Chessie Begins Her Fifth Life
Editor's Note

With this issue we introduce you to Chessie once more. She is the "once and future" cat.

We plan to emphasize her contributions to C&O history in the next year by promoting her through our website and the new children's book Chessie Takes a Train Trip (KBK-19-938), as well as by a complete redesign and expansion of the famous Chessie the Railroad Kitten book. It went through 29 printings 1987-2010 as one of the most popular railroad books of all time.

The whole story of Chessie is unique in railroad advertising and in the field of advertising in general. Only perhaps "Nipper," the RCA dalmation, equals her stature as an advertising symbol. In the railroad world there are none. Certainly not the GN's mountain goat or CP's beaver.

The genius of L. C. Probert, C&O's PR chief who "found" Chessie, created an unlikely and surprising chain of events that led even to the naming of a railroad for a kitten. The whole story is fascinating especially to people who never knew Chessie in her other lives as a sales cat for passengers, then for freight, then as a symbol for C&O/B&O/WM. We hope now to introduce her to a whole new generation-in the fifth of her nine lives (see pages 18 & 30).

Otherwise, I want to ask everyone to look at joining my "Coffee Club" giving program. You've seen the flyers throughout the year. We NEED you more than ever to launch ourselves into a second 50 years of service. Pledge today (540-862-2210)!

This magazine is a little late, so you will not receive it until after Christmas. We hope you had a great holiday and that 2020 will be a good year for you. We appreciate your support so very much and look forward to serving you in 2020!

Respectfully,
Tom Dixon
Looking at the photo above one might think that the date was perhaps 1920, but it is actually 1947. The ex-Hocking Valley 4-6-0 was still stepping high, just as it did when it was new in 1912. This ten-wheeler served Hocking Valley for 18 years and C&O for another two decades before retirement and scrapped in 1947. Class T-2 on the HV, C&O gave it F-13 class when the merger occurred in 1930.

Nos. 89-91 were HV’s newest passenger power. It arrived in 1912 from ALCO’s Richmond Works. By 1947, the engine was in its very last year, in the rural Ohio backwater, handling a two-car local between Columbus and Pomeroy. The nicely-composed picture was taken near Hobson, Ohio.

The train was probably largely supported by mail and express revenues. The first car is likely one of C&O’s 81-91-series built by St. Louis Car Co. in 1934. These durable Harriman-roof 30-foot apartment RPO cars were used on mainline trains that didn’t have enough mail business to rate a full RPO. They also suited branch line postal operations well. Although the Railway Mail Service called this type car an “apartment RPO,” because the RPO function was related to only a portion of the car, C&O called them “Mail & Express,” or “M&E,” cars. In a train such as this, the car handled the RPO, express, and any baggage that was checked. The heavyweight coach that followed accommodated what few passengers were left on this line.

Old No. 90 was scrapped by the end of 1947 not longer after this photo was shot. The train lasted until the end of December, 1949, when it was discontinued as part of a general effort by C&O to eliminate most of its branch line passenger service.

Steam locomotive aficionados, in appraising a engine’s looks, often speak of how it was proportioned. This was a good-looking locomotive by any measure. It came at a time when the crude early designs were fading away but the modern functional designs had not yet gained dominance.

Photographer Ben F. Cutler worked for Rail Photo Service, just as did our own Gene Huddleston, taking photos which RPS later sold widely through the mail using mimeographed lists.

(C&OHS Collection, COHS 1016)
This is part of a series of articles we are doing about C&O cabooses. We discussed PM's steel cabooses in the last issue of this magazine. This article is about the C&O's first 50 steel cars, built in 1937. Much of this material, and a lot more, can be found in Dwight Jones's book Steel Cabooses of the Chesapeake & Ohio. The second, expanded, and enlarged edition of this book is still available from C&OHS (540-862-2210 or chessieshop.com, catalog No. BK-10-528).

C&O's cabooses in the wooden car era ranged from the tiny four-wheel “bobber” cars to large offset-cupola designs. By the 1920s the center-cupola style became standard and the company purchased numerous cars built in this way. The last group of wooden cabooses (125 cars, road numbers 90900-91024) was built in 1929 by C&O's subsidiary Hocking Valley Railway shops at Logan, Ohio. These cars were hardly changed from their earlier predecessors except more sturdy construction. Although we often say they were “wooden,” a more accurate description is “wood-sheathed.” They had steel frames and underframes, making them not only durable but sturdy in train service. Cars built this way are generally known as “composite.” The new cars C&O acquired in 1929 were certainly good enough to handle its traffic in the lean years of the Depression, but by 1936 the economy was showing some signs of recovery, and C&O's business was still very good because of coal. It was the lifeblood of industry and home heating, and even in the bad years of the early 1930s C&O retained a high level of traffic and weathered the economic storm well.

