



This 1911 photo by O.V. Hunt shows the L&N bridge over 20th Street near the crest of Red Mountain. The track in the roadway is the "39 Edgewood" streetcar line. L&N transported the Vulcan statue to this general area in the mid-'30's, and since 1936, the venerable "Iron Man" has stood on top of Red Mountain, to the viewer's right. (Archives Department collection/Birmingham Public Library)

## BIRMINGHAM MINERAL RAILROAD'S RED MOUNTAIN ROUTE

### Part II of III

by Lyle Key

As you will recall from our earlier discussion of the various short branches to mines that were built off the North Branch, the Songo Branch from Spring Gap No. 1 to Skyhy was completed in 1904. That short branch was to be the last segment of Birmingham Mineral's Red Mountain Route. The branches that made up the Red Mountain Route were 55.70 miles long and extended 31.82 miles along Red Mountain from Trussville on the east to Ferro on the west. By deed, dated January 11, 1904, Birmingham Mineral conveyed to L&N all its property, rights, and franchises.

In about 1908 some underground workings of the ore companies began to cave in. In one incident, a 3,000 foot long segment of the South Branch near Wares

settled about four feet. The roadbed was returned to proper surface with slag and cinders, and special care was exercised to watch for further such cave-ins.

On June 30, 1917, Birmingham Mineral's successor, L&N, conveyed to TCI its assorted mine-serving branches on the west end of Red Mountain. These were the Fossil and Spring Gap Branches, the Muscoda Branch, the Reader's Gap Branch, and the Songo Branch. The branches conveyed to TCI were 8.74 miles long and had various sidings and spurs. The sale included the station building at Wenonah, section houses at Winetka, and all other structures and improvements on those lines. TCI wanted to acquire these branches serving its ore mines so as to have complete control over

the transportation of ore for its furnaces.

After the acquisition, TCI laid about 1.4 miles of new track between Muscoda and Wenonah to connect the Muscoda and Fossil Branches. This created a continuous TCI line along the north slope of Red Mountain from Muscoda to Ishkooda. On June 1, 1925, TCI began operations on its new "High Line" between the furnaces at Fairfield and the ore mines at Wenonah. The High Line crossed the North Branch at Winetka and tied into the Fossil and Spring Gap Branches.

Most of the Red Mountain Route apparently thrived on iron ore traffic in those early years, but the Trussville extension of the Gate City Branch was never very successful. The blast furnace at Trussville—which provided the stimulus

for the extension—operated intermittently until 1918 and was then permanently abandoned. The furnace's demise eliminated the only major industry served by L&N in Trussville, but the Old Reliable continued to serve limestone and silica quarries at Vanns, about two miles from the end of the branch.

Regularly scheduled passenger trains were never operated over the Gate City Branch, the Red Gap Branch, or the various smaller branches off the North and South Branches. The North and South Branches of the Red Mountain Route did have regular passenger service, however. The two locals that operated via the South Branch, 40-41 and 43-42, would have been perfect for one day railfan excursions since their runs originated and terminated in the Magic City. These trains ran in opposite directions over a 94.2 mile loop in the area southwest of Birmingham.

Train 40-41 (actually one train that had to change numbers during the course of its run since it changed directions while covering the loop) left Birmingham Union Station (as No. 41) at 6:55 every morning and ran south over the S&NA main line to the junction with the Helena and Blocton Branch at Tacoa (Tacoa is an obscure way station just north of Helena). At 7:27 a.m. the local left the main line at Tacoa and headed northwest (as No. 40) over the aforementioned branch to Gurnee Junction and Blocton. From Blocton it proceeded north through Blocton Junction to Yolande where it met L&N's Tuscaloosa-Birmingham line. Train 40 turned northeast on that line en route to Bessemer and Birmingham. After leaving Bessemer at 10:31 a.m., No. 40 rolled over the South Branch to Brick Yard Y where it turned south toward Sloss and Readers. From Readers the train followed the South Branch east along the southern base of Red Mountain to the junction point of Graces. At Graces it rejoined the S&NA main and steamed north through Grace's Gap toward an 11:10 a.m. arrival in Birmingham. The four mile stretch between Graces and Birmingham was the only duplicate mileage covered on this train's 94.2 mile odyssey!

