

L & N

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HISTORY OF THE L. & N.

THE OPENING OF THE L. & N.'S NEW PASSENGER DEPOT AT BIRMINGHAM, ALA., IN 1887, COINCIDED WITH AN EPOCH IN THE CITY'S HISTORY WHEN IT WAS ENJOYING PHENOMENAL GROWTH. THE STATION WAS ONE OF THE SHOW PLACES OF THE TOWN AND WAS COMPLETED AT A COST OF \$134,163.95.

Curb Service

The L. & N. Railroad by the construction of its Birmingham and Alabama Mineral divisions in the eighties brought its lines to the doors of hundreds of mines and furnaces.

By K. A. H.



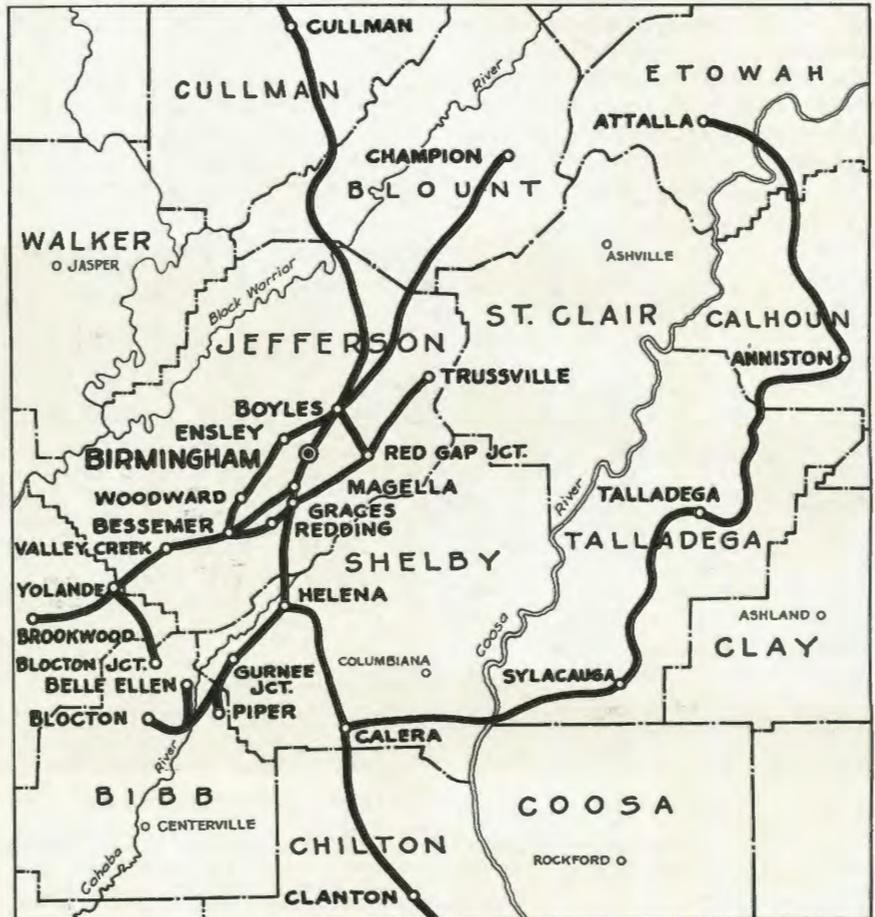
L. & N. empl. magazine
 (History of the L. & N., Part 14)

THE change of gauge was, of course, one for the big brass-bound diary and was an event that cast a shadow a long way into the future. However, the railroad had scarcely had time to become accustomed to its new "figger" than it again began to grow and expand, to acquire and construct. An important nucleus for such growth had been created in July, 1884, following the completion of the Birmingham Mineral Railroad upon that date. The Birmingham Mineral Railroad (owned and operated by the L. & N.) had a modest beginning and, as its name would imply, was projected to serve the iron and coal industries of the Birmingham District. It was originally only 11 miles long and consisted of two branches, the North and South. However, the Company had ambitious plans for this seedling and it was the intention to encircle Red Mountain, thereby tapping the rich mineral deposits and serving the many industries which had sprung up mushroom-like in the vicinity. The original trackage extended from a junction with the S. & N. A. at Magella, Ala., (about three miles south of Birmingham) for a distance of about seven and one-half miles along the northern base of Red Mountain to what later became the town of Bessemer, so named with prophetic insight by H. F. DeBardeleben, its founder. The South Branch led off from the S. & N. A. about four miles south of Birmingham at Graces, Ala., and skirted the southern base of Red Mountain for a distance of about three and one-half miles to Redding, Ala. As mentioned, these two small lines served as bases for the L. & N.'s many and extended beneficial forays into the Birmingham District.