We have no records telling us the background or reason that C&O bought its first steel cars in 1937, but we can trace their design to the Advisory Mechanical Committee (AMC). Students of C&O steam locomotives often encounter references to the AMC, but we hear little about its freight car and caboose designs.

The AMC was created in 1929. It was made of mechanical engineers brought to the Cleveland headquarters from the railroads that constituted the Van Sweringen empire: C&O, NKP, Erie, and Pere Marquette. Its mission was first to standardize as much as possible the equipment of the four lines to eliminate duplicative effort. It was also chartered with creating designs for locomotives and cars that could be used to build new equipment for each of the roads. The first engine designed was C&O’s fabulous T-1 2-10-4. The committee went on to design the J-3, J-3a, K-4, L-2, L-2a, C-16, and the unequalled H-8. All the while they were also designing freight cars and cabooses, but this has hardly been remarked about in the literature.
It can be inferred that these 50 new steel cars were placed in the premier service. Certainly, cars such as these would have been well-suited to the Alleghany Subdivision coal trains where an H-7 pusher was used. However, it appears that for safety reasons cabooses on the Alleghany pusher district were generally carried behind the rear engine during both the H-7 and H-8 eras.

The cars were painted red in the same standard style as the wooden cabooses. A 12-inch Roman font CHESAPEAKE & OHIO, and numerals. appeared in white on the basic red.

No. 90000 was destroyed in a wreck at Limeville, Ky., in 1947; No. 90011 was wrecked at Owens, Ohio, in 1951; No. 90022 was scrapped at Raceland car shops in 1962. The remaining 47 cars were rebuilt at Grand Rapids’ shops in 1969-70. They were the 3500-3600-series cars with their distinctive blue paint and redesigned cupolas and windows. These cars remained in service to the end. (See an article about these rebuilt cars in the September/October, 2017 issue of this magazine.)

The 1956 standard yellow paint scheme was applied to this series before the cars were rebuilt at Grand Rapids in 1969-70. They emerged from the rebuild in blue with a yellow C&O For Progress herald and number. After 1972 many were repainted into Chessie System livery.
Magor even took photos even of the trucks as the 90000-90049 series cars were being built. Most builders shot these “progress” photos as equipment was being built. Sometimes builder photo sets would also have underframes, and incomplete body frames. (C&OHS Collection, COHS 51741)}
No. 90039 trails a westbound coal train at Limeville, Ky., in 1947. (C&O Ry. Photo, C&OHS Collection, CSPR 1002)

This broadside of No. 90017 was taken at Logan, Ohio, in the early 1960s. It is wearing the post-1956 yellow paint with blue lettering. The road name was also dropped when this redesign was applied. (C&OHS Collection, COHS 37258)
Rare overhead view of No. 90033 at Raceland, Ky., in 1958. It already has the 1956-standard yellow scheme. The car shops are in the background. Modelers like overhead photos, but few were taken unless the photographer happened to be on a bridge or overpass. Otherwise the tops of equipment (the part of models most visible to people) are sort of enigmas. (C&O Ry. C&OHS Collection, CSPR CL790)

(Below) C&O undertook a redesign of its equipment starting in 1955-56. Part of the "new" look included yellow body paint for the cabooses and this altered herald paint scheme. It was applied to one side of No. 90001 and was displayed at the 1956 stockholder’s meeting. The yellow was retained but the standard C&O For Progress herald was used instead of this modified one. No. 90001 is seen here at Logan, Ohio in 1960. The oddly-painted side remained until the car was rebuilt in 1969. (C&OHS Collection, COHS 4194)
No. 3610 (ex-90045) at Williamsburg, Va., on April 29, 1972, wearing its new Grand Rapids rebuild scheme. (T. W. Dixon, Jr. photo, C&OHS Collection, COHS 28130)

No. 3564 (ex-90013) became one of the Chessie System Safety Slogan. Cabooses, here at Grand Rapids in April, 1979. (Gary Stuebben photo, C&OHS Collection, COHS 662)

A numbering variation: Chessie System for a while added a “C” prefix to its existing caboose numbers. Here is C-3506 (ex-90030) at Hinton, W. Va., on Sept. 9, 1979. (T. W. Dixon, Jr. photo, C&OHS Collection, COHS 28916)

At the very end of the caboose era, this car wears Chessie System No. 903662 (yet another numbering variation) at Peru, Ind., in July, 1984. The prefix “90” replaced the “C-...” (Adrian Hahn photo, C&OHS Collection, COHS 34094)
My First Day on the Railroad
By Phillip A. Shuster

This article is by the late Phil Shuster. He was co-author of C&O Power in 1965 and one of the founders of the C&OHS in 1969, along with Gene Huddleston and me. He left us this article about his first day on the C&O in 1956.
-Tom Dixon

One of the most memorable days in my railroad associations was Monday, June 18, 1956 - my first day of employment with the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway.