Train 43-42 left Birmingham at 2:30 p.m. (as No. 43) and ran in the reverse direction over the same loop. This afternoon train over the loop returned to Union Station at 6:55 p.m. (as No. 42).

L&N's passenger trains between Birmingham and Tuscaloosa, No. 101 southbound and No. 102 northbound, also operated over the old Birmingham Mineral lines. Number 102 ran via the South Branch, but it is unclear whether No. 101 originally used that line or the nearby North Branch. Train 102 would make conditional stops at all stations on the South Branch ("To let off passengers from points south of Yolande"), but for some reason, No. 101 ran non-stop between Magella and Bessemer. Number 101 left Birmingham at 9:45 a.m. and arrived in Tuscaloosa at 11:40 a.m. The same equipment left the Druid City at 3:00 p.m. (as No. 102) and was due into Birmingham's Union Station at 4:55 p.m.

The Great Depression of the '30's was the beginning of the end for much of the Red Mountain Route, and the first casualty was passenger service to the obscure stations of Sloss, Readers, Redding, and Smythe on the South Branch. On April 6, 1931, L&N petitioned the Alabama Public Service Commission for authority to discontinue the portions of trains 40-41 and 43-42's runs between Graces, Readers, Bessemer, and Yolande.

L&N's proposal called for eliminating the afternoon train around the loop and operating the morning train over just the southern part of the loop as a Birmingham-Tacoa-Yolande turn. Train 41 would leave Birmingham almost an hour later (at 7:50 a.m.) on its run to Tacoa, Blocton, Blocton Junction, and Yolande with a 10:50 a.m. arrival in the latter town. The train's equipment would be quickly turned at Yolande, and it would depart at 10:55 a.m. as train 43. Number 43 would then retrace 41's route back to Birmingham and tie up there at 2:00 p.m.

The financial exhibits presented by the railroad showed that these trains were not carrying many passengers between Graces, Bessemer, and Yolande. Number 40's average *monthly* passenger revenue on that portion of its run was only \$88.20! The overall financial picture for the runs L&N wanted to discontinue looked like this:

#### MONTHLY EXPENSES

Train Crew	\$528.44
Engine Expense	\$809.37
Car Expense	<u>\$254.61</u>
Total	\$1,592.42

#### MONTHLY REVENUES

Passenger	\$203.70
Mail	\$268.88
Express	<u>\$117.00</u>
Total	\$589.58

Expenses	Revenues	Losses
\$1,592.42	\$589.58	\$1,002.84

The magnitude of this loss may seem insignificant relative to losses railroads incurred as a result of more contemporary passenger train operations, but in the context of the depression, the PSC found that the savings from the proposed discontinuances would be substantial. The Commission also stated:

"It is apparent from the testimony in this case that the people in the territory here served, as in many other like cases in Alabama which have come before us within the last few years, have largely ceased to use local passenger trains for transportation of passengers."

L&N thus received PSC authority to discontinue 40-41 and 43-42 between Graces, Bessemer, and Yolande, and on June 6, 1931, these trains made their last runs over the full loop. June 6, 1931, was also the last day that the Birmingham-Tuscaloosa trains (Nos. 101 and 102) operated via the South Branch. Effective June 7, 1931, they began running over the North Branch between Magella and Bessemer. Trains 101 and 102 did not operate via the North Branch for long, however. On November 7, 1932, they were discontinued along with what remained of 40-41 and 43-42. The following paragraph from the Alabama PSC decision authorizing those discontinuances says a great deal about the economic climate that existed at that time:

"The Commission, from its records and from facts that it judicially knows, is aware of the present situation of the rail carriers throughout the country, in the South, and in Alabama. Some of the strongest carriers are threatened with receiverships largely because of the great loss of traffic growing out of the acute widespread business depression. Unless the people and the states permit the carriers to economize as far as possible dur-



**In March of 1954, about four months before L&N pulled up the last section of the Red Gap Branch between Red Gap Junction and Hedona, Charlie Preston took this photo of the grade crossing just north of the English Village shopping area. This location was known as "Hedona" on the railroad. (Archives Department collection/ Birmingham Public Library)**

ing this period, the very existence of rail transportation to many of the people is threatened."

