

**Passenger Rail Service before the Interstates:** As late as the 1950s, although most steam locomotives were gone, there were still many semblances of the glory days of passenger railroading in the United States and Canada. Well-patronized long-distance trains, at least seasonally, allowed the myriad of American railroads that operated them to feature their flagship trains. I can think of at least 15 name trains from Chicago to the West Coast alone, many operating over two or three railroads in the course of their 40-to-50-hour journey. This was the decade when I was a travel agent in Wilmington, so I had to know something about these trains (and I loved it).

In Wilmington, both the DuPont Company and Hercules Powder Company had traffic departments, and the two passenger railroads that served the city, the Pennsylvania and the Baltimore & Ohio, maintained city ticket offices on Market Street between 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Streets, mostly to serve the needs of these customers. In addition to destinations in what is now called the Northeast Corridor, many passengers went west on either the PRR or the B & O. The PRR had faster service and many more trains, but many liked B & O service and the fact that you could board the “Capitol Limited” or the “National Limited” in Wilmington and go through to Chicago or St. Louis without change. On the “Pennsy,” it was necessary to take a connecting train from Wilmington to North Philadelphia, and transfer there to a westbound express from New York. Rather than do this, some local people drove to Paoli, where all the name trains stopped for Philadelphia’s suburban trade. If you stood on the platform at Paoli for a two-hour period in early evening, no less than 12 name trains would pause before heading on west. For Chicago would be the “Broadway Limited,” the “Trail Blazer,” and the “General,” for St. Louis would be the “Spirit of St. Louis,” and the “Jeffersonian,” for Detroit was the “Red Arrow,” and others for Cleveland and Cincinnati. Often these fast trains were only five minutes apart on PRR’s four-track main line. The railroad thought the situation would last forever and that it was not necessary to treat passengers well, or to plan for the future.

Sleeping cars for overnight journeys pre-dated the Civil War. When President-elect Lincoln came east from Springfield, Illinois, to assume his office, the railroads over which he traveled may have had track gauges of varying widths, which required the changing of cars. However, most of these cars had provision for bunks in which to rest or sleep while moving along. The Pullman Palace Car Company, founded in Chicago in the 1860s, made fancy sleeping cars that were attached to the best overnight trains. In Lincoln’s time, standard time zones had not been established, either, so it was especially hard to print a timetable that anyone could understand. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the fastest passenger trains with the most modern Pullman cars were advertised by their respective railroads as the ultimate way to travel. Examples were the “Phoebe Snow” on the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western (anthracite or “hard” coal produced less smoke to stain Phoebe’s white dress), the “Empire State Express” on the New York Central that established a world speed record of 112 m.p.h. near Batavia, New York, in 1893, and the “Wabash Cannonball,” a Detroit-St. Louis train on the Wabash. Later famous trains were the “20<sup>th</sup>-Century Limited” on the New York Central; the “Broadway Limited” on the Pennsylvania; the “Empire Builder” on the Burlington and Great Northern; the “Super Chief” on the Santa Fe; the “City of San Francisco” on the Chicago & Northwestern, Union Pacific, and Southern Pacific; and the “California Zephyr” on the Burlington, the Denver & Rio Grande Western, and the Western Pacific; and many more.

The Interstate Highway bill passed Congress in 1956, and limited-access highways rapidly crossed the country. This, coupled with the acceptance of air travel as practical for long-distances, spelled the end of passenger railroading as it had been known for 100 years and the demise was *fast*. All B & O passenger service was abandoned east of Baltimore in 1958. The PRR’s hourly expresses led by the “Congressional” did well in the Northeast Corridor for several years thereafter, but with the opening of I-95 through the area in 1963, this business fell off as well. All railroads faced similar challenges. Mergers took place in an effort to keep passenger (and freight) railroading viable. Unfortunately, the combination of losers like the Pennsylvania, the New York Central and the New Haven into what was called Penn Central, was a financial disaster. From this mess in the East and poorly patronized passenger rail travel in the West, came the government-subsidized

Amtrak, and the government-owned Conrail to bail out the freight business. Conrail eventually had a positive result and went out of business, and Amtrak, especially in the Northeast Corridor, has met with some success. Oh, well, I can remember many times I had to stand in a coach from Wilmington to Philadelphia or from Providence to Boston, as there were no seats available.

As a sidelight, when railroad trains first came on the scene in the 1830s and '40s, they were referred to as the "steam cars." A hundred years ago, local trains like those run by SEPTA today, were called "accommodations." And when almost everyone traveled by rail, you never heard of "train station" or "train tracks," it was simply "station" and "track" because everyone knew they were for trains.

The Airlines of the World, once providing a delightful way to travel, have followed the passenger railroads' situation with "too much business." It will be interesting to see what comes next.

**Work Report:** On Tuesday, January 2, the new year got off to a good start with six volunteers attending the session on a cold night. Those on hand were John Bacino (in charge), Steve Bryce, Bob Jordan, Ted Kamen, Stan Lakey, and Bill Scheper.

The main project of the evening was the cleaning and preserving of the leather seats on most of our cars, using an old product called "Lexol." All cars were done except the Mobile steamer, the Model 750, and the Mountain Wagon, and the two cars that do not have leather (the '37 Packard and the Rauch & Lang electric). Bill Scheper checked over the electric trains.

A broken water pipe in the garage sprayed water over a lot of our insulation that was stored nearby. This was taken apart and laid out for drying. Most of it was DipLag. A wooden crate was also dismantled.

On Wednesday, January 3, eight volunteers attended, viz: Richard Bernard (in charge), Bob Koury, Jerry Lucas, Jerry Novak, Steve Bryce, Tom Marshall, Larry Tennity, and Tom Smith. Treatment on the leather seats was completed by doing the Mobile and the Mountain Wagon. Updated registration and insurance cards were placed in all the cars. The shop basement and the former potting shed were cleaned and the walls scraped for use by the improved A.V.R.R.

The Rauch & Lang was checked over. Some work on the Model 740 was discussed. A list of work to be done on all Stanley cars was refined and posted for future work sessions. The car stewards will be responsible for oversight of this work.

The Thursday night work session was canceled due to the closing of all State Park properties caused by the Nor'easter that made traveling treacherous.

The weekly report on AVRR projects prepared by Bob Koury follows: On the "Diesel" locomotive, the oil and oil filter were changed, the two spark plugs were changed and are properly gauged, the hydraulic fluid filter was changed, and the fuel filter was changed. The air filter was checked and will need to be changed in the spring. Construction of the Maintenance-of-Way car is finished and the car is located back at Auburn Heights in the shop. Car #854 has been moved into the shop basement and one set of 6-wheel trucks has been removed for rebuilding. A new retractable work light has been installed over the middle track in the shop basement. Tom Smith and Mark Russell worked on these projects with Bob Koury.

We are happy to report that our longtime friend Irene du Pont Jr. is celebrating his 98<sup>th</sup> birthday on January 8. All of us wish him the very best for many years to come!