

# BOX CARS OF THE NEW YORK CENTRAL

presented by  
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## Scope

\_\_\_\_\_ This presentation covers all box cars of the New York Central Railroad and its predecessors, subsidiaries and affiliates during the period from 1906 to the Penn Central merger in 1968.

## Background

Many roads were owned or controlled by the Vanderbilt interests, and were marketed to the public as the "New York Central Lines" until 1936, at which time the moniker "New York Central System" was adopted. In the twentieth century, there were two points in time when significant consolidation of subsidiaries occurred, the first being in 1914 when Lake Shore & Michigan Southern (LS&MS) and New York Central & Hudson River (NYC&HR) were merged to form the New York Central Railroad. At about the same time numerous smaller subsidiaries were merged into the new NYC, including Chicago Indiana & Southern (CI&S), Rome Watertown & Ogdensburg (RW&O), and Toledo & Ohio Central (TOC reporting marks were revived by Penn Central decades later).

Cincinnati Northern (adopted reporting marks "NOR" approximately upon formation of Canadian National Railways; before this Cincinnati Northern used "C.N.") and Peoria & Eastern were subsidiaries of Big Four (Cleveland Cincinnati Chicago & St Louis). NOR was apparently merged into Big Four in the late twenties, and freight cars were assigned new numbers. Canada Southern was a subsidiary of Michigan Central.

The Nickel Plate Road (New York Chicago & St Louis), as well as Lake Erie & Western, was controlled by the Vanderbilts in the period immediately prior to World War I, and during this time these roads acquired NYC-standard freight cars. The Rutland Railroad was wholly owned during the period 1905 - 1911, after which NYC shared 50% controlling interest with the New Haven. As a result, Rutland's equipment acquisitions were directly influenced by NYC standards, and much Rutland equipment was even assigned NYC Lot numbers (see below).

The 1936 consolidation marked the end of separate accounting for Michigan Central and Big Four freight cars as these roads' fleets were merged into NYC's. At the same time there was a systemwide renumbering of all equipment: freight cars, passenger cars and locomotives, which probably was driven by the need to eliminate duplication of numbers between the three merged fleets. Four subsidiaries remained separate: Boston & Albany, Peoria & Eastern and Pittsburgh & Lake Erie because they were still not wholly owned, and Canada Southern, to accommodate international accounting needs. B&A was later merged into NYC, but reporting marks were not retired for many years thereafter. Note that the 1936 renumbering, and other general renumberings as well, was not accomplished expeditiously. Many cars would go a decade or more carrying their old reporting mark and number, until they finally were brought into a shop for needed work, at which time fresh paint was applied and the opportunity taken to effect the renumbering.

NYC merged with the Pennsylvania Railroad on February 1, 1968, marking what was probably the greatest economic disaster in North American transportation history, as well as a repugnant marriage in the eyes of the adherents to the fine traditions of either system.

## Lot Numbering System

In 1906, NYC Lines adopted a Lot numbering system for freight cars, which was distinguished from the passenger lots by using three digits for freight and four digits for passenger equipment. Some subsidiaries apparently were already using Lot numbering before this, and these cars were not assigned new Lot numbers in the new system. The new system for freight cars started arbitrarily with the number 200, and numbers were assigned in ascending sequence as new cars were ordered over time. When, in the mid-1960s, the numbers reached 999, the sequence was started over at 100, and continued into the Penn Central era, apparently ending with Lot 162-B in 1970. Each car type had a letter suffix after the three digits identifying that type, except cabooses, which, like passenger cars, had no

suffix at all:

- B - box (including auto & furniture cars)
- C - coke (apparently ceased to be used after the first few years)
- F - flat
- G - gondola
- H - hopper (including covered hoppers)
- R- refrigerator (exclusively MDT from the 1920s onward)
- S - stock

To this writer's knowledge, no Lot number was ever reused. In a few cases, Lot numbers were assigned to cars that ended up not being built, but even these Lot numbers were generally not ever used for subsequent orders.

After the Penn Central merger, PC adopted the PRR freight car classification system, and some but not all former NYC equipment received class designations retroactively. NYC never used a classification system.

Usually, when older equipment was rebuilt by NYC, a new Lot number would be assigned to the resulting cars, but there are many curious exceptions. Sometimes cars were barely altered when a new Lot number was assigned, while in other cases there was little more than the center sill remaining, yet the original Lot number was retained.

