic and exciting with a jaw-dropping wow-factor every time!



Simple Light-Painted Driver Abstract with One Light. (Photo by Ken Boyd.)

Editor's Note: Books by O. Winston Link include:

Link, O. Winston (1987). *Steam, Steel & Stars*. Harry N. Abrams.

Link, O. Winston (1995). *The Last Steam Railroad in America*. Harry N. Abrams.

These books are available through the Jefferson County Library Cooperative and are also still in print from the publisher.

THE MID-SOUTH FLYER



**Amtrak No. 156, GE P42DC, Built 2001, 40th Anniversary Phase I Heritage Unit, 1971—2011.
(Photo by Ken Boyd.)**