

## RAILROAD RESEARCH

### I. Background

- A. In 1720, a railroad is reportedly used in the construction of the French fortress at Louisburg, Nova Scotia.
- B. Between 1762 and 1764, a gravity railroad was built by British military engineers in Lewiston, New York.
- C. In 1827, the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad was chartered, and the first 1.5 mile section opened January 7, 1830 - first passenger railroad.
- D. In 1829, the Carbondale and Honesdale Railroad in Pennsylvania launched its first locomotive.
- E. In 1831, the first passenger train ran from Hamburg to Charleston, South Carolina.
- F. The first railroad tunnel in the U.S. was the Staple Bend Tunnel of the Allegheny Portage Railroad completed in 1833.
- G. In 1852, a railroad replaced the Leiper Canal and became in 1887 the Crum Creek Branch of the Baltimore and Philadelphia Railroad.
- H. In 1852, the first section of the Pacific Railroad opened near St. Louis, Missouri. It later was part of the Missouri Pacific Railroad.
- I. In 1868, the Central Pacific Railroad built the Central Pacific Hospital in San Francisco, California for employees as well as passengers injured in railway accidents.
- J. By 1875, there were 74,096 miles of railroad in the U.S.
- K. More than 2 ¼ million people worked for the United States railroad companies at their peak around 1920.
- L. *Mergent's Transportation Manual* by Moody's Investor Services determines which railroads merged with another major service. (issued annually)

### II. Railroad Information

- A. Signaling – system used on railways to control traffic safely—prevents trains from colliding. In 1891, establishment of strict guidelines for timekeeping.
  - 1. Telegraph allowed information to be transmitted faster than the trains themselves (train orders).
  - 2. Color light signals
    - a. Green: proceed at line speed.
    - b. Yellow: prepare to find next signal displaying red
    - c. Red: stop
    - d. Green over green: continue
    - e. Green over yellow: attention, next signal at green over red
    - f. Green over red: caution, next signal at stop
    - g. Red over red: stop and stay stopped
    - h. Red over red with small lamp lit: low speed, 25 km/h
- B. Railroad Terminology
  - 1. Railroad – used in U.S. to describe conventional rail transport systems that are part of national rail network. The alternative form of *rail road* used early and still used by the Long Island Rail Road.
  - 2. Railway – British influenced -- also used by companies in bankruptcy and urban electric railways using single cars or short trains.

3. **Caboose** – manned rail transport vehicle coupled at the end of a freight train. Provided train crew with shelter. Fitted with red lights to indicate end of train. Non-revenue equipment and used well beyond normal lifetime of freight car.
4. **Freighthopping** or train hopping is the act of surreptitiously hitching a ride on a railroad freight car. This became a common means of transportation following the Civil War. This method of transportation was widely used by the destitute and those unable to afford other transportation – especially during the depression. Today, a statute forbids this practice in all fifty U.S. states.
5. **Railroad Police** – certified police officers who were employees of the railroad (also known as “bulls”) who were charged with preventing trespassing on railroad property. They patrolled in trucks or police cruisers (“bullmobiles”).
6. **Hobos**—traditionally known as itinerant workers moving from one job to another. When seasonal work became the province of illegal immigrants, freighthopping was done mainly by the homeless population, thrill seekers, rebelling kids.
7. **Hobo Lingo**
  - a. **Hobo** – travelers who are willing to do work
  - b. **Tramp** – will travel but will not work
  - c. **Bum** – will do neither
  - d. **Bindle stick** – collection of belongings wrapped in cloth and tied on a stick.
  - e. **Banjo** – a portable frying pan
  - f. **Bull** – a railroad officer
  - g. **Catch the Westbound** – to die
  - h. **Crumbs** – lice
  - i. **On the Fly** – jumping a moving train
  - j. **Road kid** – a young hobo who apprentices himself to an older hobo to learn the way of the road
  - k. **Yegg** – a traveling professional thief
8. **Hobo Code** – a system of symbols developed by hobos and written with chalk or coal to provide directions, information, and warnings.
  - a. **Triangle** – homeowner has a gun
  - b. **Sharp teeth** – mean dog
  - c. **Square missing top line** – safe to camp there
  - d. **Spearhead** – warning to defend oneself
  - e. **Circle with two parallel arrows** – get out fast – hobos not welcome
  - f. **Two interlocking humans** – handcuffs (hobos hauled to jail)
  - g. **Cat** – kind lady lives here
  - h. **Wavy line above an X** – fresh water and campsite
  - i. **Two shovels** – work available

**C. Railroad Employees**

1. **Conductor** – railway employee charged with safe and efficient operation and management of a freight, passenger, or other types of train. Supervisor of the Train Crew (brakeman, flagman, ticket collector, assistant conductor).
2. **Engineer** – in charge of the locomotives and any additional members of the Engine Crew (fireman, pilot, engineer). Shares responsibility

for the safe operation of the train with the conductor and monitors the schedules and therefore the speed limits.