On January 27, 1933, L&N petitioned the ICC for authority to abandon the 9.4 mile segment of its Gate City Branch between Ruffner No. 2 and Trussville. As was previously mentioned, the L&N-served iron furnace in Trussville had been shut down in 1918, and the quarries at Vanns had been abandoned in 1931 and 1932. In 1928 125,746 tons of freight had moved over the line between Ruffner No. 2 and Trussville, but with the closure of the quarries and the general business decline, only 3,502 tons were handled in 1932. In that year the deficit from railway operations reached \$8,073.71. After the closing of the quarries, there was no industry beyond Ruffner No. 2 that was dependent on rail transportation, and the ICC granted the requested abandonment authority. The Ruffner No. 2-Trussville line was actually abandoned in April or May of 1933.

On May 1, 1933, L&N applied for ICC authority to abandon the five-mile long segment of its Red Gap Branch between Graces and Hedona. The railhead at Hedona was on the northwest side of the English Village shopping area. The Commission noted that this line had been constructed to serve certain iron ore mines, that no ore had been mined along

this route since 1923, and that no other substantial traffic had ever originated or terminated on this segment. The only freight which had been hauled over the line since 1927 was a 150 pound LCL shipment! Since January 1, 1928, this portion of the Red Gap Branch had been used primarily to store bad order cars.

The company that owned Valley View Mine, below Vulcan, felt that someday it might want to resume mining ore there, so L&N agreed to leave the mile of track between Valley View and Hedona in place as an industrial spur. The significance of the reclassification of this segment from branch line to industrial spur status was that it could then be abandoned without further ICC authority.

In view of the dearth of traffic on this line, the ICC granted the abandonment authority, and the track between Graces and Valley View was retired on November 14, 1933. As promised, the Valley View-Hedona segment was left in place but downgraded from "branch line" to "industrial spur."

On January 31, 1934, L&N asked for ICC authority to abandon yet another portion of the old Birmingham Mineral Red Mountain Route—this time the five mile portion of the South Branch between Readers and Redding. The Commission found that this segment had been built to serve iron ore deposits and that ore mining operations along this route had

ceased. Since the mining operations had ended, some sand, lumber, and LCL had been handled, but in 1932 traffic was down to 59 tons of sand and 9 tons of LCL. In that year the total freight revenue applicable to the Readers-Redding line was a meager \$4.96! The operating loss was not as great as might be imagined, however, since maintenance-of-way and structures expenses totaled only \$30 and train expenses amounted to \$42.11. Unfortunately, railway tax accruals were \$2,193.62, so the net loss for the line in 1932 was \$2,260.77. No freight had moved over this segment since 1932, but the taxes, of course, continued to accrue.

In view of the lack of any industries, incorporated villages, or traffic on the Readers-Redding line, the ICC quickly granted the requested abandonment authority. This portion of the South Branch was retired on May 1, 1934. This was to be the last of the depression era abandonments affecting the Red Mountain Route, but the east end of the South Branch was not destined to survive the scrap metal drives of WWII.

In 1937 L&N retired the half-mile long spur from Spaulding Junction on the North Branch to RMIC's mine at Spaulding.

On September 21, 1942, L&N petitioned the ICC for permission to abandon the 2.8 mile segment of the South Branch between Redding and Graces. The ICC

found that freight service had not been provided or required on the line for eight years: "No traffic has been offered for movement over the branch [since 1934] and none is available. The only industry in the territory has been the mining of iron ore, but mining operations ceased several years ago and it is not expected that they will be resumed within the near future." The requested abandonment authority was accordingly forthcoming, and this portion of the South Branch was retired in November of 1942. You will recall that the Graces-Redding line was one of the first two lines constructed by Birmingham Mineral, and it had survived just over 58 years when it was abandoned.

After L&N abandoned the segments of the South Branch between Readers, Redding, and Graces, the surviving 3.79 mile portion of the branch between Readers, Brick Yard Y, Bessemer, and Blue Creek Junction was divided up among other branches as follows:

LINE SEGMENT	LENGTH	ACQUIRING BRANCH
Readers-Brick Yard Y	1.79 mi.	Reader's Gap Branch
Brick Yard Y-Bessemer	1.00 mi.	North Branch
Bessemer-Blue Creek Junction	1.00 mi.	Huntsville Branch No. 1

The North Branch thus became a nine mile long line between Magella and Bessemer, and the Reader's Gap Branch expanded to a 4.26 mile long branch between Brick Yard Y, Readers, and Ferro.