By the year 1886, the city of Birmingham, a lusty adolescent of 15 years, was experiencing phenomenal growth. Nearby towns, too, like Bessemer (1887) sprang up overnight and for a brief space seemed to threaten the very supremacy of Birmingham itself, but in the end they but contributed to the greater glory of the Magic City. Speculation was rife and one would have to go to the Florida boom of the 1920's for adequate comparison. But whereas the Florida boom was largely the result of real estate specu-

lation, alone, Birmingham's 1886-1887 crashing crescendo was a hectic mixture of the selling of real estate, the mining of coal and the making of iron, with other less important items flavoring the heady brew of growth and expansion.

The Magic City's glittering future as well as the demands of the traffic, seemed to justify the L. & N. in its construction of a new depot there and this was completed in 1887, at a total cost of \$134,163.95, this sum representing expenditures not only for the station itself, but for pas-



The L. & N. lines in the land of coal and iron in 1890.

senger tracks, a trainshed, etc.

The Old Reliable's faith in the future of Birmingham and the Birmingham District was thus based not alone on wishful thinking. As mentioned, its Birmingham Mineral Railroad, which received its initial impetus from Milton H. Smith, was rapidly bringing it in touch with many flourishing iron and coal operations and the Annual Report for the fiscal year ending with June 30, 1887, states that at that time there were in existence upon the lines of the L. & N. and those of its sister road, the N. C. & St. L., a total of 32 furnaces producing huge quantities of pig iron, 11 of these furnaces utilizing charcoal and 21 of them using coke. In the Birmingham District alone there were 33 coal and iron companies. There were also under construction at the time 28 additional furnaces, only six of which were of the charcoal variety. It was estimated that the coke furnaces then operating could each produce 115 tons of pig iron a day, while the charcoal ones had a rated daily capacity of 50 tons each. As a matter of possible interest, the recipe for one ton of pig iron at that time was two tons of iron ore, one and one-half tons of coke, and one-half ton of limestone.

Prominent among the industries at that time (1887) in the stronghold of iron and coal were the Tennessee Coal Iron and Railroad Company, which was just completing four large furnaces at Ensley known as the "Big Four," the Pratt Coal and Iron Company (soon to be absorbed by T. C. I. & R. R. Co.), the Sloss Furnace Company, the DeBardeleben Coal and Iron Company (capitalized at \$13,000,000), the Cahaba Coal Mining Company, the Pioneer Mining and Manufacturing Company (now a part of Republic Iron and Steel), the Woodward Iron Company and the Eureka Furnace Company, each representing an investment of many hundreds of thousands or, in some cases, millions of dollars.

These properties were owned or operated by men who have since become almost legendary figures in the world of coal and iron: Daniel Pratt, Truman H. Aldrich, Henry F. DeBardeleben, Enoch Ensley, James H. Sloss, William T. Underwood (the brother of that Senator, Oscar W. Underwood, for whom years later Alabama Democrats were so persistently to cast their 24 votes for Presidential nominee), John T. Milner, T. T. Hillman and many others.



An L. & N. flat car proudly carried this 11-ton lump of Alabama coal to the World's Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition at New Orleans in 1884. It was shipped by the Pratt Coal and Iron Co., near Birmingham. Reading from the left, the men are: Col. Enoch Ensley, L. W. Johns, Joshua Collins and William Gude.

