



Historic Birmingham Mineral Railroad Signs Project
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HISTORIC BIRMINGHAM MINERAL RAILROAD (BMRR)

(Birmingham Mineral Railroad Company, a Division of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad Company)

Established 1884 (Portions in use for local industry until 1988)

Signs Project Description

(A project in conjunction with the Mid-South Chapter of the Railway & Locomotive Historical Society)

As of December 5, 2015
Prepared by James Lowery

Background and Purpose of Project

People drive, walk, and bicycle every day in areas where the historic Birmingham Mineral Railroad (BMRR) ran throughout the Birmingham and surrounding areas without ever being aware that the BMRR was located in those places. Birmingham's iron industry history is an important part of its overall history, and the BMRR was a significant part of that iron industry history. The network of rail lines that constituted the BMRR and its various branches transported the raw materials from the mines and quarries to the furnaces, coke from the coke ovens to the furnaces, pig-iron from the furnaces to the various processing facilities, and products from those facilities to major rail lines that connected to points across the Birmingham area and beyond. The BMRR made possible the economic development that enabled Birmingham to become the iron industry giant that it was during the late 1800s and early to middle 1900s. "This industrial railroad established the critical linkage between the individual elements of the iron industry, providing transportation between coal mines, ore mines, blast furnaces, rolling mills, and foundries." (H.A.E.R. report No. AL-45, Page 3) The BMRR

connected virtually all of the Birmingham area's iron industry's major facilities during the heyday of its operation. The BMRR was an extensive system of rail lines sometimes referred to as the "Birmingham Mineral Belt." In addition to the BMRR's primary purpose as a Louisville and Nashville Railroad Company industrial railroad, L&N also provided regular passenger service on several of the major BMRR branches, and opened outlying areas to economic development by providing a means for people and products to get to-and-from Birmingham.

The total length of the BMRR mainline tracks with all its 31 branches was **253 miles long**, which is equal to the distance from Birmingham to Mobile! Adding to that its various sidings and spurs to the mines, quarries, coke ovens, furnaces, etc., would put its length well over 300 miles. It was a major railroad!

Use of the Birmingham Mineral Railroad continued in various forms and locations throughout the peak of Birmingham's iron ore mining and iron and steel production era. The **century-long era** covered by the historic BMRR began with the building of the first segment (branch) in 1884 (in what is now Red Mountain Park) and continued with additional branches being added and used until they were retired or abandoned at various times, with at least a portion of one branch continuing to be used to handle light industrial materials until 1984 and one branch continuing to be used to handle the movement of train cars until 1988 (H.A.E.R. report No. AL-11, Page 40). Even today, some segments of the BMRR are still in use as portions of active railroad lines in the Birmingham area.

Education about, and awareness of, the BMRR locations will go a long way toward educating the general public, tourists, teachers, students, and historians about the BMRR system and its role in the Birmingham area's history.

Project Description

This project is installing signs at various locations around Birmingham and the surrounding area where the Birmingham Mineral Railroad ran so that people will become more aware of that part of this area's history. As people drive, ride, bicycle, and walk in the areas where the signs are located, they will become more aware of their surroundings and will learn about one aspect of the history of where they are. The signs are for educational purposes and are intended to raise awareness with the general public of the importance of railroads in the development of the Birmingham area. The signs are being installed in high-visibility areas throughout Birmingham and the surrounding area where a lot of people in cars or on foot would see the signs (for example, along Montclair Road, in English Village, on Ruffner Road, in Trussville, in downtown Bessemer, in Pratt City, in Woodlawn, in Helena, on Highway 75 in Pinson, on Highway 231 near Oneonta, in parks related to the area's iron history, etc.).

The railroad bed no longer is connected in many places, so this is not a "walkable" trail; the project designates locations. But the signage and information provided by this project could be thought of as a drivable "urban trail." In some places, it will naturally connect to existing urban trails such as the Vulcan Trail along Red Mountain, which is a walking trail on the roadbed of the original BMRR. It also could become part of an "iron history trail" if such is

developed in the Birmingham area and an “Alabama Rail Trail” if such is developed across the state. More broadly, the BMRR Signs Project could be part of Alabama’s tourism efforts.

In addition to persons in vehicles driving by, and seeing, the BMRR signs and learning about that part of our history, local bicyclers and urban hikers might be interested in following the routes of the BMRR and learning about that part of our history from the signs and website that would be part of this project. Some of the locations that the BMRR connected to are now parks and nature preserves related to the area’s iron history, so the BMRR routes and sites could once again tie those parks together for the general public, tourists, bicyclers, hikers, etc.