3. **Brakeman** – a trainboard rail transport worker. The person who would walk the length of a train atop the cars while the train is in motion and turn the brake wheel on each car to apply the train's brakes. He also insured that the couplings between cars were properly set, lining switches and signaling to the train operators while performing switching operations.
4. **Fireman or Boiler Man** – his job is to tend the fire running the steam engine of a locomotive, such as shoveling coal or cleaning the ash and dust, lighting the fire, adding water to the boiler, and performing other tasks according to the orders of locomotive engineer.

**D. Railroad Problems**

1. **Train Robbers** – first robbery was in 1883, and the last recorded attempt to hold up train in southern Arizona was May 15, 1922.
2. **Scarcity of Water** – from time the Southern Pacific entered Arizona, wells had to be drilled along the route because of lack of moisture. There were 21 wells along 45 stations by 1906.
3. **Arizona law from 1912 limited the length of trains to 14 passenger cars and 70 freight cars.**

**E. Railroad Unions**

1. **The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers (BLE) was a labor union founded in Michigan May 8, 1863 as The Brotherhood of the Footboard. It was the senior national labor organization in the United States and North America's oldest rail labor union. Conductors will able to enter.**
2. **In 2004, the BLE merged with the Teamsters to become the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET), a Division of the Rail Conference of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT).**
3. **The Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen changed its name to The Brotherhood of Firemen and Enginemen in 1900.**
4. **In 1969, four unions merged and the organization is now known as The United Transportation Union.**
  - a. **The Brotherhood of Firemen and Enginemen**
  - b. **The Order of Railway Conductors and Brakemen**
  - c. **The Brotherhood of Railway Trainmen**
  - d. **The Switchmen's Union of North America.**
5. **The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters – records at The Chicago Historical Society – [www.chicagohs.org](http://www.chicagohs.org)**

**III. Research Resources**

- A. **U.S. Railroad Retirement Board, 844 N. Rush St., Chicago, IL 60611**
  1. **National pensioning agency for railroad employees who received a pension**
  2. **No records prior to 1936 – unless the employee retired or quit work after that time**
  3. **Website: <http://www.rrb.gov>**
- B. **National Archives**
  1. **Claims related to services on military railroads**
  2. **Railroad transportation accounts – 113 volumes**

- C. **Museums and Libraries for Railroad Records**
  - 1. **The California State Railroad Museum Library, 111 I St., Sacramento, CA 95814 – employment cards for the Southern Pacific Railroad back to 1903 – [www.csrmf.org](http://www.csrmf.org)**
  - 2. **Refer to *The Directory of North American Railroads, Associations, Societies, Archives, Libraries, Museums and Their Collections* (in Bibliography)**
- D. **General Libraries and Societies**
  - 1. **LDS Family History Library**
    - a. **Railroad employment cards**
    - b. **Life insurance records filed by Union Pacific employees and some from the Southern Pacific Railroad**
  - 2. **Newberry Library, Chicago, IL**
    - a. **Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railroads – manuscripts**
    - b. **Pullman Standard Card Company**
  - 3. **South Suburban Genealogical Society in South Holland, IL**  
**Index of a million Pullman Company records**
  - 4. **Minnesota Historical Society – [www.mnhs.org](http://www.mnhs.org)**  
**Records from Burlington Northern, Northern Pacific and Great Northern Railroads**
- E. **Newspaper, Periodicals, and Magazine Articles**
- F. **Miscellaneous Web Sites**
  - 1. **Railroad Historical Information – [www.rrhistorical.com](http://www.rrhistorical.com)**
  - 2. **List of U. S. Railroads – [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_United\\_States-railroads](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_United_States-railroads)**
  - 3. **Resources at the Railroad History Archives, Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut.**  
**<http://railroads.uconn.edu/links.htm>**  
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