

Railroads generally decided upon the use of a hollow barrel key (which was difficult to duplicate by the average person) and many different shapes and cuts depending on both the railroad and the service for which it was intended. They also stamped the locks and keys with their reporting marks (initials), the type of service, (S for switch, C for car, WS for water service, RT for repair track, R&B for road and bridge, etc.), and finally a recording number, to track to which employee that the key was issued.

Many of the early locks were brass (now they are steel) and had the railroads Initials cast into them, often in fancy patterns as well.

The study of, and the collecting of these locks and keys is a fascinating hobby for many rail enthusiasts and collectors as the various types of locks and keys easily numbers in the thousands.

Some of these are easy to find, others are quite a bit more difficult. Obviously, the shorter and smaller the railroad, the more difficult that these locks and keys are to find. Items from the Red River and Gulf, are among the most difficult to find. Some of the items here are the only known examples found to date.