



**Railway & Locomotive Historical Society, Inc.**  
**Southeast Chapter**  
**Newsletter No. 132 – August 2012**  
**www.rlhssec.org**

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**Railway & Locomotive Historical Society**  
**Annual Convention, May 17-20, 2012**  
**“Birmingham Rails”**

The convention included the usual Board of Directors meeting, two days of touring the railroads of Birmingham and the Annual Membership meeting. Four members of our chapter flew to Birmingham on May 16th and stayed at the Tutwiler Hotel. The theme of the meeting was “Birmingham: Railroads, Red Ore, and Red Hot Metal.” It was a great convention that was hosted by the R&LHS Mid-South Chapter under the direction of their president, Marvin Clemons.

The first tour began with a visit to Vulcan Park, which hosts the largest cast iron statue in the world. It depicts the Roman god “Vulcan”, god of fire and forge, reflecting Birmingham’s roots in the iron and steel industry. Vulcan weighs 60 tons, and stands on a 123 foot pedestal. He was built for the 1904 Worlds Fair - very appropriate since Birmingham was considered the Pittsburgh of the South in terms of steel manufacturing. Birmingham still hosts the NS, CSX, BNSF (Frisco), CN (IC), and a number of short lines along with Amtrak’s *Crescent*.

The following photos were provided by Linda Fike (LF), who is a professional photographer and the wife of the R&LHS *Quarterly Newsletter* editor, John Fike, and SE Chapter editor, Jim Smith (JS).



Our first tour stop was a visit to the statue of “Vulcan”, on top of Red Mountain (so named because it is made up of iron ore). js

Your editor is standing next to a replica of Vulcan’s foot - he’s a big man - 56 feet tall! js

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A view of Norfolk Southern's Ernest Norris Yard, one of their largest hump yards. A briefing and discussion was provided by the local NS Terminal Superintendent who then took us to the hump yard tower which was actively humping cars. If



Our next tour stop was visiting the Irondale Cafe for lunch. The book (later a film) *Fried Green Tomatoes*, by Irondale native Fannie Flagg, is loosely based around the town and the landmark Irondale Cafe, known as the Whistle-Stop Cafe in the book & film. It is the home of Fried Green Tomatoes since 1928. After lunch, we inspected Irondale's train watching platform - unfortunately we didn't see any trains. js & lf



A view of the Irondale train watching platform. There are also three other smaller uncovered platforms on the other side of the tracks. js



**SOUTHEAST CHAPTER OFFICERS**

- |                       |               |
|-----------------------|---------------|
| William F. Howes Jr.  | Chairman      |
| Arthur L. Towson      | Vice-Chairman |
| Stephen J. Vertescher | Secretary     |
| Robert L. Van Nest    | Treasurer     |

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**Sloss Furnace - Started in 1880, by Colonel James W. Sloss, who capitalized on the unusual coincidence of having coal, iron ore and limestone in the area. Sloss Furnace had two blast furnaces that were completely rebuilt between 1927 and 1931. It and other blast furnaces located in Birmingham and Bessemer is why Birmingham was called the Pittsburgh of the South. Sloss Furnace operated until 1971 when it was donated to the City of Birmingham and listed as a National Historic Landmark. If**



**Here you can see the two blast furnaces, with angling conveyer to deliver raw materials to the top of the furnace, along with numerous smoke stacks and the remains of the railroad trestle (on steel pillars) that supplied coal for the furnaces. If**



**One of the many coal fired boilers. Note the three openings to shovel coal into the firebox are in the center and the ash removal openings below. Heated air is blown in at the top. If**



A view looking down the slag track which handled molten steel cars. If

A view of one of the two blast furnaces. If



SLSF (Frisco) Mikado 2-8-2, #4018 was built in 1919 and is typical of the steam engines of the era. It made its last run from Bessemer, AL, to Birmingham on February 29, 1952 and was then displayed at the Alabama State Fairgrounds until it was relocated in 2009 to the Sloss Furnace location where a cosmetic restoration was completed. If



The Leeds, AL, railroad station, built in 1884 for the Georgia & Pacific RR (followed by the Southern and NS). This is where the R&LHS Mid-South Chapter has its meetings. If



The next day we visited Birmingham's Railroad Park. Birmingham is split by a quarter mile wide industrial part (mostly railroads) and isn't on a river so the valley contains just a small stream. If

We then visited Heart of Dixie Railroad Museum in Calera, AL, which is Alabama's state railroad museum, and rode their train for 11 miles over former L&N track. Shown on these two photos are their Calera & Shelby locomotives. js





Next on our tour was a trip to Bessemer, AL, to view various train/steel sites. First was the Bessemer station. js

This photo shows what little is left of one of the many steel operations in the area. At present, there is only one active blast furnace at Bessemer. If



R&LHS Chairman, Robert Holzweiss accepting a book, *Birmingham Rails, the Last Golden Era*, from R&LHS Mid-South Chapter Chairman, Marvin Clemons. If

### Announcements

- August 9 Regular chapter meeting, program will be by Art Towson - The Ann Arbor RR.
- September 13 Regular chapter meeting, program will be by Robert Van Nest - Siberia RR.
- October 11 Regular chapter meeting, program will be by Larry Shughart - Locomotives 101.
- November 8 Regular chapter meeting, program will be by Steve Vertescher - Forty Feet Below.