Ten days earlier, I had received my Bachelor of Civil Engineering degree from the Ohio State University, was commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant in the U.S.A.F., had been hired by the C&O Rwy., and after five long, arduous years (engineering was a five-year program at O.S.U.), was anxious to get started on what I hoped would be a challenging and rewarding career.

Anticipating that I would not be entitled to vacation time during that first summer, I decided to take a few days off prior to commencing work. I made a quick trip down to Russell, Kentucky, and luckily was able to photograph the last of steam operations there. The following day I rode the doodlebug, 9051, from Huntington to Logan and return, catching steam in all its glory at Peach Creek. Little did I realize that only about three months later all of that would be history. I used all of the film my budget could afford, but looking back in perfect hindsight, I should have hocked the wife and dog and used twice as much film.

On Thursday of that week, I went down to the C&O’s Hocking Division offices at 50 E. Broad Street in downtown Columbus, as instructed, on an orientation, get-acquainted visit. I was duly impressed with the entrance and lobby of the Spahr Building (since demolished) where the offices were located (as well as being the former Hocking Valley Railway headquarters) with its polished brass doors and frames, including...
the elevator doors and framing, polished wood paneling above marble wainscottings, and two beautiful chandeliers hanging from a high ceiling - truly a magnificent entrance to a former railroad's domain. After arriving on the eighth floor I was shown to the Division Engineer's office where I met Mr. W.D. “Luke” Hewlett, who graciously took time out of his busy day to greet me, learn my background and history, and welcome me to his staff. After spending half-an-hour with me (and my unannounced visit), he called in his Assistant Division Engineer, Mr. W.D. “Bill” Dowdy, and told me I would be reporting to and taking instructions from Bill. After taking me around the office to meet the clerks and office workers, we retired to the backside of the building, to the office Bill and I would share. My space had already been prepared and was waiting. I was to share a large double-desk (facing each other) with a centered telephone that swung side to side to serve both sides of the desk. Bill and I talked for over an hour, Bill answering my many questions, and finding out about each other, and how the railroad was doing things in that era. He was quite surprised with my knowledge of the railroad, both in its geographic locations, equipment and personnel. Finally, Bill had to leave for an appointment, so we parted, agreeing that I would come in at 8:00 the following Monday to begin working.

Of course I had not hired out with the C&O stone cold. I suppose that one could say that I was, for lack of a better term, a pretty solid C&O railfan at that stage. I had been born and raised next to the C&O mainline, and watched, heard, smelled and felt the trains all my young life. Later, I had read everything about the C&O I could get my hands on, and the more I learned, the more attracted to it I became. One time, in my high school years, we had a scrap paper drive to raise money for a school project, and we used our shed at home to temporarily store the paper. One of my classmate’s grandfather was the C&O station agent at Linworth, Ohio. When we called his home, he threw a box-full of old C&O Tracks magazines, the C&O’s monthly employees magazine, into the paper drive. It was a gold mine of treasure to me, and needless to say, they were rescued from the paper drive and read over and over. I learned I could subscribe to the magazine for $1.00 per year, did so, and began to keep up with current events and personnel changes as they were presented. Thus my inside knowledge was much higher than most, even before employment.

In the Spring of 1955, I found a notice on a bulletin board that a C&O Railway job recruiter would be on the O.S.U. campus to interview for employment. I scheduled an interview with the thought of getting a summer job between my 4th and 5th years at college, and perhaps get an advantage for full-time employment upon graduation a year later. The recruiter was overwhelmed with my C&O knowledge and promptly offered the summer job I wanted, but at a rate I could not afford to accept. He later apologized for the low rate and offered a more competitive figure, but by that time I had already committed to another position. However, the door had been left open, and the following spring (1956) he contacted me by letter and wanted me to come by for an interview when he again came to O. S. U. That spring, I did, with my employment resulting.

On Sunday evening I received a phone call from Bill Dowdy, saying that he would pick me up at home at 6:30 a.m. on the following morning in order to take a trip out to visit the System Rail Force that was working on the Hocking near Rising Sun, Ohio. (It had developed that Bill and I lived within four blocks of each other, and were able to ride together on numerous occasions.) The Monday dawn arrived, Bill picked me up, and we headed north to Rising Sun. At Carey, Ohio, Bill decided we should call into the office for a check-in; see what was happening, tell them our location and plans for the day, etc. At the Carey depot I got out of the car and stepped onto C&O property for the first time in my life as a C&O employee; part of what I considered a member of the great family.