Extensive, written self-guided “Driving and Walking Tours” have been created covering several of the BMRR branches, and copies of those tours have been distributed to individuals in the greater Birmingham area. Response to having those driving and walking tours has been outstanding, and additional such written tours are being developed for other BMRR branches. Those “tours” allow a person to drive to places to see the old BMRR roadbed and to walk on parts of it that have been turned into walking trails such as the Vulcan Trail, the trail below Trinity Hospital, and several trail segments in Red Mountain Park. The self-guided “Driving and Walking Tours” are available on the project’s website at Bham-MRR.com.

Also, it is envisioned that people involved in geocaching would welcome the BMRR information and sites as locations they could use. Geocaching websites often include information about a site, and that could be provided as part of this signage project. The list of all sign installations that is on the website includes the latitude and longitude for each sign.

Timeline of the history of the BMRR is included on the website so that people understand the era in which this rail line was active and was used.

How does this project differ from other similar ones in the Birmingham area?

1. All socio-economic statuses. Places where the signs will be installed cover all socio-economic statuses because they include locations as diverse as Mountain Brook, City of Birmingham, Irondale, Woodlawn, Pratt City, Bessemer, Lipscomb, Gate City, Inglenook, etc., and will complement restoration efforts going on in several of those underserved communities such as with racial and ethnic minorities and economically disadvantaged areas. In addition, not only is this project in urban areas, but it also is in many local rural communities and even in farmland.
2. General public. One problem historical efforts and historical societies have is how to reach the general public with historical information. This project will do that; it is directed primarily to educating members of the general public about history.
3. Noncontiguous “trail”. The railroad bed no longer is connected in many places, so this is not a “walkable” trail; the project designates locations. Therefore, land does not have to be acquired as is the case with contiguous trails; only permission to install the signs is needed. This can be thought of as a drivable “urban trail.” In some places, it will naturally connect to

existing urban trails which use the roadbed of the original BMRR such as Vulcan Trail, the Trinity Hospital trail, and several trail segments in Red Mountain Park. It also could become part of an “iron history trail” if such is developed in the Birmingham area. (See also information above about the four written “Driving and Walking Tours” that have been created covering four of the BMRR branches.)

4. Cost-effective signage. These signs are not the expensive cast-iron, molded historical markers but instead are much less expensive, but durable, signs similar in size and construction as “speed limit” signs. This will enable a lot of signs to be installed in a lot of areas.

Initial Locations of Signs

Approximately 100 locations throughout the immediate Birmingham area and into the Oneonta, Altoona, Pinson, Helena, Trussville, West Blocton, etc., areas have been identified as possible locations where the signs could be installed initially. A **draft example** list of those initial locations is included in the “SUMMARY List of Possible Locations” section at the end of this proposal. It is envisioned that the list will expand as more locations for the signs are identified and as additional funds become available for purchase and installation of the signs.

For planning purposes, BMRR branches that have been identified thus far as ones along which signs would be installed initially are as follows:

Red Gap Branch	Gate City Branch
North Branch	South Branch
Huntsville Branch No. 1	Huntsville Branch No. 2
Helena and Blocton Branch	Woodstock and Blocton Branch
Pioneer Branch	Trussville Branch (Gate City Extension)
BB&B (Brierfield, Blocton, and Birmingham) Branch	
TCI Spur (when project signs are extended to include associated spur rail lines)	

There are other branches and short spurs that were part of the BMRR, and other locations for the signs will be explored along those routes in the future such as when trails and greenways are developed that intersect the former BMRR routes. The primary consideration for sign locations is to place them where a lot of people will see them or where there is a now-public facility that had its origin in Birmingham’s iron history.

Design of Signs

The signs that are being installed as part of this project comply with federal regulations covering signs on rights-of-way, and they are installed similar to “Speed Limit” signs alongside streets and roads with a channel post holding the signs in a similar way that “Speed Limit” signs are erected. The signs for this project are structured as indicated in this section. The signs will

be simple markers designating a location and are not intended to tell the story of the railroad; the story will be told on the website.

Main large sign – 18 inches wide by 24 inches high – meets federal regulations for signs on highway rights-of-way. (Note: Within the city limits of Birmingham, signs installed on rights-of-way will not have the railroad crossbuck in logo.)