### Notes on Paint & Lettering

(Note: the dates given for changes are the dates that such features were put into practice for application of fresh paint jobs at the time cited. Obviously, cars bearing earlier versions could have remained the way they were for many, many years after the date cited)

At the beginning of the century, freight cars were apparently painted in a variety of colors, but in the first decade the Vanderbilt lines settled on a standard freight car red/brown, with black car cement on roofs and underframes. The use of black on roofs faded as metal-sheathed roofs came into the fleet. Apparently as a wartime economy, all black was eliminated circa 1944.

Black appears to have returned by the early 50s, although it seems to have been only sporadically applied variously to roofs, ends, trucks and underframes.

After a few little-used experiments, the new "Jade Green" scheme was instituted in late 1958, featuring black ends, roof, trucks and underframes. In 1964, the ends and roof were changed to green. NYC's official name for this color was "Century Green".

The NYC oval herald was first applied to rolling stock circa 1904, at which time it consisted of the legend "New York Central Lines" in white Roman lettering on a black background. This herald, 48-3/8" wide on boxcars (except for USRA single-sheathed cars), continued in use unchanged until 1935 when it was superseded by the legend "New York Central System". It was the same size overall, and initially used the same lettering. Consistent with its elimination from underframes, black was removed from the background of the oval circa 1944. Lot 734-B were the first box cars delivered new with no black background, in September, 1944.

Variations in the style of lettering within the oval were introduced to freight cars after the end of World War 2. Most box cars continued to receive the same Roman lettering, but a Gothic version (in which the tail of the "A" disappeared) was used for cars painted in the red/gray Pacemaker scheme. A Roman version that had more-rounded serifs may not have been used on freight cars.

In 1955, the black background returned to the oval, along with consistent universal adoption of Gothic lettering, and the size of the oval was increased to 54-3/8". It seems that all freight cars with this oval showed stencil breaks in all the herald lettering. This short-lived herald and a few intervening little-used experiments were eclipsed by the new "Cigar Band" herald in late 1958. Initially a whopping twelve feet wide, it was diminished to 4' 4" when a Scotchcal decal was introduced in 1964. Some cars received what appears to be an even smaller version in the last few years of the NYC.

Some P&LE cars had a variation of the Cigar Band herald which was an all-white stencil applied to the freight-car-red background. In some cases a black background was used. This indicates P&LE did not immediately adopt Jade Green at the same time as the introduction of the Cigar Band herald.

Some box cars never had an oval applied, including all Boston & Albany cars and Lot 669-B Canada Southern cars, as well as the few with the "Early Bird" herald.

Box car lettering was Roman until 1955 except for Lot 679-B express box cars (1940) and Lot 737-B Pacemaker LCL cars (1945), both of which had Century Gothic lettering, which had been adopted for locomotives and passenger equipment circa 1936. These same two exceptions also had a variation of the oval herald in which the

48-3/8" oval contained Gothic lettering, on the red body-color background in the case of the Pacemaker cars.

The use of periods, stencil lines above and below reporting marks, and arrangement of dimensional data generally followed a chronological progression driven by MCB/ARA/AAR standards and recommendations. For NYC&HR, LS&MS and NYC, reporting marks appear to have consistently been limited to initials (at least from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century onward), but other subsidiary roads used their entire name spelled out in all caps on the side, usually with the initial letters larger than the rest and with underlining under all but the initial letters. Many of these also had "R.R." included on their end reporting marks, e.g. "M.C.R.R.," which was later dropped. Early Cincinnati Northern cars used "C.N." reporting marks, which was changed to "NOR", and "Big Four" ceased to be used early on, being supplanted by "CCC&STL" much earlier than other roads.

Coincident with the Jade Green/Cigar Band scheme was the adoption of a simplified Gothic lettering, which is most easily spotted by the "C" which looks like a "U" lying on its side. Initially with the new green scheme, reporting marks and number were black applied to a white rectangular field, but this did not last long. A single horizontal stripe between the reporting marks and number was red when the white background was used, then white when applied on a green background and disappeared completely around 1964.

Starting in the 1930s, it appears that swapping the reporting mark and number to the right side was justified in order to keep them from being obscured by the left-sliding door when left open, and this practice continued for most, if not all, double-door cars through the forties and fifties. When reviewing the photographic evidence of cars painted in the green scheme, however, one finds that placing reporting mark & number on the right became much more commonplace on cars which had no left-sliding doors.