We went on to Rising Sun where the railgang was spread out and working northward (westbound) on No. 1 track, replacing worn, ten-year-old 131# rail, with new 132# stick rail (this was before the introduction of continuous welded rail). To see this gang perform its tasks is a show worthy paying admission to. We met and talked with the system gang foreman, “Blacky” Carrell, who Bill was well acquainted with, and who I would come to know and rely upon heavily in the coming fifteen or so years. Bill also introduced me to Charlie Butcher, the Track Supervisor for that area of the Hocking.

After discussing several problems with Bill, he and Charlie left me to check on something and Blacky assigned one of his assistant foremen to show me how all the rail laying machinery worked, and various problems associated with each. I got to know many of the trackmen by their first names and became friendly with several of them; a friendship that would continue for many years and followed me onto the Toledo Terminal Railroad, when we hired the C&O gang to lay rail for us there.

That first day evaporated much too quickly, and soon Bill hailed me and suggested that we should be heading for home. We departed, and my work day ended when he dropped me off at my house about 5:30. My thoughts were (although kept strictly to myself), “That was fun; they’re actually going to pay me to do this?” It came to me in later years how these “fun” days laid a groundwork of knowledge and experience that allowed me to grow and be able to accept responsibility for higher positions, and work my way up the ladder of railroad caretakers. Many days have come and gone since that memorable fore on the railroad, but none hangs on in memory like that first day.
This is a follow-up on Al Kresse’s article in the *C&O Historical Society Magazine*, May/June, 2019 issue, regarding coal hopper car No. 300003 of 1954. The C&O made five of these experimental 42-foot, three-bay cars.

I decided to build this car in styrene at 1:48 or ¼” scale. Previously, I had scratch-built in excess of 1,000 units in past years. This was just another with three-bays instead of two or four.

I started with a drawing made on engineering paper with ¼” squares. This became my template to cut the styrene panels to. In conclusion, the 69000-series of hopper cars are quite similar to this car.

Photo No. 1 shows construction from the bottom side doing the slope sheet angles are crucial in hopper construction. Walls were constructed using 0.030” styrene with the battens made by a pounce wheel on 0.020” styrene strips (from P and D Hobbies, Roseville, Michigan). These are overlaid by a 0.040 x 0.040” bar on top. The ¼” x ¼” main frame (center sill) is totally secured except for the O-Scale coupler pockets.
Photo No. 2 shows the bottom of the three bays and added rivets at various spots. Slope sheets and doors are now complete.

Photo No. 3 shows the finished car with brake systems and ladders. Paint is primer black and lettering is from “Champion” decals.

Photo No. 4 shows an end view of the handbrake system and lettering.
What motivates me to research and write an article? In this case it was reading a set of instructions for the Ludington, Mich., yard in the C&O Northern Region Timetable No. 1, dated Sunday, April 27, 1969. It has bold statements on the cover reminding employees to destroy previous timetables and to “READ THE INSTRUCTIONS.”

It stated for instruction T-93-13-Ludington Yard: “in the Tracks column – Loading Steamers; and in the Instructions column – (c) Cushion underframe extension drawbar cars are not to be loaded in the wing tracks of all car ferries dispatched to Manitowoc-C&NW. They must be in the center tracks only. 90-ft. Hi-Cube cars are restricted to Steamer No. 43 (BADGER), center tracks only.”

This reminded me that C&O had Cushion Underframe box cars specifically designed to carry finished newsprint paper rolls from mills located on the Fox River in Wisconsin to eastern markets. These were shipped east either by rail through Chicago, Ill., and Gary, Ind., around Lake Michigan, or across Lake Michigan via the PM/C&O car ferries. A 1924 Railway Age article, titled “Car Ferries Aid Transportation,” reported that using the car ferries, versus passing through the Chicago terminals, saved 14 to 19 hours and reduced shifting cargo damage caused by switching.

I quickly contacted Pere Marquette Michigan-Wisconsin operations experts Carl Shaver, Arthur Chaves, and Stuart Thomson and asked them “what was the problem?” I received the following feedback:

Carl – Think about it . . . the problems existed only at one end of one route, and this is when C&O still served lots of destinations in Wisconsin, including another slip at Manitowoc. The problem was probably in connection with the apron of the CNW slip that may have made a curve too sharp for some of these cars.

Art – With bigger rolling stock in later years of ferry operations, long, heavy, or otherwise oversize cars were always carried in the relatively straight center tracks. The wing tracks were reserved for shorter cars and lighter loads. Also, the Manitowoc apron at CNW was shorter, older, and weaker than most Lake Michigan ferry aprons. Anything long or wide would have a difficult time making the switch to the wing tracks from the apron. Just making it aboard the boat would make it difficult to negotiate the curve onto the ship’s stern.