Smaller “Sub-signs” – In some locations, there will be smaller “sub-signs” installed below the main large signs. These smaller signs are 18 inches wide by 4 inches high and will contain the website address. The large sign is designed to designate the site, and the smaller website address sign will direct people to additional information about the project and, especially, about the Historic Birmingham Mineral Railroad.

An optional sub-sign would be used at locations where signs are installed not at an actual location where the BMRR ran but, instead, at a location nearby. Such sub-signs would contain an arrow pointing in the direction of where the BMRR actually ran. An example of a location where such a sign will be installed is at the intersection of Morningside Drive and Montclair Road. That sign will point up Morningside Drive to where the BMRR ran and where a sign also will be installed.

Logo

A logo for the project and signs represents the BMRR’s role in the area’s iron history. The logo ties the area’s iron-related mineral and ore mining (the three components required to make iron and steel – iron ore, coal, and limestone) to the railroad facilities that transported those minerals and ores.



The project logo shown here reflects the railroad's significance in hauling the three locally mined natural resources required as ingredients for making iron and steel: coal, iron ore, and limestone. Birmingham is one of the few places on Earth where all three of those ingredients are found in abundance in close proximity.

Ongoing Sign Monitoring and Maintenance Plan

The overall budget for the signs project includes an entry for monitoring and maintaining the signs. For every \$5,000 of income received for the purchase of signs in each phase of the project, \$500 of that money will be set aside in a "Signs Maintenance" category to be spent only for maintenance of the signs and posts. If those sign maintenance funds are not sufficient to cover a specific maintenance expenditure, additional funds for that purpose will be used from the general project funds.

Maintenance of the signs will be provided by members of the Mid-South Chapter of the Railway & Locomotive Historical Society. Its Board of Directors will designate a member (or members) of the chapter to monitor the signs, to receive notices of signs needing repair or replacement, and to make the necessary repairs or replacements as needed.

The maintenance plan for signs installed on rights-of-way in cities that have a published maintenance plan for their own signs will be adhered to wherever applicable for the signs installed on rights-of-way as part of this project. If a city does not have a maintenance plan or set period for checking all of its signs, the following maintenance plan will be followed for signs installed as part of this project.

Every installed sign will be visited and inspected at least once a year. Signs requiring cleaning will be cleaned with an appropriate cleaning agent. Signs needing to be replaced will be replaced as needed. Records of every sign installation are being maintained, and those records include the date at which the next inspection of a sign is scheduled to occur and the contact person for the sign in case additional maintenance or replacement is needed.

The website (Bham-MRR.com) associated with this project includes the ability for anyone who sees a sign that needs maintenance to report that, and those reports will be followed-up by the person(s) responsible for sign maintenance.

Maintenance on installed signs needed because of fading, damage, missing signs, damaged posts, posts out of vertical, etc., will be performed or will be requested of the original installing entity. Signs needing to be replaced will be ordered, and replacements will be installed.

Officials at parks or similar locations where signs have been installed will be expected to monitor the signs at their facility and to report any problems they find. Likewise, private property owners where signs have been installed will be requested to monitor the signs and to report problems for correction.

Whenever the information on a smaller sub-sign that was installed below the large sign becomes obsolete or changes, replacement sub-signs containing the current information will be purchased and will be installed on the posts in place of the signs containing the out-of-date information.

Internet Presence and Website

A website has been created for the project at **Bham-MRR.com**. The website already contains many resources such as maps, photographs, oral histories and “anecdotal” stories, documentation of historic trestles and cut-stone culverts, and a way for people to report such information. It is envisioned that an “enhanced” website will include additional components such as the following:

- A map showing locations of the signs
- Each location of a sign on the map could be “clicked on” to bring up additional information about that BMRR route, dates of operation, site or facility information, and historical photographs of that site (in some instances, “then and now” photographs).
- General information about the area’s iron industry history.
- Locations of current historical facilities, parks, etc., that help tell the story of the area’s iron industry history, and links to the websites of those facilities, parks, etc.
- Additional resources and links for learning more about the area’s iron industry history and the BMRR.

As indicated elsewhere in this proposal, a small sub-sign on many of the sign posts contains the website address. A QR code could be added to that sign or the post for connecting to the Internet website.

If it is appropriate, links could be made to local geocaching websites or from those websites to this one in order to encourage use by geocachers.