The expanded Reader's Gap Branch thus included both L&N and TCI-owned trackage, but the two companies had already entered into an agreement providing for L&N operation of the segment owned by TCI.

Valley View Mine had continued to lie dormant since 1923, and on January 6, 1943, the mile of track between Valley View and Hedona was finally retired and pulled up. About this time the area "over the Mountain" was beginning to develop rapidly, and with that development came new traffic for the surviving 5.67 mile segment of the Red Gap Branch between Hedona (English Village) and Red Gap Junction. While the line no longer served its original purpose as an iron ore hauler, it began to handle inbound shipments of sand, gravel, tar, building materials, hay, fertilizer, and concrete pipe. Outbound commodities included coal and pulpwood.

Unfortunately, the residents around Hedona were less than enthusiastic about

on the sides of hopper cars with heavy tools and admonished to use rubber mallets or wooden scrapers. An injunction was also issued against Koppers "restraining them from causing to be emitted odors and fumes accompanied with loud noises, occasioned by the operation of heating and distributing the contents of tank [cars of tar] at Hedona." Finally, the Court enjoined three individuals, who were transferring coal from trucks to hopper cars at Hedona, from creating "an excessive discharge of dust in that area." It appears that the coal was transferred from the trucks to the rail cars with *hand shovels*, without having been sprinkled, oiled, or washed.

On April 10, 1953,—just over two years after the Supreme Court of Alabama handed down its decision in *McClung v. L&N*—L&N requested ICC authority to abandon the remaining 5.67 mile segment of the Red Gap Branch between Red Gap Junction and Hedona. In its decision granting them abandonment authority, the Commission noted that "the effect of the [Supreme Court of Alabama's] decision [in *McClung v. L&N*] ... was to discourage the use of applicant's facilities at Hedona for the delivery and forwarding of carload freight." The ICC also noted that the residential property owners along the line favored the abandonment.

Unlike the previously abandoned segments of the old Birmingham Mineral Red Mountain Route, this last segment of the Red Gap Branch was fairly active right up to the end. A diesel-powered turn to Hedona was operated about three days a week with an average consist of 1.5 loaded cars. By the early '50's, outbound traffic was negligible. Traffic during those final years was as follows:

#### TRAFFIC TO AND FROM HEDONA IN CARLOADS

	Inbound**	Outbound
1951	204	8 (coal)
1952	244	0
1953*	116	14 (pulpwood)

\*First nine months.

\*\*Sand, gravel, building materials, hay, fertilizer, and concrete sewer pipe.

The Red Gap Branch operation showed a deficit of \$1,335 in 1951 but earned income of \$1,414 in 1952. The

this resurgence of activity on the neighborhood railroad. In September of 1946 some residents on Lanark Road filed a suit which was in many respects similar to now common environmental actions.