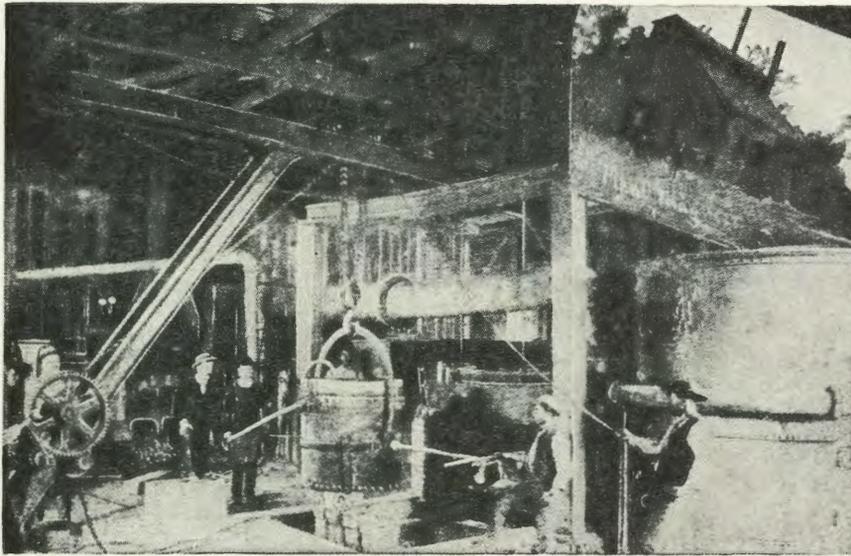
While it is true that the manufacture of pig iron and the mining of coal monopolized the picture, there were a number of other flourishing industries in the Birmingham District and their number was constantly being increased. For the most part these industries manufactured products such as pipe, car wheels, axles, stoves, nails and hardware of all sorts and descriptions for whose making large quantities of pig iron were required. Numerous rolling mills were also established to serve as middlemen between the furnaces and the factories.

In this connection it is interesting to note that steel was first produced in Alabama as early as 1888. On March 8, of that year, the Henderson Steel and Manufacturing Company produced a ton of that metal, utilizing ordinary Alabama iron ores. This steel was subsequently successfully used in the manufacture of razors, carving knives, etc. But the fruits of this achievement were highly deceduous. In all, the Henderson Company produced about 1,800 tons of fine steel, but the cost of operation was entirely out of proportion to the price that could be obtained for the product in the open market and in 1890 the company's furnace was turned over to a committee from the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce as a possible proving ground for the introduction of steel-making into the Birmingham District. One of this

committee was Pulaski Leeds, the L. & N.'s superintendent of machinery. This committee reported favorably upon the furnace and its process, but outside capital strangely enough was somewhat coy and the plant was subsequently abandoned. It was years later, in 1897, to be exact, before steel was manufactured again in the Birmingham District. But, of that, more later.

Other railroads, too, were being attracted to Birmingham, each anxious to serve as Mercury to Vulcan. Lines which later became parts of the Southern, the Central of Georgia and the Frisco were all completed to Birmingham during the eighties. Thus, the position of the South and North Alabama Railroad, long the dominant one of the district, was being challenged by these new arrivals.

A less alert leadership might have allowed this early-gained and hard-won advantage to be forfeited through sheer inertia or a too-fond recollection of past glories. But that was not the policy of the L. & N. Its rapid-fire construction of innumerable branch lines and industrial spurs more than kept it in the running. Nourished by L. & N. capital, the Birmingham Mineral Railroad, that rapidly-growing satellite of the S. & N. A., shot out tendrils of steel and wood in every direction, allowing the Iron Horse access to remote mountain fastnesses



The Henderson Steel Company's Open Hearth Furnace, opened in 1887, the first in the Birmingham district.

where large coal mining operations were being prosecuted or where huge quantities of red and brown hematite ore were being removed from the bosom of Mother Earth.

This account, endeavoring as it does to preserve a judicious balance of power between bare statistics and the more colorful aspects of our Road's building, will not attempt to list in iron-clad detail the gradual evolution of the Birmingham Mineral Railroad. This has already been done by very competent authorities. Then, too, some of these branches, spurs, etc., once projected to serve then vital needs, have long since been abandoned and nowadays no trace of them remains. Others have been sold to other railroads. In a broad way, however, we shall endeavor to sketch the growth of the Birmingham Mineral Railroad as it occurred year by year in that territory which largely lies to the southwest of Birmingham.

Mention has been made heretofore of that "basic" trackage which skirted the south and north bases of Red Mountain, just south of Birmingham. These two branches were soon connected, forming a loop of some 18½ miles around Red Mountain. (A portion of this trackage, from Redding to Bessemer, was later abandoned.) On January 1, 1888, the North Branch which extended to Bessemer was further extended to Blocton Junction, some 27 miles distant, by way of Valley Creek and Yolande, this being known at present as the Blue Creek Extension. That New Year's Day in 1888, in all, saw the completion of about 61½ additional miles of track on the

Birmingham Mineral. In addition to the trackage previously mentioned, construction was completed of a line from Bessemer to Boyles, the present day Huntsville Branch No. 1, nearly 16 miles long and extending through the thriving communities of Woodward and Ensley, and of a line (east of the S. & N. A.) from Boyles to Red Gap, a distance of about 6½ miles.

