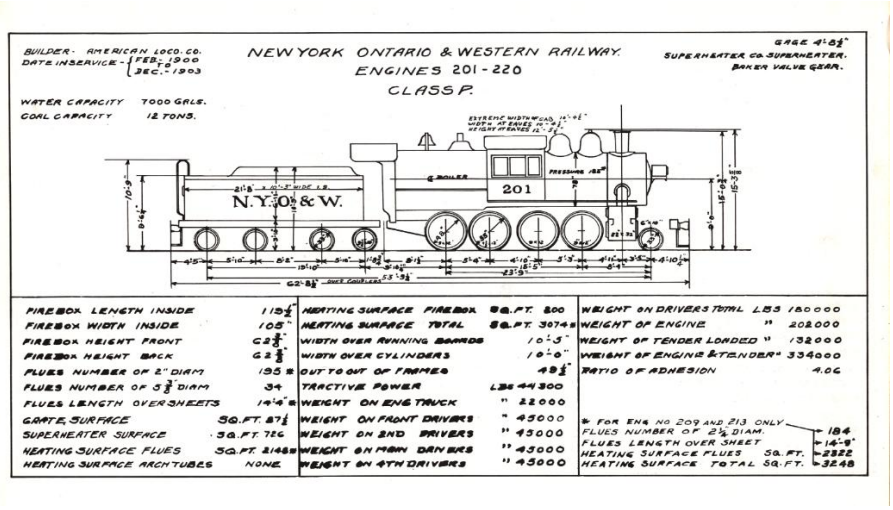
O&W Ramblings No. 61 in a Series
N.Y.O.&W. Ry.
2-8-0 Double Cab "Orrie" --What's in a name?

With the increase in traffic tonnage, coal shipments from the Scranton area mines, and general freight business along and over the maturing NYO&W system, the freight locomotives inherited from the Midland, and the later acquired Class M 2-6-0 types (New York Locomotive Works -1889-1890), Class O 2-8-0 types (Baldwin/West Shore 1886-1887), and then the Class R 2-6-0 Double Cabs from Dickson Manufacturing – Scranton (1890) were found to be of inadequate capability.

While they served well the later Dickson Double Cab Class T 2-6-0 and Class S 2-8-0 types, having Tractive efforts of 21,400# and 26,100# respectively, a more "muscular" mainline freight locomotive was needed. So, the O&W in 1900 turned to the Paterson, New Jersey Cooke Locomotive Works for the Class P 2-8-0 Double Cab types having a Tractive Effort of 44,300#; - the increase in capability quite obvious. These engines were touted in trade publications as, at 100 tons in weight, as the "largest" locomotives yet built(!). Upon delivery the Class P engines were restricted to limited areas of the Southern (then the "Middle") Division pending rebuilding / strengthening / replacement of wooden and early iron bridges.



The slang and shorthand lexicon descriptor of the O&W employees came very shortly to refer to these engines as "Orries." The origin of this and any other such terms is largely lost to history. All such descriptors are and can be the subject of largely unsubstantiated debates.

Some earlier authors have attributed the apparent ponderous bulk of the "Orries" to a similarity with a generously proportioned barmaid at a Mayfield saloon frequented by the O&W railroad men. In observing the history and tenor of the times, I (reservedly) disagree(!) and now make my case……

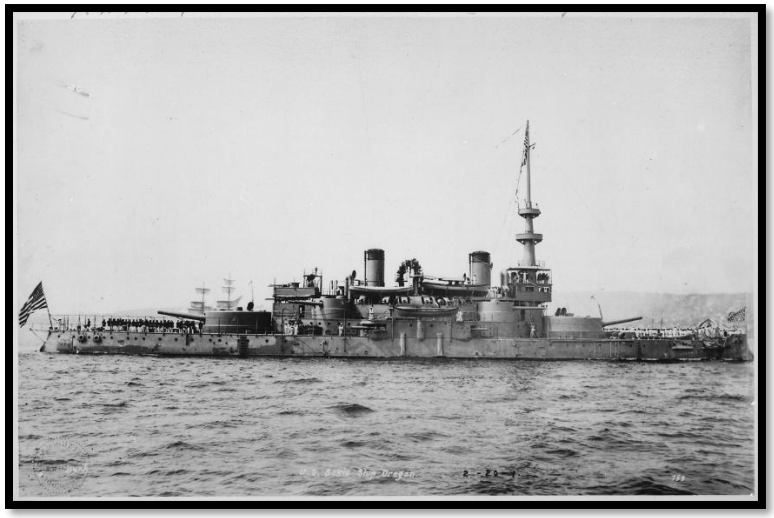
The Spanish-American War of 1898 established the United States as World Power with a reach across the Pacific as well as an historical presence in the Atlantic. The U.S. sentiment in lead-up to the conflict was as "spoiling-for-a fight" with public opinion manifestly opposed to the colonial presence of Spain in the Western Hemisphere. There was great public outrage over Spanish rule of Cuba, with the Cuban citizens virtually treated as slaves. The overall domestic sentiment was for Cuban sovereign independence. With Spain crushing the Cuban War of Independence anti-Spain public opinion and sentiment rose to fever pitch.