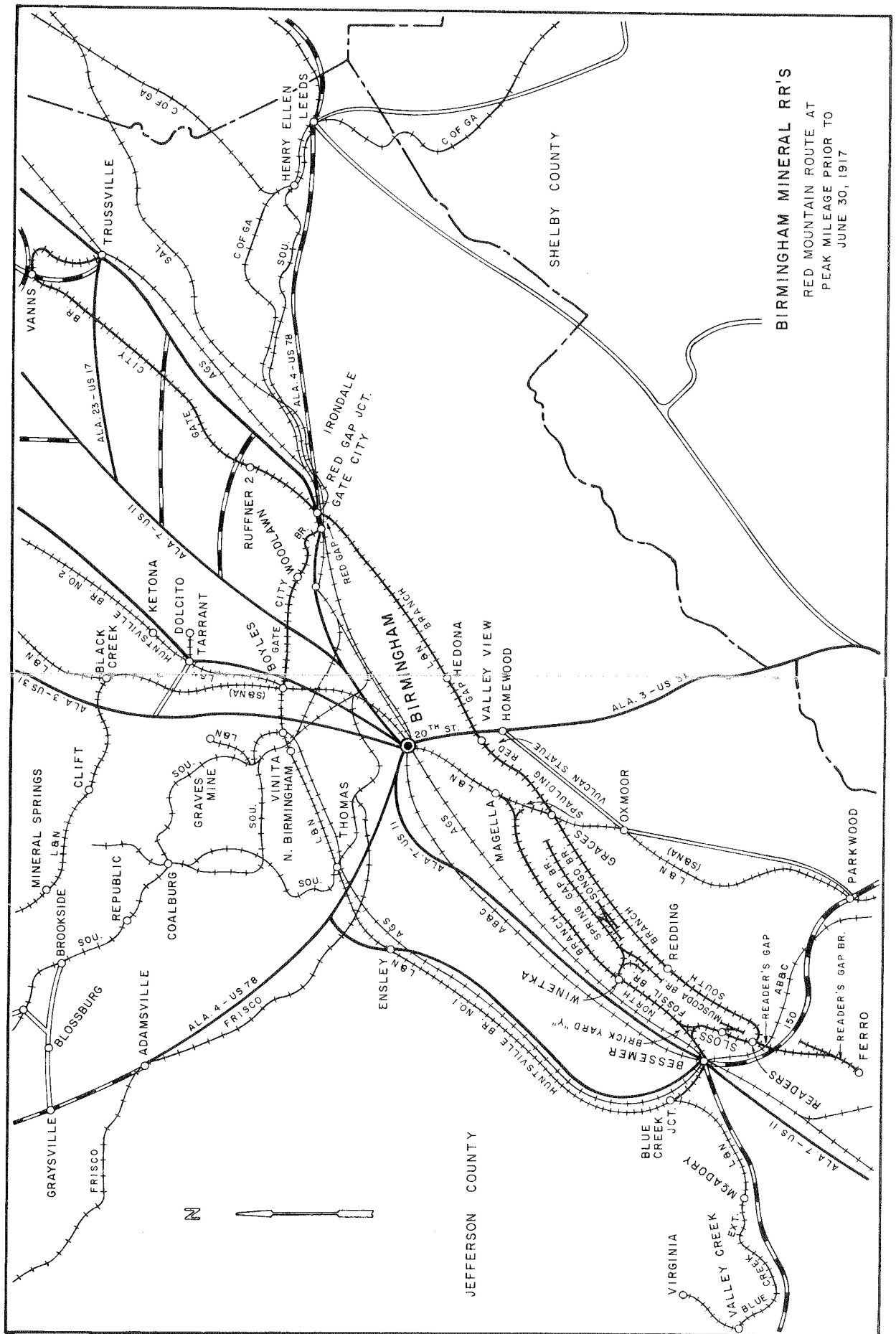
Simply stated, the complainants sought to enjoin the rail operations and related activities at Hedona as abateable nuisances. The case went all the way to the Supreme Court of Alabama, *McClung v. Louisville & N. RR*, 255 Ala. 302, 51 So.2d 371 (1951), and while the Court declined to enjoin the rail operations at Hedona, it did order certain patrons who shipped or received freight there to use less annoying methods of loading and unloading rail cars.

Kershaw Contracting was ordered to cease unloading its sand by beating

Table 6—BIRMINGHAM MINERAL RAILROAD.

April 30, 1916.									
101	49	Ms					48	192	...
A M	P M	...	LEAVE	ARRIVE	A M	P M	...		
*7 00	*2 55	0	.....Birmingham.....	11 10	5 50	...			
.....	3 07	5	.....Grace's.....	10 55	.....	.....			
.....	3 13	7	.....Redding.....	10 49	.....	.....			
.....	3 25	14	.....Sloss.....	10 34	.....	.....			
.....	7 09	7 -	.....Magella.....	7 -	5 22	.....			
.....	7 20	.....	.....Winetka.....	.....	5 09	.....			
.....	7 32	3 34	+.....Bessemer.....	10 25	5 00	.....			
*.....	7 58	3 59	.....Adger.....	9 58	4 38	.....			
.....	8 01	4 04	.....John's.....	9 54	4 34	.....			
.....	8 05	4 09	.....Sumter.....	9 51	4 31	.....			
.....	8 17	4 25	.....Yolande.....	9 40	4 20	.....			
.....	9 35	5 40	arr...Tuscaloosa..lve.	*8 20	*3 05	.....			
.....	8 43	4 50	arr.....Searles...lve.	*9 11	*3 55	.....			
.....	A M	4 43	.....Chamblee.....	9 18	P M	.....			
.....	.....	4 49	.....Blocton Junction.....	9 10	.....	.....			
.....	.....	5 09	.....Blocton.....	8 50	.....	.....			
.....	.....	5 29	.....Belle Ellen.....	*8 30	.....	.....			
.....	P M	...	ARRIVE	LEAVE	A M	.....			