Then, in 1889, or thereabouts, some 60 additional miles were added to the Birmingham Mineral's trackage, making in all a total of 132.60 miles. Included in such construction was a line from Boyles to Champion, a distance of 36 miles, and the further extension of the road from Red Gap to Trussville, some 11 miles away. During the fiscal year ending with June 30, 1890, some 24 additional miles were constructed, resulting in the Birmingham Mineral having a total trackage of 156.22 miles as of that date.

Various spur lines were constructed in conjunction with these branches and the Birmingham Mineral and the South and North Alabama between them rendered a real service to the industries of the District, assuring an expedited handling of raw materials and finished products alike. Then, in 1890, they were joined by a potent ally, the Alabama Mineral Railroad Company, which was incorporated on July 28, 1890, with the L. & N. owning a majority of the capital stock. This venture was the result of the consolidation of the Anniston and Atlantic Railroad (incorporated on May 24, 1883) which boasted of some 53 miles of narrow gauge track, extend-

ing from Anniston to Sylacauga and the Anniston and Cincinnati Railroad (incorporated on January 31, 1887) which ran between Anniston and Attalla, a distance of 35 miles. Both of these roads were built by A. L. Tyler and Samuel Noble, the founders of Anniston, that city (Annie's Town) being so named in honor of Mr. Tyler's wife.

Each of these roads was acquired by the L. & N. shortly after completion, or on July 19, 1889, and it immediately set about to correlate their activities with the rest of the System. The formation of the Alabama Mineral Railroad was the first step towards this end. The Anniston and Atlantic's narrow gauge line was changed to four feet, nine inches, the 30-pound rail was replaced with 58-pound rail and the line was changed at a number of points to reduce grades, eliminate curves, etc. New construction work was also commenced in March, 1890, the line eventually being extended from Sylacauga to a connection with the South and North Alabama at Calera, 34 miles south of Birmingham. This linking was completed on January 1, 1891, with the result that the Alabama Mineral Railroad now consisted of 119 miles of main line track and 13.23 miles of spurs and branches, extending from Calera through Sylacauga, Talladega and Anniston to Attalla. These lines formed, when viewed on the map, a rough-hewn masculine profile, which, with some pardonable imaginative license, suggests the features of the "Father of our Country." The line from Shelby to Columbiana, some six miles long, just below the chin of the profile, was acquired by the Alabama Mineral Railroad on September 9, 1890.

This left a gap of some 26 miles between Attalla and Champion, which at that time was the northern outpost of the Birmingham Mineral's Huntsville Branch No. 2. The L. & N., for obvious reasons, was extremely anxious to complete its "great circle," embracing St. Clair county in totality and large portions of Shelby, Talladega, Jefferson and Calhoun counties. The Alabama Mineral Railroad served a territory which was rich in marble, limestone, brown hematite ore and other mineral deposits and to move these commodities to Birmingham or to the South and North Alabama from Attalla, Gadsden, Anniston and other points on the "forehead" of the profile was a roundabout procedure. There were other railroads providing short cuts to Birmingham

from various points on the Alabama Mineral, nevertheless it was May 28, 1905, before the missing link of the Alabama Mineral was completed between Attalla and Champion, providing a more direct route to Birmingham via the L. & N.'s Alabama Mineral.

Much iron ore and coal also moved over the Alabama Mineral Railroad from Birmingham and points nearby to the numerous iron furnaces in operation at Attalla, Gadsden, Anniston, Jenifer, Ironton, Talladega and Shelby. It was also planned that the cars moving onto the Alabama Mineral after being unloaded, could be re-loaded with the brown hematite ores heretofore mentioned for shipping to the Birmingham District for subsequent admixture with the red hematite ores, it having been found that a better grade of iron, as well as a larger yield, was thereby produced.

At this time (1890) insofar as the Birmingham District was concerned, King Cotton had abdicated his throne a long while before. The L. & N.'s Annual Report for the year ending June 30, 1889, carries a very interesting comparison of the tonnage provided by the cotton crop for *the country as a whole* and the tonnage that iron and coal provided *the L. & N. Railroad alone*, in the supplying of the numerous furnaces along its lines, chiefly in the Birmingham District, with the necessary raw materials, i. e., coal, coke, iron ore and limestone. Using the last 15 years as a standard, it was esti-

mated that the average annual weight of the total cotton crop during this period, was 1,434,126 tons. On the other hand, the raw materials before mentioned and handled over the lines of the L. & N. alone totaled 1,438,292 tons for the year 1888.

