

O&W Ramblings
The “lingo” of the NYO&W
And the “Lost Tapes”
No. 56 in a Series

By Mal Houck NMRA MMR #696

Some years back, for the original Website and the “Mountaineer” Newsletter I’d written a narrative of terms and slang specific to the “old heads” of the NYO&W. Upon some reflection, and with so many new members of OWRHS and this incarnation of ***The “Official” OWRHS Website***, it seemed time again to revisit those peculiarities of expression and employee slang specific to the O&W. Additionally, I here include a narrative of a few O&W “myths” and misunderstandings of art. One of the OWRHS “treasures” is a series of unscripted audio recordings made in October 1962 and offered via the OWRHS Sales Table as the “Lost Tapes” (another O&W Rambling will describe those recordings, but some references are made here in this “Ramble.”). With apologies to those readers who might recognize the repetition, or to those who might disagree with my descriptors, from top-of-mind this’s my list, and some brief history regarding sources: -

Camelbacks, Center Cabs and “Double Cabs” and “Culm.”

While a most common descriptor for a locomotive with the cab astride the boiler is “**Camelback,**” which seemingly originates from the name of the pioneering “**Winans Camel**” designed by Ross Winans for the 19th Century antebellum, Baltimore & Ohio. Despite not truly having a cab as “we” know it, the operator / engineer rode on what was essentially an open and railing enclosed platform reached via a sloping “staircase” from rear of the engine . . . and so configured it resembles the profile of the eponymous “Ship of the Desert.”

The reality and necessity of the center cab location was dictated by the design for an engine that burned anthracite coal for fuel. Anthracite (in several grades (“ranks”) as designated by mining scientists and regulators) is so-called “hard coal.” Anthracite combustion produces more heat per pound than does “soft” bituminous coal; - burned and producing more heat per hour than anthracite.

Anthracite, burned in a firebox, requires a relatively thin bed evenly distributed over a wide grate; -- a grate so wide that the firebox left little room for in the more “conventional” location at the cab at rear of the firebox; - Although both RDG and D&H had hard coal burners with cabs in the conventional “single-cab” location, albeit with minimal room inside! Anthracite coal is found primarily in the Lackawanna, Wyoming and Panther Creek Valley of Northeastern Pennsylvania, with a few small lodes near Pittsburg, PA and another small quantity near Taunton, Massachusetts.

After the processing / crushing and sizing mine-run coal the residue of sizes smaller than the preferred marketable sizes of “nut,” “egg” or “lump,” designated as “culm” was discarded in huge and mountaineous so-called culm “banks.” Long an anthracite region eyesore, culm banks (still held combustible coal, suitable for burning in steam producing fireboxes as “steam coal”) were re-processed in facilities known as “**Washerries.**” With such a desirable source of steam locomotive fuel so close-at-hand, the railroads that served those regions made use of the wide firebox engine designs that could suitably burn anthracite “**culm.**”

Those lines, besides the NYO&W, included L&NE, CNJ, D&H, L&HR, RDG and LV. What the engines burning anthracite for fuel were called depended on where one was and from whom the

description was spoken. Homer House on Lost Tape testimony called them “**Double Cabs**” (in contrast to a reference made to a “**Single Cab**” engine). He also called them “**Center Cabs**” and once lapsing into a description as a “**Mother Hubbard**” but most commonly using “**Double Cab**”. . . . from Homer House, “**Double Cab**” is all quite good enough for me!

Writers and those who chronicle the so-called “Anthracite Roads” recognize the **CNJ** employee use of the term “**Camelback**” and the same as well used on the **L&NE** and **L&HR**. The **D&H** used the term “**Double Cab**” on its locomotive diagrams, but the **RDG** description was of “**Mother Hubbard**” (with so little space in the cab as to resemble “**Mother Hubbard’s Cupboard**” (!)).

The “Kitchen: In a recorded interview with retired and longtime O&W fireman Ted Lewis he described the Double Cab fireman shelter, but not quite an enclosure as (understandably) the “**Kitchen**.” In a modest embrace of that term, I entitled my study of **O&W Double Cabs**, published as the OWRHS 2010 Observer, as “**Center Cabs and Kitchens**.”

Double Cab / Camelback “myth” of “Outlaw”: Any number of O&W historians (me included, once upon a time past), and other railroad writers / historians have reported and written that the Double Cab locomotive design was “outlawed” by edict of the Interstate Commerce Commission. Whereas the I.C.C. was primarily concerned with its operative “Commerce” jurisdiction to promulgate and enforce such an order, seems doubtful at best. Simply and emphatically stated the I.C.C. NEVER “banned” Double Cab Locomotives.