Written Materials and Brochure

As mentioned in the “Project Description” section above, extensive written self-guided “Driving and Walking Tours” have been created covering several of the BMRR branches, and copies of those tours have been distributed to individuals in the greater Birmingham area and are posted on the website. Response to having those self-guided driving and walking tours has been outstanding, and additional written tours are being developed for other BMRR branches. Those “tours” allow a person to drive to places to see the old BMRR roadbed and to walk on parts of it that have been turned into walking trails such as the Vulcan Trail, the trail below Trinity Hospital, and several trail segments in Red Mountain Park. The self-guided “Driving and Walking Tours” are available on the project’s website at Bham-MRR.com.

In addition to a website, it is anticipated that a brochure explaining the BMRR with a map of the sign locations would be developed that could be placed at locations such as the Leeds Depot, the caboose in Old Town Helena, the caboose in downtown Irondale, the Irondale Cafe, the vintage train facilities at Grants Mill Station, the Bessemer Hall of History, the Heart of Dixie Railroad Museum, Alabama Welcome Centers, etc.

Oral and “Anecdotal” Histories

As part of this project, oral histories (and “anecdotal stories”) about the BMRR are being gathered and are included on the website. Already, many people have shared anecdotal information and stories about their remembrances of this railroad or stories of their friends or family members who grew up near this railroad.

Supportive Organizations and Individuals

Thus far, the following have expressed their support of this project by providing information, contacts, votes of support, in-kind assistance, financial assistance, etc. (*Lists will be developed further as organizations are contacted for support and assistance.*)

Endorsements Received

Mid-South Chapter of the Railway & Locomotive Historical Society, Inc.
 Louisville and Nashville Railroad Historical Society (L&N logo approved for use in the project)
 Birmingham Historical Society
 Birmingham History Center
 Jefferson County Historical Association
 Homewood Historical Society
 Helena Museum
 Historic Machinery Services Corporation
 City of Birmingham (approved installation of signs on the city right-of-way)
 City of Mountain Brook (approved installation of signs on the city right-of-way)

City of Irondale (approved installation of signs on the city right-of-way)
 City of Oneonta (approved installation of signs on the city right-of-way)
 City of Helena (approved installation of signs on the city right-of-way)
 City of Lipscomb (approved installation of signs on the city right-of-way)
 City of Trussville (waiting for approval by Jefferson County)
 Darryl Washington and Sheryl Daniels, Commercial Development Authority, City of
 Irondale
 Redmont Park Neighborhood Association
 Various other Birmingham neighborhood associations through which the BMRR ran
 Vulcan Park
 Ruffner Mountain Nature Center
 Red Mountain Park
 Bessemer Hall of History (located in the historic Bessemer Depot)
 Birmingham Rails (John Stewart, www.bhamrails.info)
 Heart of Dixie Railroad Museum
 Blount County Memorial Museum
 Freshwater Land Trust (Red Rock Ridge and Valley Trail)
 Greater Birmingham Convention and Visitors Bureau
 YMBC Civic Forum

Organizations To Be Contacted

Plans are to contact organizations such as the following for their endorsement or support of this project:

Society for Industrial Archaeology (Southern Chapter or local contacts)
 Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham
 Additional Birmingham neighborhood associations through which the BMRR ran
 CAWACO RC&D (Resource Conservation and Development)
 REV Birmingham (Revive Birmingham)
 Boatright Enterprises, Inc.
 Railroad Park
 Sloss Furnaces National Historical Landmark
 Tannehill Ironworks Historical State Park
 Brierfield Ironworks Historical State Park
 Blount County Historical Society
 Historic Shelby Association (Shelby Iron Park)
 Shelby County Museum Trail (under development)
 Alabama Trails Commission (ADECA)
 Alabama Historical Commission
 Alabama Tourism Department
 Mayors or appropriate officials of additional localities in which the signs would be
 installed (for example, Bessemer, Pinson, Tarrant, West Blocton, and various
 county governments where the BMRR ran.)

Individuals

There are many individuals in the Birmingham area who are knowledgeable about the Birmingham Mineral Railroad, its routes, and its history, and they are being asked to provide information about the BMRR and assistance with various aspects of this project. Also, officials such as the mayors of several of the locales where signs are to be installed are being asked to support the project by facilitating, or providing, the installation of the signs on street or highway rights-of-way in their jurisdictions. For signs to be installed on state highway rights-of-way, ALDOT officials will be contacted for permission.