Stuart – Well, a few thoughts. Cushion underframe cars had devices that extended couplers out 20 to 30 inches on each end. So curvature could have been an issue as well as vertical clearances. C&O got a few cars with Hydra Frame-60 units as I recall. Check those RBL’s by Pullman in about 62/63. The other problem was more economics. The car ferries were designed for 40-foot cars. The new cushion cars in 1962 were almost 50% longer, so less revenue per boat load. It got worse as 89-foot auto racks and 86-foot box cars showed up. The DT&I, when they got the AA, thought they could get automotive business
moving west out of Detroit to increase revenue but it backfired. Longer and wider boats were needed but too much money and had high labor costs. But probably the problems you mention were due to the physically different car designs. The AA operated DT&I 50-foot Hydra Frame-60 box cars, too.

Author's note: 65-foot and 50-foot with vertically-stacked, automobile frames loaded in gondola cars were also stowed on the center tracks.

These timetable instructions were issued during the 1963-1973 era of the joint C&O/B&O Mechanical Department’s modernizing and reconfiguring of the joint line’s box car fleet. The department’s committees experimented with 10-, 20-, 24-, and 30-inch stroke cushioning devices mounted between sliding center sills, and to their 50-foot cars’ load-carrying central frames. Most of these cars had internal load-shifting restraining devices. These cars were configured for auto industry and specific merchandise industry’s requirements. Early on, General Motors’ individual car divisions and the Ford Motor Company worked with the larger railroads to develop early auto parts car specifications that worked with their assembly plant loading docks (spaced for 50-foot-long cars) and standard part baskets or pallet sizes. Locations of parts plants and assembly plants determined the number of cars allocated for each railroad to be in that plant’s yard used along the various “just in time” shipping routes.

The railroad also equipped insulated box cars with cushioning systems for transport of temperature-sensitive products such packaged chemicals, packaged foods, and beer. We’ve previously reported on the C&O’s “Bourbon Cushioned Underframe Box Cars.” Because they were configured to specific customer needs, they were typically pooled. This meant, under threat of penalty tariffs, the intermediate railroads were forbidden to commandeer them for their own short term shipping needs, incentivizing each railroad to return them directly the home pool yard or junction.

The C&O either built or converted its own cushioned box cars at Raceland, purchased B&O DuBois Car Shop or traditional builders-built cars, or leased cars from Fruit Growers Express. The DuBois-built cars were assembled and finished from Thrall Car Manufacturing Company underbodies and supplier kit upper sub-assemblies and components.

These box cars started out as reconfigured 50-foot, standard clearance plated, or route unrestricted, cars. Car sizes then grew to 62-foot cars designed to multiple clearance plate restrictions, and eventually increased to 86-foot-long, Hi-Cube (low bulk density cargo) cars. Starting in 1975, during the Chessie System era, C&O slowly abandoned car ferry service. It exited rail car service at Jones Island, Milwaukee, Wis., in October, 1980 (auto service was extended for the June-September, 1981 summer season), and Manitowoc operations exited in January, 1982. The PM’s Kewaunee operation was abandoned in 1983. The following is a sampling of typical C&O Cushioned Underframe box cars from this era. We’ll have more detailed discussions down the road.

References:


3. Greg Bruce’s post of an April 27, 1969, C&O Northern Region Employee Timetable on the “PM/C&O/CSX Ludington Subdivision” Facebook group.


Experimental stretched and converted in 1962 from 40-foot PS-1 into a 50-foot cushioned box car, No. 22618 is equipped with an extended draft gear, floating sill, National Gliding-Sill cushioning devise, and modified couplers. It is painted in the C&O Box Car brown and white Futura livery. It has a crossing platform to keep the brakemen off stroking parts. (C&OHS Collection, COHS 51044)
Early 1962 American Car & Foundry-built C&O 70-ton, 50-foot No. 22551 box car with “Cushion Underframe” script stenciling and C&O for Progress logo painted in Enchantment Blue and Federal Yellow livery. C&O cars of this era were often co-built with B&O cars. B&O cars were painted with their unique logos and Roman lettering, and in Royal Blue. (C&OHS collection, COHS 51865)

Overhead view of “Plate C” C&O 62-foot cushion underframe box car No. 490126. The roof is unpainted, leaving the galvanized steel exposed.
(C&OHS Collection, COHS 37905)

(Below) Broadside view of C&O 50-foot insulated Cushion Underframe box car No. 23066 painted in the reverse Federal Yellow and Enchantment Blue livery. Ends are painted blue. Notice the long draft gear and coupler.
(C&OHS Collection, COHS 21635)
In train view of Fruit Growers Express Insulated Cushioned 50-foot box car leased and marked C&O No. 896353 with yellow sides/doors and brown ends. January, 1970. (Photo by T. W. Dixon, Jr., C&OHS Collection, COHS 10612)