However, any number of state legislatures enacted statutes to prohibit the operation of Double Cab design locomotives within their state borders. This similar tactic was employed against the so-called “Bobber” cabooses types. Some state laws forbade within state borders the operation of a caboose with fewer than eight wheels. . . further requiring that those eight wheels be employed in two trucks. Other states mandated minimum caboose overall lengths of longer than the usual lengths of “Bobbers.” The effect was to prevent operation(s) of Bobbers across state lines. Very shortly most Bobber operators retired those cars from revenue service.

The Double Cab “Danger” -- myth and truth; A prevailing Double Cab myth is that, whereas the engineer was seated directly above the main rod (and to a lesser danger of the flailing links of the valve gear) should the Main Rod pivot pin break the rod end would flail and crash through the bottom of the cab causing serious, of not fatal injury to the engineer. . . . but that danger is not limited solely to a Double Cab! Either a disconnected Main Rod or broken side rod causes just as much danger to the cab and engineer of single Cab engine, and railroad accident history is replete with such instances.

Should a Main Rod, or side rod, fail the most likely effect would be that upon the next driver rotation the broken / disconnected rod will jam to the ground and tip the engine over onto its opposite side. Model railroaders have watched this happen to steam engine models; - a side rod screw loosens and falls out, the rod jams down on the track bed and tips the model over – opposite side!

The real danger of Double Cab tipping on the prototype is exactly the same, but with the engineer unable to easily exit the cab and “. . . take to the birds. . .” The fireman, so unprotected as he/she is, is caught between engine and tender, most often being fatally injured.

At Arrowhead Class V 2-6-0 Double Cab had a rear axle driving box fail and dislocate, thereby derailing the rear driver. The engine bumped along the track, turning over the right-side rail for a considerable distance and drifting to a stop. The engine then gently turned over on its right side. Engineer and fireman both killed in a zero-mph accident.

Similarly, at Norwich a Class L 0-6-0 failed to back into a siding, fully “in the clear” but stopped. An oncoming FT powered freight approached, and the nose of the diesel “swiped” the switcher, tipped it over. . . killing both engineer and fireman. Here is also a zero-mph fatal accident!

“Bullmoose” – On the O&W this was the Class X 2-20-2 “Santa Fe” type of 1915 from Alco Schenectady. The origin here likely derives from the descriptor of the massive, eponymous palmate antler bearing relative of deer and elk in the genus *Alces*. Other railroads applied the term to locomotives-built ca. 1912 when Teddy Roosevelt’s “Bullmoose” political party was his brand in running for President against incumbent William Howard (“Wil”) Taft.

Central New England 2-8-0 types of 1912 were “Bullmoose” as were contemporaneously acquired 4-4-0 “Eight-Wheelers” of the AT&SF.

Whereas the grammatical plural of the “moose” (animal) is MOOSE, and the male moose is a Bullmoose, and whereas more than one male moose is MOOSE the plural of the O&W Class X engine is BULLMOOSE!

“Long John” – On the NYO&W this’s the term applied to the “Single Cab” Class W 2-8-0 types. I s’pose the from the engineer’s view used to looking forward from the vantage point-of-view (“POV”) in a Center Cab / Double Cab engine, that perspective from a cab at the rear of the locomotive firebox, seemingly made the boiler appear to be, well l-o-n-g! The RDG single cab 2-8-0 types were also called “Long John,” likely from the similar experience rated POV.

“Light 400”- From the Homer House “Lost Tapes” testimony is the Class Y 4-8-2 type; - perhaps an homage to the USRA-designed “Light Mountain” 4-8-2 type. . . with which the very similar O&W Class Y is often mistakenly confused. NYO&W Class Y 4-8-2 was the last design of long-time Motive Power Superintendent Burton P. Flory. This nickname being derived from 401-410 Roster number(s) assigned the Class Y engines.

“Big 400”- Again from Homer House is the designation for and of the Class Y2 4-8-2 types (Nos. 451-460) delivered from Schenectady in 1929.

“Shanghai” – Little used and lesser known was the nickname of the single Class U 2-6-0 Double Cab No. 249; - writers in the past having thinly attributed the name to the flailing motion of the valve gear at speed to that of a “Shanghai Chicken.” No. 249 was reputed to be the fastest O&W locomotive of the Double Cab era.

Station v. Depot: According to Peter Josserand in his seminal work “The Rights of Trains” a station is “. . . a place so designated in a timetable, with an employee on duty for the conduct of company business. . .” This can mean something so little as a telegraph operator’s shelter. Pecksport at Mile Post 248.98 as listed in O&W Employee Timetables (Telegraph Call “KS”) is a **station**.

Josserand's definition of a Depot is “. . . a station providing adequate shelter and accommodation for passengers and with shelter to receive and provide storage for baggage, express or freight.”

A “station” is always a station, as such, but it may not always be a “depot.”

“Hairpull” – A location along the Southern Division Mainline at or near the bridge crossing of the Willowemoc between Roscoe and Cooks Falls. An interesting footnote here is that the spans that once carried one of the double tracks are extant today!

