

November 26, 2012 Story for Weekly News

Sleeping Cars and the Pullman Palace Car Company: The Pullman Palace Car Company, established in the Chicago area about 1860 by George M. Pullman (1831-1897), sought to make rail travel more comfortable and luxurious. By aggressive promotion and sound manufacturing practices, it soon had a virtual monopoly on first-class travel on American railroads. Not only trying to emulate lodgings in the finest hotels, the company also established dining cars, employing newly freed black men as cooks and waiters. While these were low-paying jobs (often with meaningful tips), it was a better lot than staying in the south as a sharecropper. For half a century, most of America's crack trains carried Pullman cars and diners, in addition to day coaches owned by the railroad that operated them.

The early "Pullmans" had wooden bodies, but as demand increased for larger and longer cars, steel frames began to appear before 1900. In the early 20th century, some of these cars were 85 feet long and were known as heavyweight Pullmans. Most of the accommodations were in upper and lower berths, one of each called a "section," which could be made into facing seats during the day. Clean linens and full porter service were available. At each end of these cars was a Drawing Room, intended for one or two passengers, that included extra space, more privacy, and a wash basin at an increased fare. Close by in the train would be the dining car, where the friendly Pullman porter could make a passenger's reservation for breakfast, luncheon, or dinner at tables with white tablecloths and the railroad's cherished china and silver. A passenger was expected to pay cash for his meals. All these cars would be steam heated from the locomotive's boiler and air conditioned by huge cakes of ice carried in boxes underneath the car. One of these cars often weighed over 100 tons.

During the Depression of the 1930s, all railroads attempted to modernize to attract passenger business. Although on most roads steam was still the prime mover, lightweight, streamlined stainless-steel-sided cars replaced the older "Pullmans" on crack trains. The styling on many of these trains, such as the 20th-Century Limited on the New York Central (New York to Chicago), were coordinated with streamlining on the big 4-6-4 locomotives, to provide a sleek 1,500-foot-long "meteor" as it sped along at 80 m.p.h. Double bedrooms, compartments, and roomettes were added to the interior offerings of this newer generation of sleeping cars, and "section cars" were gradually retired. (During World War II, most of these, plus retired motive power and coaches, were pressed into service again.) Some name trains were "all first-class" (no coaches), but in return there were new names like the "Trail Blazer" (New York-Chicago) and the "Jeffersonian" (New York-St. Louis), both on the Pennsylvania Railroad, and "El Capitan" (Chicago-Los Angeles) on the Santa Fe that carried only reserved reclining-seat coaches. Day trains (other than "locals") on most railroads carried parlor cars (first class) and coaches (second class), and many carried diners.

Unlike the ridiculous difference in fare between a regular ticket and business class (or first class) on most airlines today, often 3 or 4 times as much, first class fares on American railroads of old were about one and one-half times the cost of coach fares. To be added to that, however, was your specific accommodation: for example a berth might add another 20% and a drawing

room another 40%, or something of that magnitude. As an example, a coach ticket from Wilmington to Boston was about \$10 one-way. A first-class ticket would be about \$15, and then a passenger had to add his parlor car seat, probably another \$3.50.

It's hard to realize that business travelers did not take to air travel in a big way until the 1950s. Air travel was limited in frequency, still considered by many to be unsafe, and was very expensive.

Work Report: With Jerry Lucas in charge, 16 volunteers were on hand for our only work session of the week, and a lot of small jobs were accomplished or completed. On the Model EX, both boiler checks were replaced, and the car was returned to its place in the museum. (It was used for the "Firing-Up" demonstration on 11/24, and the vaporizer cables may be choked again.)

The bonnet for the 607 was covered with a layer of Fiberfrax, the two blow-down valves were repacked, and the fuel tank was cleaned with a weak solution of muriatic acid. The cap for the pilot tank inside the main tank is set up in our small milling machine for cleaning up.

The Mountain Wagon was thoroughly cleaned and polished, and the museum was prepared for our Steamin' Day on November 24. The new insurance cards were placed in all the cars. It is believed that the condenser on the 735 is leaking near the top, which will be addressed in the coming weeks. The popcorn machine was brought to the upper garage for its upcoming use.

Outside the work session, both the pilot line and the main fuel line were installed on the 607, and one of the two boiler checks was replaced on the Mountain Wagon, which also had a new throttle installed. The Model 87 was driven three miles, mainly to check out the cylinder oil pump, and all seemed good. (This car, along with the Mountain Wagon and the Rauch & Lang electric gave rides all afternoon during our Steamin' Day, and all worked out well. Two trains on the Auburn Valley Railroad also ran very well on a cold and windy day.)

Triumphant Final Steamin' Day of 2012: During the busy Thanksgiving Weekend, we gave special thanks for all who came out for the final Steamin' Day of 2012 -- most especially the great volunteers who braved the chilly wind. The temps may have been low, but spirits were certainly high among the 257 happy visitors who attended. A total of 118 toured the mansion, and all had one final look at the Smithsonian exhibit, which will be packed up for its trip southward to Bethel, Delaware, later this week. The day marked the end of another great "season," during which we welcomed many new faces and hope to see them again in 2013!