May, 1971, close-up view of Pullman-Standard-built C&O 62-foot Hi-Cube No. 488109 with expanding Air-Pak divider used to secure appliance boxes. This was captured at the Gibson Appliance plant, in Greenville, Mich. Notice the “excess height car” white end-caps. (C&O Ry. photo, C&OHS Collection, CSPR 12260)

November, 1964, broadside view of C&O 86-foot Hi-Cube automobile parts box car No. 301001 at GM Fisher Body stamping plant in Grand Blanc, Mich. The C&O for Progress logo is stenciled on a yellow target. (C&O Ry. photo, C&OHS Collection, CSPR 11456-63)
The classic Chessie. C&O ran ads in the mid 1930s saying “Chessie – As We found Her.” This is the original and never-changing kitten. (C&OHS Collection, Logo 47)

The C&OHS always has been vitally interested in the history and use of C&O’s Chessie advertising emblem. We plan to do some new things with her, to start her perhaps on another one of her nine lives.

Almost everyone knows the story of how Chessie was used by C&O starting in 1933 to advertise the comfort of its trains with the phrase “Sleep like a kitten and wake up fresh as a daisy on C&O’s fleet of air-conditioned trains.” The first ad featuring her was in the September, 1933 issue of Fortune magazine, and C&O’s 1934 calendar featured her. From then on, she appeared in thousands of ads and on every C&O timetable.

When COHS took over the Chessie calendar in 1992, CSX CEO Hays Watkins said that “Chessie is just on the third of her nine lives.” He was right. First, she was the railway’s attractive way to convey the comfort of air-conditioned travel on C&O’s great passenger trains.

With passenger trains fading in the 1950s-60s, Chessie began her second life as she took over C&O’s, and then C&O/B&O’s, freight service by advertising “pur-r-r-fect transportation.” In her third life she became the corporate image of the new Chessie System Railroads in 1972. Her fourth life has been as a nostalgic historical figure we use to tell the story of the C&O and of railroading. She is also an important part of advertising history in general. The Wall Street Journal once called her “the kitten of destiny” because of her long use in massively successful ads.

There was an interest in creating a new name for the joined systems when C&O and B&O united in 1963. Tax considerations in Maryland that required the word “Baltimore” in the corporate name in order to get certain breaks initially limiting what could be done. A study ordered at the time (1964) suggested “Chessie System,” but it was never implemented.

However, C&O/B&O public relations officials tried to give B&O a kitten mascot. They found some additional Guido Gruenwald etchings (he was, of course, the creator of the Chessie etching back in 1933) and adopted one he had done of a wide-awake young cat that they dubbed “Bessie.” The new kitten was featured in the company magazine, playing cards were issued, and frameable prints prepared (in a set with Chessie Carries On!

Begins Her Fifth Life!

By Thomas W. Dixon, Jr.
and Peake), but Bessie just didn’t catch on. There simply could be no replacement for Chessie in the hearts and minds of the people who had known her for 30 years.

However, the merger of C&O and Norfolk & Western (N&W) was actively underway in 1969. The Interstate Commerce Commission was holding hearings, and C&O and N&W both appointed executive teams to deal with the details of the merger. Their presidents held news conferences about it. Locomotive orders were being coordinated so that road numbers would not conflict, and everyone more or less thought it was going to happen in the fairly near future. That was the year that the C&O Historical Society’s Newsletter began reporting on the merger and some of those events.

One thing that most people didn’t understand was that the N&W side saw this as more of a “takeover” than a merger and that they intended to subsume C&O, B&O, and WM just as they had Nickel Plate and Wabash five years before. For many insiders it did indeed seem that N&W was the dominant partner in the talks.

This, of course, eventually led people to start talking about what would become of Chessie once C&O became part of N&W. Given the breadth and depth of Chessie’s 36-year career up to that time, this was a natural question among the public, and as it turned out, even among shippers.

Norman W. Allison, supervisor-traff for Fisher Body Division of General Motors, wrote to C&O/B&O Cleveland headquarters and said: “We have come to associate Chessie and the C&O as a symbol of everyday tender consideration for the shipping public, and know that personal care can be expected when we call upon C&O. We would like to add our feeling to that of many shippers and other citizens that the C&O/B&O corporate trademark of Chessie be carried on to the merged company.”

The Cleveland Plain Dealer newspaper then ran a story about the merger and said “She [Chessie] probably is the best-known corporate trademark since that little dog stopped poking his head into a Victrola to hear his master’s voice.” They were referring to the RCA trademark.

The Nov. 7, 1969 issue of Life magazine depicted Chessie in the company of “Nipper,” the RCA dog, and Mobil Oil’s flying horse Pegasus in an article about corporate symbols. The article decried the rage of “creating corporate trademarks out of nothing more appealing than a clutch of initial letters.”