The nickname for this place is quite well established and was well known to the O&W operating crews. It mentioned more than once in the dialogue of the “Lost Tapes.” The origin of the name was once explained to a gathering of OWRHS members by the late and longtime O&W engineer Elwin Mumford, at or near the northerly bridge abutment, all while taking a “view” during an OWRHS bus trip.

Evidently there was a small shack near the ROW, up close to the Southbound track. That shack was occupied by a “. . . couple of old hags. . .” [Mumford's descriptor, not mine] who would get into their drink, then fight with, and scream at one another loudly enough to be heard in the cab of a passing steam engine working hard around the curves in the area.

Mumford went further to explain the importance of having an understood name for as many locations along the O&W line as possible.

In the communication / line pole wiring of the O&W system there were uninsulated wires on the top pole crossarms. Those lines carried morse telegraph messages. Many trains carried an employee who could send and receive messages via Morse Code, and along with a Morse key and sounder. Today we are manifestly accustomed to an ease of mobile communication with Cellphones and automobile / dashboard routed communication. In the past it was simply not so.

As Mumford explained, if an engine broke down, and there was no easy facility – Station or Depot close by.....or even a railroad or residential telephone at which / by which the distress could be registered, someone aboard the train could climb a pole and clip flexible morse key wires to the uninsulated wires on the top crossarm and alert at least a nearby station of the distress. In his somewhat jocular narrative Mumford said an exemplar of communication, requiring the climb to top cross arm to register distress via Morse, might be something like this:

Call - “Engine 305 on the Morning Pickup is broke down by the Willowemoc. . . “

Reply - “Tell us some more. . . “

Rejoinder - “The last milepost was by RK 135”

Back again - “Tell some more”

Restrained frustration - “We're broke down at Hairpull”

“We'll have tow right on the way”

“The Pickup” – Was the O&W-specific term for those short extra freights sometime elsewhere called “Locals” or “Peddlers.” This term was oft-repeated in the verbal ramblings of the participants recorded on the “Lost Tapes.”

“Combined Car” - While a most commonly used term for the passenger car with seating and then a baggage / freight compartment is “Combine” I’ve seen the descriptor “Combined Car” in copies of O&W company memos, and then occasionally a mention of those cars as “Smokers.”

“Osgood Bradley” – Was one of the earliest domestic railroad car builders, having started ca. 1836 in Worcester, Massachusetts. In shorthand sometimes referred to as “OB” but sometimes mistakenly referred to as “Osgood-Bradley.” However, the firm was started by an Andover, Massachusetts native by the proper name of Osgood Bradley(!) and so that be the name!

OB is a part of the O&W narrative since the last of the new steel passenger cars purchased by the O&W in 1922 were built by OB. Those were notable in the use of hi-strength light(er) weight steel and the use of corrosion resisting COR-TEN branded steel. The OB designs were an advance on traditional “Heavyweight” cars with deep fabricated and visually distinctive “fishbelly” centerframe members. OB developed a “monocoque” structural “girder” for its passenger car bodies, whereby the rooftop was an inherent part of that structure. “Up-top” overhead views of OB cars exhibit a “tell” in the form of rivet or weld lines laterally across the rooftop.

As aside, OB developed expertise in the manufacture of electrical equipment, and it produced rapid transit cars for any number of city subway systems; -- quite notably for the New York City MTE. That allowed the company to remain in business after the post-WWII passenger car demand dissipated and then virtually disappeared altogether. OB also developed expertise in stainless Steel “Shot-Welding” and used that method to construct lightweight “fluted-side” passenger cars for several Northeast railroads; -- the B&M and NYNH&H notably among.

Osgood Bradley operated in a sprawling complex on Rte. 12 in Worcester until the facility was closed by P-S ca. 1962; -- making its production to that time the longest of any railroad car-builder in the U.S. The Bradley family had retained control of the firm until purchased by Pullman around 1870, and then as the accumulated car-building holdings came to be branded as “Pullman Standard.” Nonetheless, the operation was to its end very commonly referred to across the industry as Osgood Bradley, and then locally as the “Osgood Bradley Car Company.” The office building a part of, and on the side of, the Worcester Union Station bears a cast plaque with the legend “Osgood Bradley Building.”

“M’s (?)” - I see that (pulling) capacity ratings for O&W diesels has been described in tons. However, older Employee Timetable ratings were in number of **“M’s.”** Where-oh-where does that come from? Easy. It’s from accountant shorthand, since those folks enumerate “Thousands” [of dollars] on a financial statement as “M’s”

Well, so much for this longer than anticipated “Ramble” as I sat down to compose it. As with the old “Mountaineer” newsletter sign-off. . . . Then

More later.

Mal Houck MMR #696