Individuals who already have provided valuable information and assistance include the following:

Marty Schulman	Natasha Bettis
Jeff Newman	Stan Moss
Marvin Clemons	Sam Gaston
Lyle Key	Jerry Weems
Robert Yuill	Marjorie White
Eric McFerrin	George Jenkins
Stan Burnett	Mimi Wilson Tynes
John Stewart	Alice Williams
Ken Penhale	Tim Smith
Patti Pennington	Ryan Cole
Erskine Ramsay	Sue Staff
Wendy Jackson	Miller Peterson
Stan Palla	

Many, many more people who have provided information and assistance as the project has progressed. Thank you all!

Project Budget*

Purchase and installation of signs (Includes signs, posts, hardware, and installation)	\$ 18,000
Website costs/enhancements and development of clickable map (Includes dynamic connections to social media)	\$ 500
General costs for map scanning, photocopying, etc.	\$ 1,000
Fees and insurance required by City of Birmingham	\$ 1,000
Development and production of brochure, publicity, and educational materials	\$ 2,000
Ongoing monitoring and maintenance of installed signs	\$ 2,500
TOTAL	\$ 25,000

* Note: This budget is for the entire project, not just one year. However, if additional funds are received beyond this budgeted amount, additional signs can be installed in additional locations.

SUMMARY Example List of Possible Locations

**(NOTE: This is a preliminary list that was developed early in the project.
See the list of INSTALLED signs on the website Bham-MRR.com for more up-to-date locations.)**

Red Mountain Park	Kiosk and various places where trails use or cross the former BMRR railbed
Venice Road	Near Red Mountain Park
Railroad Park	
Birmingham Amtrak Station	Station Platform
Sloss Furnaces	
Ruffner Mountain Nature Center	Various places, especially along BMRR roadbed
Trussville	
Crestwood Boulevard	Near intersection with Crest Hill (Cresthill) Road
Trinity Hospital Walking Trail	
Levite Jewish Community Center	
Morningside Drive	Behind Crestline Post Office
Montclair Road	Across street from side of Crestline Post Office
Montclair Road	Triangular Park at intersection of Montclair Road and Country Club Road
Ramsay Park	
Country Club Road	Just past intersection with Montclair Road
English Village	
Oxford Road	Between Sterling Road and Carlisle Road
Carlisle Road	Near Montrose Place South
Richard Arrington, Jr. Boulevard	Crest of mountain below Vulcan Park
Vulcan Park	
Vulcan Trail	
Green Springs Highway	Just north of crest of Red Mountain
Birmingham Zoo	At entrance WITH ARROW pointing toward English Village
Gate City	Oporto Madrid Boulevard north of intersection with 65th Street South
	Georgia Road at Brussels Avenue
	Other locations in the Gate City residential area
Woodlawn	65th Street and 1st Avenue North
	65th Street and 1st Avenue South
	65th Street and 3rd Avenue South
Inglenook	Tallapoosa Street at East Lake Boulevard/Vanderbilt Road
Pinson	Park at southwest corner of Center Point Road and Main Street
Irondale	Railroad viewing platform
	Georgia Road near Ruffner Road
	Crestwood Boulevard at 16th Street South
Bessemer	East of Bessemer Hall of History -- 22nd Street North near 1st Avenue North or near Alabama Avenue
	Bessemer Hall of History WITH ARROW pointing east
Lipscomb	Both ends of linear park along Avenue H
Red Rock Ridge and Valley Trail	Various places where trails cross the former BMRR railbed
Helena	Hillsboro walking trail
	Railroad crossing in Old Town Helena
	Helena High School

Oneonta	Highway 91 Downtown beside existing historical marker Highway 231 south of downtown Oneonta
Altoona	
Remlap	Highway 75 near intersection of Pine Mountain Road
Tarrant	Highway 79 near Dolcito Quarry
Turkey Creek Preserve	Possibly (WITH ARROW pointing toward Highway 75)
Fairfield	On Valley Road near U. S. Steel plant
Ensley	Near former Ensley steel plant
Pratt City	Various locations
Fultondale	Highway 31 near coke ovens
West Blocton	Coke oven park Alabama Highway 5 WITH ARROW pointing toward West Blocton
Tannehill Iron Works	
Bierfield Ironworks Park	
Woodstock	Eastern Valley Road at switch location
Oxmoor Cemetery	WITH ARROW pointing toward BMRR location
Five Mile Creek Greenway	Various places where trail crosses the former BMRR railbed