And, of all things, N&W President Herman Pelver called Chessie “one of the greatest corporate advertising symbols in the country.” After the newspaper article appeared, letters poured into the C&O/B&O offices in Cleveland and N&W in Roanoke. They were all in Chessie’s favor.

The Roanoke Times got into the act when it reprinted the Plain Dealer’s editorial and C&O/B&O’s Public Relations Chief Howard Skidmore said that at the time of the C&O/B&O affiliation, there had been discussion of continuing Chessie (as mentioned earlier in this article).

Of course, the wreck of the Penn Central and deteriorating eastern railroad situation doomed the merger. But there was also a definite rivalry between C&O and N&W more than the executives ever acknowledged (in fact, denied) during interviews when the PC problems came up in questions.

This author once discussed the merger talks with the late Pete Carpenter (who was twice CSX CEO). Carpenter was a junior executive at the time of the merger talks, having graduated from the C&O/B&O “Management Trainee” program. He said that during one session the two merger teams were meeting in a Roanoke hotel, but they really weren’t “meeting.” The C&O/B&O team was in one suite writing up proposals that Carpenter would then deliver to the N&W team in another suite. He would then bring back the responses. This certainly looks a little like the problems that Penn Central had.

Two years later, the N&W merger now dead, recently-elected CEO Hays T. Watkins ordered a new image for C&O/B&O. His agent for this was Howard Skidmore, the company’s far-traveled and masterful public relations man. Skidmore asked Franklyn Carr, his director of design, to create a new image using the name “Chessie System.” Carr developed a very bold font with a capital “C” that utilized the outline of little Chessie in its central void. For the first time the kitten began to appear on cars and locomotives, now painted in a flashy yellow, blue, and vermilion.
livery. It was a stroke of genius by the people involved, Watkins in deciding to do it, and Carr in making it happen with his artist’s eye.

Chessie System was a breath of fresh air in the deteriorating eastern railroad situation. The bright new engines and cars made employees proud of their company and caused customers and the public to take notice that railroads were still there and still doing important work transporting the goods required by the nation. The image of Chessie System, finally discontinued by CSX in 1985, still commands a great following in the railfan and modeling community, especially the farther back in time it goes.

C&OHS has published the official Chessie Calendar since the 1992 edition, mainly using great old calendar art and advertising illustrations from the 1930s-1960s.

Certainly, hundreds, and probably thousands, of Chessie-themed products have been issued over the years. At first the company itself produced souvenir items for its patrons and others, such as playing cards, art-prints for framing, pins/buttons, brochures, glassware, clothes, pajamas, etc. Later, starting in the 1970s, outside companies were licensed to create things for the growing railfan market. Everyone loved Chessie, so she was a hot commodity. One now finds it is hard to name a memorabilia (railroadiana) or souvenir item that hasn’t born Chessie’s image. In fact, the Nov. 17, 1969 issue of Chessie News, when the N&W merger was being discussed, C&O’s Public Relations Department was still offering no fewer than 26 different Chessie items for sale to its employees and the public, ranging from stuffed toys to pocket knives, and bathmats to socks!

By arrangement with CSX, C&OHS has contributed to this Chessiemania over the years, issuing our own plethora of themed items in addition to the calendar. We even carried it further by reproducing dining car china and glassware.

However, the image of Chessie, or should we say the memory of her, has dimmed over the years as people who knew her in her great days of advertising train travel have aged or passed beyond the vale.

At the same time, C&OHS realizes that Chessie is timeless. Even people who have no memory or idea of her as a train travel promoter, still loved to see the cute little cat depicted in so many unusual period locations and poses.

Therefore, I propose that Chessie is poised to start her fifth life: Helping to teach new generations about how America was in the days of the passenger train when a fictional kitten
introducing Chessie, not just to railfans and modelers because we have always known and loved her. We want to introduce her to new generations of people who can identify with the cuddly little animal that received acres of newsprint and millions of advertising dollars in the last 30 years of train travel. Indeed, it might be said that she was the kitten who became a railroad!

The Canadian Pacific has its Beaver mascot and the Great Northern the Mountain Goat, while Norfolk Southern introduced the rearing Stallion in recent decades, but none can compare with the appeal of Chessie.

We hope to create a Chessie-themed website this coming year as well as reissuing the book Chessie, the Railroad Kitten, by this author. It went through 29 printings between 1987 and 2010. And... never daunted, we plan other new memorabilia items. Look at our new, recently-issued catalog for new items in 2020, or go to www.chessieshop.com.

If you like Chessie, we’re your first and last stop. Buying these items will help us preserve her special place in railroad and advertising history and the C&O as her progenitor.