**For three decades after L&N abandoned the Red Gap Branch, these rotting crossties near the English Village shopping area marked the former alignment of the main track. This spot was called “Hedona” by the railroad, and as late as 1954 L&N had a main track, a team track, and a private spur at this location. The old crossties were finally uprooted in the mid-’80’s during construction of the Park Lane Florist Shop.**

Commission found, however, that if it had not been for a nonrecurring movement of concrete sewer pipe, the branch would have showed a \$1,342 deficit in 1952. It also found that substantial rehabilitation expenditures would have to be incurred if operations to Hedona were to continue—including replacement of the 240 foot deck girder span over the Southern, CofG and SAL at Red Gap; renewal of 75% of the crossties; and replacement of 11,000 feet of 58 pound rail which was badly worn and surface bent. It was estimated that it would have cost approximately \$150,000 to bring the Red Gap Branch up to L&N’s normal level of maintenance for branch lines.

The ICC decision indicates that the only strong protest to the abandonment came from a person or company who owned some storage bins beside the spur tracks at Hedona. This party had acquired the bins in 1947 for \$11,000, and they would be rendered practically worthless by abandonment of the railroad. The Commission noted that, “It has been some

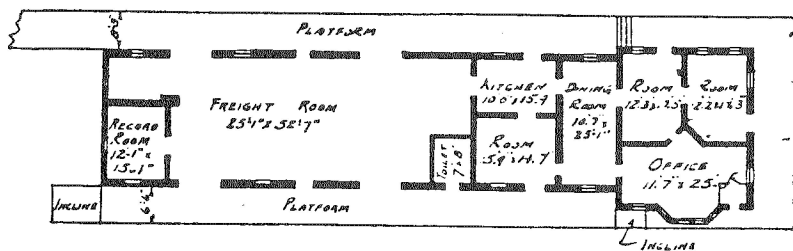
time since the owner of the bins received or forwarded any carload traffic over the line.”

In view of the deficit nature of the Red Gap Branch operation, the substantial rehabilitation cost, the relatively light traffic involved, the fact that owners of surrounding residential property supported the abandonment, and the minimal opposition to the plan, it is not surprising that the Commission authorized L&N to pull up the last 5.67 miles of this branch. The track was formally retired on July 29, 1954. While this abandonment eliminated the last segment of the Red Gap Branch, that line’s former right-of-way attracted some attention in the ’60’s when someone suggested using the portion between Valley View and Hedona for a monorail line that would connect Vulcan Park with the Birmingham Zoo. The plan was intriguing, but unfortunately, it was never pursued.

The last iron ore mines on Red Mountain were phased out in the late ’50’s and early ’60’s, and to the best rec-

ollection of L&N operating officials, rail operations on the Reader’s Gap Branch ceased in 1957. The 2.47 miles of TCI trackage beyond Readers, *i.e.*, the original Reader’s Gap Branch, were abandoned around 1960. The remaining 1.79 mile long vestige of the Reader’s Gap Branch (formerly part of the South Branch) between Readers and Brick Yard Y survived two more decades in a non-operable, brush-covered state and was finally abandoned on January 13, 1982. This abandonment marked the first use of the ICC’s relatively new exemption authority in an abandonment proceeding. In other words, the ICC merely exempted this abandonment from regulation—for obvious reasons—rather than requiring L&N to go through the normal abandonment procedures.

*The conclusion of this story will appear in the August issue of **The Dixie Line**.*

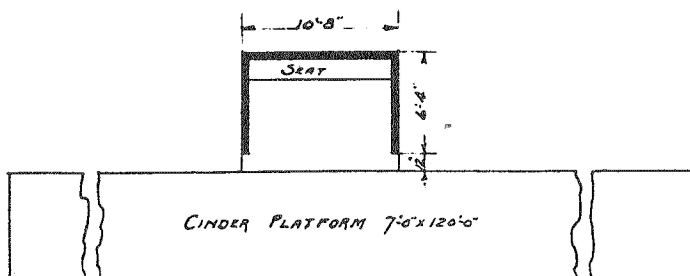


Track Side

FLOOR PLAN

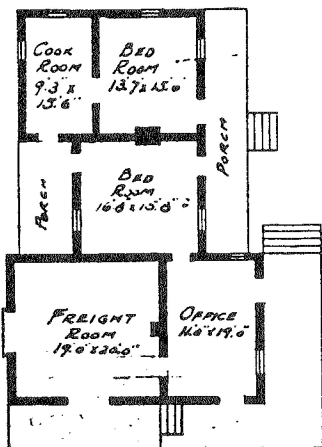
FRAME STATION BUILT IN 1888  
WOOD FOUNDATIONS  
EXTENSION, DOORS AND BARRIERS  
OFFICE AND LIVING ROOMS CEILING.  
TIN ROOF  
PLATFORM EXTENDED 40'-0" AS  
PER A.P.E. OF 11/3/27