The Pacemaker red/gray scheme, instituted in 1946, initially had exclusively white lettering, but this was later changed to black on the gray portion to improve legibility. Photographic evidence makes it difficult to pin down a clean break date for this change. The oval heralds started out on a red background but went to white-on-black with the advent of the 1955 version of the oval. Lots 737-B and 848-B were the only cars to have the full red/gray scheme applied. Doors were all red, while underframes were initially gray, then black car cement circa 1955. Lot 773-B were freight car red/brown but had the stylized "Pacemaker Freight Service" legend applied in white, in the same location as in the red/gray scheme.

The only cars bearing the blue & yellow "Early Bird Freight Service" emblem were Lot 862-B, built in 1957, which otherwise featured the standard 1955 paint and lettering.

Notable subsidiary variants were P&E and P&LE. The Peoria & Eastern's sweeping "Quicker via Peoria" legend is known to have been applied to some cars in Lots 883-B and 943-B at least. There were many P&LE variations in the application of oval heralds. Some were placed above the reporting marks, to make room for the "Serves the Steel Centers" legend on the right. This legend appears to have been used concurrently with contemporary painting and lettering practices from the early fifties to the early sixties. It appears that the legend "Pittsburgh & Lake Erie" in billboard Gothic lettering did not appear until after the advent of Penn Central.

## Car Types

1906 Design - all wood 36-foot superstructure on truss-rod underframe. Crossbearers pass under center sill. The first NYCL cars with steel center sills when built. 7,000 cars built; retired before 1940.

1907 Design - the last substantial number of truss-rod cars built for NYCL, 5,000, including single-door and 1- ½ door versions. Crossbearers tie into center sill. Retired by 1940.

1910 Design - first large-scale fleet: 15,000 cars, including single-door (9,000) and 1- ½ -door (6,000) versions.

These cars had the latest evolution of the company-standard wood superstructure, now with outside metal roof, placed over three variations of underframe design. Most common u.f. was fishbelly steel center sill with massive channel side sills. Many received steel ends later. A handful survived until 1950.

1912 Design - 19,930 cars built, single-door (17,480) and 1- ½ doors (2,450). Underframe standardized, with simplified side sills. Last cars built new for NYCL with wood ends, but many received steel ends later. Last cars survived into early 50s.

1914 Design - 7,405 cars built in 1914 & 1917. Last 36-ft cars built for NYCL; all single-door. First NYCL cars built new with steel ends. Last car retired in 1950.

1916 Design - First large-scale production 40-foot cars for NYCL 1916 - 1918: 10,750 double-sheathed and 6,500 steel-sheathed, all with 1- ½ doors. 500 steel-sheathed cars had end doors. A few DS cars survived until the early 50s; steel-sheathed cars lasted until late 50s.

1916 Rebuilds - Over 15,000 cars rebuilt 1929 - 1946, including door conversions, height increases, new roofs, new trucks, steel sheathing for DS cars. Stayed in revenue service into the early 60s.

USRA - 2,500 single-sheathed, 2,250 double-sheathed, all 1919. Examples survived into the early 50s. 300 DS sold to TH&B circa 1940. One DS rebuilt to all steel; 492 SS rebuilt to all steel (PMcK&Y). Approx 700 SS

converted to stock cars.

1920 Transition Design - last curtain call for the development of the fishbelly center-sill structural theme. 2,250 built 1920 - 1921, concurrently with first USRA-clone All Steel cars. Stayed in revenue service through late 50s.

USRA-clone All Steel - Signature of the NYC: 32,700 cars built 1920 -1930, in 4 different inside heights, many door variations. All 10'0" were DD and had end doors. Stayed in service to the PC merger. Many rebuilt, with doors eliminated, height increased, etc.

ARA steel ("X29") - 100 cars built 1925. Rivet pattern of side sheathing conforms to the PRR's early X29 pattern.

AAR 40-foot - 1 car 9'4" ih (prototype ARA 1); 3,073 cars 10'0" ih, all "W" post, 2,500 cars 10'6" ih with 5-5 Dreadnaught ends; 13,000 cars to various post-war variations; 5,025 cars PS-1.

AAR Early 50-foot - 2,755 cars with early equal-width side-panel pattern (12 panels for single-door cars)

AAR Postwar 50-foot - 4,000 cars with 16-panel pattern, not built by Despatch Shops.

AAR DSI 50-foot - DSI proprietary stampings for ends and roofs. Produced 1954 - 1964; 2,845 single-door, 4,160 double-door

50-foot RBL - 650 cars produced 1964 - 1967

60-foot Auto Parts - 1,840 cars produced 1962 - 1968

86-foot Auto Parts - 608 cars built 1964 - 1968, both 4-door and 8-door. Built by Greenville, Thrall & P-S