The January 1898 explosion and destruction of the "protected" cruiser U.S.S. Maine, at anchor in Havana Harbor provided a convenient excuse for war. At the time the U.S. Navy had a far flung and unconsolidated presence in the Pacific. After a March 1898 Declaration of War by Congress, President McKinley ordered Captain George Dewey, commanding armored cruiser U.S.S. Olympia in the Pacific, to form up a battle force with the U.S. Asiatic Squadron and engage battle with the Spanish fleet in the Philippines. Dewey was, interestingly, then appointed "Commodore" . . . interestingly, since no such formal rank existed in the U.S. Navy; - not having been conferred on any officer since the Civil War.

In May 1898 Dewey very deliberately engaged the Spanish warships at Cavite in what could by no measure be considered a fair fight! All the Spanish Navy vessels were superannuated, poorly crewed, poorly equipped, mostly unable to maneuver, anchored with cold boilers under the lee of coastal guns protecting the City of Manila. Dewey's squadron formed a battle line in Manila Bay on May 1, 1898. And then cruised in "line ahead" formation, first on a parallel pass, then reversing, stopping to serve crew meals(!) and then sweeping again firing broadsides at the helpless Spanish ships. Surrender promptly followed!

Dewey accepted surrender of the Spanish Navy ships and surrender of the City of Manila, then occupying the City and for all practical purposes the entirety of the Philippines. However, there then remained the Spanish Navy ships operating from Santiago Bay, Cuba.

In anticipation of opening hostilities in the Pacific, the pre-dreadnought Indiana Class battleship U.S.S. Oregon (Pennant Number BB-3), then in San Francisco, began an heroic 66 day 14,000 nautical mile dash down the coast of South America, thence through the Straits of Magellan ("Around-the Horn"): - all the while covered daily in nearly every newspaper in the country. "Heroic" was an understatement of the popular fealty generated for the U.S.S. Oregon. In the era when newspapers published multiple editions daily, the Hearst and Pulitzer combines lavished daily generous praise and coverage upon the Oregon; -- a national hero as the "Bulldog of the Navy" and perhaps the fastest ship in the fleet. After joining the Atlantic Squadron in Florida, Oregon and sisters U.S.S. Indiana and U.S.S. Massachusetts blockaded the Spanish fleet in Santiago Bay, Cuba. In July 1898 the commanding Spanish Rear Admiral, not wanting to risk giving battle without maneuver in open waters, decided to break out and run north. Despite the historic naval doctrine that ". . . *A stern chase is a long chase* . . . ". and notwithstanding, Oregon and sisters Massachusetts and Indiana gave chase along with armored Cruiser U.S.S. Brooklyn. Oregon rose up to 17 knots, passed Brooklyn, taking lead of the pursuing U.S. Navy squadron and then opened fire with her forward facing 13" Naval Rifles. Outgunned and overtaken, with one Spanish Cruiser destroyed by fire, one completely sunk, another destroyed with its magazine exploding, the Spanish squadron turned to shore and either beached or scuttled. The Battle of Santiago de Cuba was a complete and resounding success. With no naval assets to support nor protect its field armies in the Western Hemisphere, Spain sued for an ignominious peace and surrender via the 1898 Treaty of Paris. Four Centuries of Spanish presence in the Pacific and in the Western Hemisphere was concluded in 3 months, 3 weeks and 1 day!



U.S.S. Oregon BB3 in profile, Santiago Bay, Cuba, after the Battle of Santigo de Cuba July 1898.

Oregon returned to peacetime as a national hero. Its long trek from Pacific to Atlantic emphasized the need for a more expeditious route between the oceans, for both commercial and military purposes. The failed French efforts of Ferdinand de Lessups were a topic of debate in Senator Mark Hannah's Congressional hearings proposing to purchase the Panama Canal franchise negotiated between the French and the Government of Columbia (of which Panama was a semi-autonomous Province). The name of Battleship Oregon surfaced time and again as the Senate continued debate; -- its name was not lost to either public consciousness or awareness in those legislative debates. Of course, the Canal debate ended in favor of the U.S. purchase and ultimately the completion of the Panama Canal by U.S. contractors.

Oregon, BB3 continued in service and was celebrated at the New York Naval Review in 1900. So, doesn't it seem that the name of the heroic (and heavyweight) Battleship Oregon was "shorthanded" for the contemporaneous new and ponderous NYO&W Class P 2-8-0 Double Cab of then and previously unmatched capability? I, for one, think so. . . absent a more compelling argument to the contrary. However, (my reservation) it's perhaps just as likely that yes, indeed the moniker "Orrie" was applied (indirectly) to the oversized barmaid, the name of Oregon BB3 having been so much in the news of the time. Two choices, a direct or indirect application of nickname; - take your pick!

Mal Houck
NMRA MMR #696