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GULF, MOBILE & OHIO RR

“The Rebel Route”



↑ COLORFUL CAB UNITS – When main line steam was swept away by the onrushing wave of post-war dieselization, railroad buffs naturally missed the sights and sounds associated with their beloved steam locomotives. Still, it was a visual delight to see the audacious color schemes that adorned the first generation diesel-electrics. One of the most audacious was the red and maroon that GM&O adopted from Alton Railroad after they merged on May 31, 1947. The red and maroon certainly looked great on these GM&O FA's and FB's that David Salter photographed north of Tuscaloosa with a Birmingham-bound freight. FA1 #702 was the lead unit in this beautiful picture from August of 1959, and the GM&O freight was running on trackage rights over L&N's line between the Druid City and the Magic City. *(David Salter)*

Of the eight trunk line railroads that served Birmingham at the end of World War II, Gulf, Mobile and Ohio Railroad (“GM&O”) was the most obscure. Some of that obscurity was due to the fact that GM&O always operated into and out of the Magic City via trackage rights over some other railroad. Another factor was the absence of any GM&O passenger trains serving Birmingham.

In 1908, Illinois Central Railroad Company (“IC”) finished piecing together a route from Jackson, Tennessee to Birmingham. IC's Birmingham route consisted of the following segments: Jackson to Perry, Tennessee – 3 miles of IC trackage; Perry to Corinth, Mississippi – 51 miles over GM&O predecessor Mobile and Ohio Railroad Company (“M&O”) on trackage rights; Corinth to Haleyville, Alabama – 80 miles of IC trackage; Haleyville to Jasper, Alabama – 41 miles over Southern Railway Company (“Southern”) on trackage rights; and Jasper to Birmingham – 40 miles over St. Louis and San Francisco Railroad (“Frisco”) on trackage rights. M&O in turn

got trackage rights over the new IC line between Corinth (the precise junction actually was Ruslor, Mississippi) and Haleyville. M&O also acquired trackage rights over Southern's 90.5 mile line between Haleyville and Birmingham. Southern had acquired M&O in 1901, so the two companies enjoyed a close business relationship.

Like many other railroads, and indeed, many other businesses, M&O lapsed into receivership during the Great Depression. Southern understandably was anxious to sell its interest in M&O, and on September 13, 1940, M&O was merged into Ike Tigrett's GM&O.

GM&O continued to use the old M&O trackage rights over IC's line between Corinth and Haleyville and Southern's line between Haleyville and Birmingham. Railroad historian and photographer Frank Ardrey recalled that when he came to Birmingham after WW-II, GM&O served the Magic City with one train per day, and that train was pulled by a light, USRA Mike (a 2-8-2 steam locomotive). GM&O used Southern's