FREIGHT STATION  
AT NORTH BIRMINGHAM, ALA.  
FILE #5225



FRAME SHELTER BUILT IN 1917  
FROM PLAN C-11500  
WOOD FOUNDATIONS  
WOOD FLOOR  
T. & G. WALLS.

SHELTER SHED  
SPAULDING JCT. ALA.  
C-11500



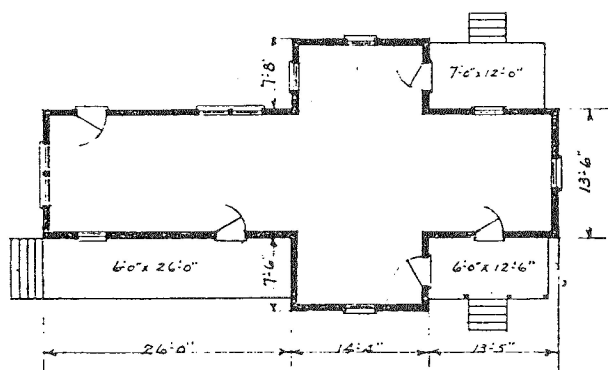
Trace 508  
FLOOR PLAN

BUILT 1888  
SHINGLE ROOF  
EXTERIOR, BOARDS AND BATTENS  
INTERIOR, CEILED EXCEPT PAT. ROOM

STATION SOLD AND REMOVED FROM R/W  
SEE GENL. MANAGERS LETTER OF MARCH 7, 1921 FILE #18693

BUILDING NOT IN USE NOW AND  
IS IN POOR CONDITION. JUNE 1, 1913.

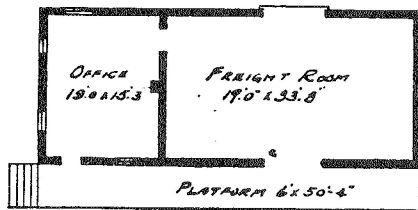
FREIGHT STATION  
AT GATE CITY, ALA.  
FILE #5225



FRAME STATION BUILT IN 1901  
BRICK FOUNDATIONS UNDER STATION  
WOOD FOUNDATIONS UNDER PLATFORMS  
CEILED INSIDE  
SHINGLE ROOF

PASSENGER STATION AND  
AGENTS LIVING QUARTERS.  
AT WENONAH, ALA.



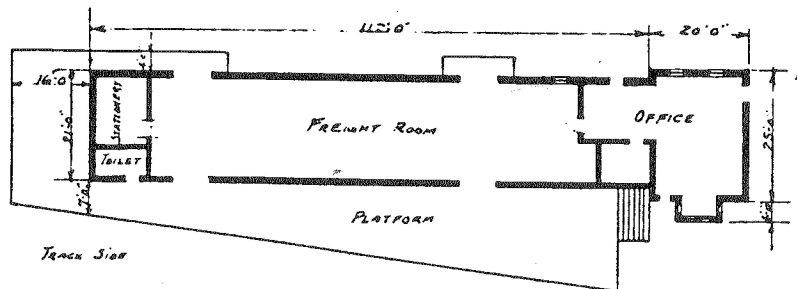


Track Side

FLOOR PLAN

BUILT 1904  
BRICK PIER FOUNDATIONS  
TIN ROOF  
WEATHER-BOARDED  
OFFICE CEILED.

FREIGHT STATION  
AT WOODLAWN, ALA.  
FILE #5225



Track Side

FLOOR PLAN

FRAME STATION  
STORE HEIGHT 2'0"

SHED ROOF REPLACED WITH TIN IN 1915

50'0" ADDED TO FREIGHT ROOM IN 1900

FREIGHT STATION  
AT ENSLEY, ALA.  
FILE #862 + #3206