The increasing traffic handled by the Louisville & Nashville Railroad necessitated the purchase, or the manufacture in its own shops, of large quantities of rolling stock of every description. The Annual Report just mentioned reveals that at that time (June 30, 1889) the Company owned and operated 439 locomotives, 338 passenger coaches and 14,274 freight cars, a sizable increase in each case over the ownership of the year previous. For some time past the L. & N. had been replacing its light engines with heavier ones of the Consolidation type, these weighing from 115,000 to 135,000 pounds and being used exclusively in heavy freight service. A distinctive feature of these engines was their unusually long fire boxes. They cost from \$9,000 to \$9,550 each.

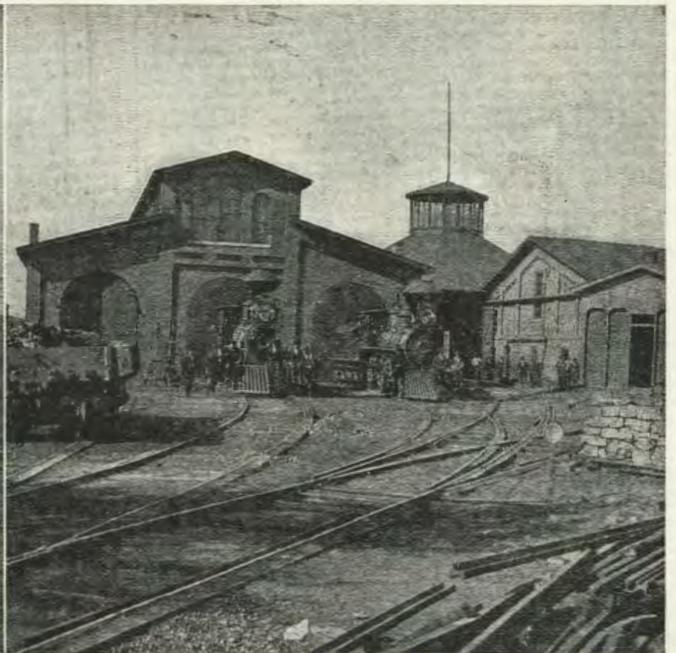
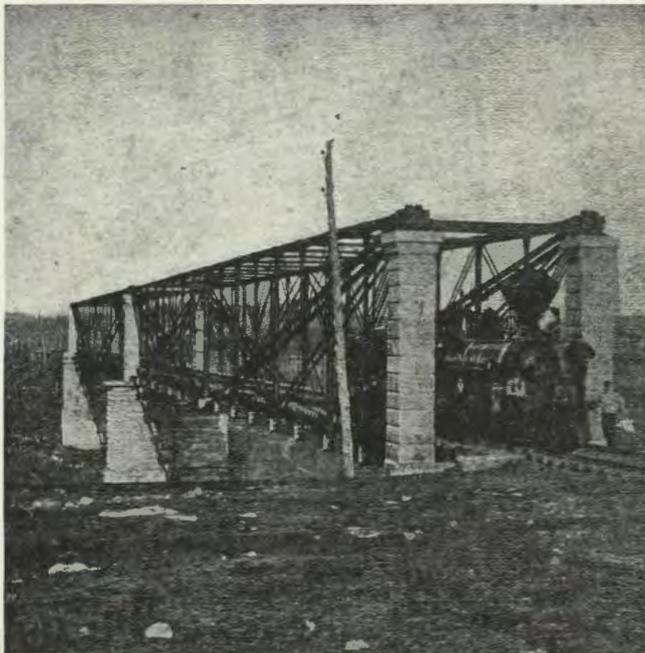
The capacity of its freight cars had also been increased from 15 tons to 20 and 30 tons; the rail in the track was gradually being replaced with heavy (for that day) 68-pound steel rail, and bridges and trestles were being strengthened in order that they might safely support the weight of the heavier rolling stock. Illustrative of the growing demands made upon the equipment is the fact that during the fiscal year ending with June 30, 1889, the L. & N. carried

4,334,175 passengers and hauled 14,443,983 tons of freight, this last being an increase of 2,271,973 tons over the year previous. The average tonnage of each freight train was 159.72 and the average number of tons carried in each car was 12.09.

This increasing traffic not only necessitated the purchase of new equipment, it also played hob with existing rolling stock and there was a pressing demand for more adequate shop facilities. To expedite this work of construction, replacement and repair, the L. & N. started building new shops at Decatur, Ala., in the year 1887. Fifty-five acres of land were purchased as a site and once started the work progressed rapidly. This paralleled similar activity at Howell, Ind., near Evansville, where shops were being built to serve the Henderson and St. Louis divisions.

Both of these shops were placed in active operation in the early part of 1890, there having been expended upon the new shops at Decatur, including the cost of machinery, a total of \$346,178.80, as of June 30, 1890. \$212,931.54 had similarly been spent at Howell. A goodly portion of the sums mentioned had been spent for machinery, among which were such interesting items as an upholsterer's sewing machine, a carriage tennoning machine, a horizontal boring mill, a 14-inch spoke slotter and an engine lathe flather.

As a result of the building of the shops at Decatur, the L. & N. formed the New and Old Decatur Belt and



Left: Barren River Bridge, Bowling Green, Ky. Right: Bowling Green Shops. Photographs taken in 1879.

Terminal Railroad Company, an organization in which it owned all of the capital stock, and, on August 24, 1892, completed the construction of 3.62 miles of terminal trackage. On the same day, all of the road's properties, rights, etc., were conveyed to the L. & N. and it was thereafter operated as a part of the S. & N. A. Railroad.

The completion of the shops at

Decatur and Howell gave the L. & N. four major shops, the other two being located at Mobile and Louisville. There were somewhat less adequate facilities at Bowling Green, Rowland and a number of other points. The L. & N.'s shops at Louisville at that time were located at 10th and Kentucky streets, but a clue as to future developments in the Kentucky metropolis might have

been gained from the Company's purchase of 44 additional acres of land at South Louisville, Ky., in the year 1890. At that time it was the intention merely to construct yards there to relieve the congestion at East Louisville and at 10th and Market Streets, although it was candidly admitted that the shop facilities at 10th and Kentucky were far from adequate.

Severe Winter Brings Heavier Traffic

IT'S an ill wind that blows nobody good, as the old saying has it, and the ill wind which brought snow, ice and zero weather to a great portion of the territory served by our lines during the latter part of December and most of January, was not without its compensations.

For one thing it introduced to a great number of persons the advantage, convenience, comfort and economy of travel by train. Many of these had gotten out of the habit of using the train as a medium of transportation; the bad weather aforesaid by drastically curtailing the effectiveness of other forms of travel brought the L. & N. many new patrons during the period mentioned. A goodly number of these were people living from 20 to 30 miles from some large city who were accustomed to commute via private automobile or bus to and from work. However, one look at the icy highways and a brief recollection of the peril-bestrewn trip of the day before was sufficient. They gladly took the train and in most cases they found that the railroad's schedules harmonized with their daily routine.

It is hoped that many of these new patrons, now that they have become re-acquainted with the pleasures of travel by train, will remain with us as regular customers.

A comparison of the number of passengers carried on certain trains during the first 15 days of January, 1939, which was an average winter's fortnight, with the same period in 1940, is very enlightening.

For instance, take No. 1, which is one of the Old Reliable's "heavy" trains. Between Cincinnati and Louisville during the period mentioned, it carried 1,048 passengers, an increase of 220 over last year. Between Louisville and Nashville, there was an increase of 341 passengers. The Pan-American between the same points did even better. Its passenger "consists" showed increases of 278 and 543 respectively between Cincinnati and Louisville and Louisville and Nashville.

Nos. 15, 19, 16, and 20, operating between Louisville and Lexington, also showed commendable increases. The four trains mentioned hauled a total of 2,613 passengers during the

period under consideration, an increase of 887 over last year.

Trains Nos. 155, 153, 151, 156, 154 and 152 between Louisville and Evansville, didn't do so badly either. Consider these figures: total passengers handled first 15 days of January, 1939—4,203. Total passengers handled first 15 days of January, 1940—5,779; an increase of 1,576.

There were comparable increases all along the line, particularly on the northern reaches of the System, with No. 91 between Evansville and Nashville perhaps turning in the best performance of all. It showed an increase of 691 passengers, an average of approximately 46 per day. Its sister train, No. 90, showed an increase of 459 passengers.

Trains between Neon and Lexington, between Corbin and Louisville, between Corbin and Cincinnati, and between Corbin and Knoxville, also did their part in swelling the Old Reliable's passenger revenues and although figures are not available at this writing it is predicted that the road's passenger trains made an even better showing during the last 15



The Pan-American, shown here gliding smoothly toward Louisville unharried by the heavy snow that covers the landscape, symbolizes the performance of the Old Reliable during the unusually severe weather of January.