These are the times when we need you, Chessie!
The first of a long line of Chessie stuffed animals is pictured here in 1954. Many different issues were designed and manufactured by “Miss Clare” of New York for C&O and C&O/B&O, ending in about 1969. They were given to shippers as corporate gifts initially, but in later years sold to employees and the public. C&OHS has several of these in its artifact collection.

(C&O Ry photo, C&OHS Collection, CSPR 3239)

Chessie merchandise display from 1959. (C&O Ry. photo, C&OHS Collection, CSPR 10722)

(Below) Bridge set with cards, coasters, and pad featuring Chessie and Peake from the company merchandise collection in 1965. (C&O Ry. photo, C&OHS Collection, CSPR 11580-1)
(Above) Neckties were also popular, and one could probably collect a couple of dozen different styles, right through Chessie System designs. C&OHS even issued our own Chessie tie about 20 years ago! Not much call for them in our present era, though.
(C&O Ry. Photo, C&OHS Collection, CSPR 3232)

(Above) Another frequently issued Chessie item was a woman’s scarf. Many different styles can be found in collections today. This photo was taken by C&O’s PR Department about 1959.
(C&O Ry. Photo, C&OHS Collection, CSPR 3232)

A full set of Chessie pajamas were prepared before Christmas in 1955. A member of the C&O PR staff poses here.
(C&O Ry. Photo, C&OHS Collection, CSPR 10260)

(Right) This page is from the Nov. 17, 1969 issue of the company newspaper Chessie News. It contains an order form and descriptions of 26 Chessie-themed items C&O/B&O was selling for that Christmas. (C&OHS Collection)
This is one of several Gruenwald etchings that C&O PR officials found in the 1960s. They attempted to use one as "Bessie," B&O's mascot. Therefore it was to be "Chessie of the C&O and Bessie of the B&O." This did not work at all. PR officials did, however, use some of the other etchings for various memorabilia items. This is a print from 1968 showing "Chessie's Playmates."

In the mid-1960s era, C&O/B&O was still struggling for identity. Though Chessie was the dominant image, there just didn't seem to be a way to work her into the C&O/B&O scheme.

(C&OHS Collection, CSPR 5290)

(Above) Fenton Art Glass Co. of Williamstown, W. Va., made a series of heavy glass candy "boxes." C&O gave them as corporate gifts starting sometime in the 1960s, using a different color glass each year. In later years, they were also sold by the company and Fenton to the public. It was probably issued in a dozen different colors over the years, including one made especially for the C&O Historical Society. It must certainly be one of the best known Chessie memorabilia items.

(C&O Ry. photo, C&OHS Collection, CSPR 12138-12)

(Right) The 1967 calendar used the classic Chessie image as well as some of the "discovered" Gruenwald kitten etchings. This wide awake young kitten is peeking out of a Pullman berth even though such accommodations had disappeared in 1950.

(C&O Ry. photo, C&OHS Collection, CSPR 12368-1)
Pere Marquette had three wooden business cars. They were replaced by three steel versions, beginning with the No. 1 edition treated in this article.

The C&OHS photo collection recently accessioned a set of photos taken in October, 1943 showing Pere Marquette business car No. 1. Those photos are reproduced in this article. We are fortunate to have these small, 3x4-inch prints. They are quite sharp so must have been taken with a good camera. They came into our collection years ago from materials we received from the company in the 1990s.

The car was completed by Pullman’s car manufacturing division on May 4, 1927. Named St. Nicholas, it was a truly private car, built for Mr. William F. Kenny of New York City. Kenny was a prominent building contractor in New York and a multi-millionaire. In 1927, although the ownership and use of a private railroad car was certainly a status symbol, the era of the individually-owned car was almost over.

C&O usually had about a dozen business cars on its roster, with a high of 15 in the early 1950s. Called office cars on many lines, C&O called them business cars, but they were still sometimes referred to as “official.” These cars were assigned to specific officials for their use in conducting business and travel from point to point on the C&O system. Business cars were occasionally interchanged with other railroads as well, and in fact railroads sometimes issued annual pass cards to officers of other lines that read with the official’s name plus the wording “and car.” That entitled the officer to bring his car along on the foreign line. Probably the area where C&O business cars traveled offline the most was on the Nickel Plate between Cleveland and Marion, Ohio, as officials moved to and from the Cleveland headquarters after the Van Sweringen takeover.

Some of the remaining business cars were sold to other lines or private persons when C&O gave up its last passenger train operations to Amtrak in 1971. Others were retained for special purposes including track inspection. CSX has a fleet to this day.

When C&O President Walter Tuohy acquired the first corporate airplanes, he called them “flying office cars.” See the April, 2001 issue of this magazine for the whole story of the railway’s aircraft fleet. (Digital downloads of this magazine are available for $8.95 by calling 540-862-2210) C&O eventually had a fleet of planes that was well-used, but it still maintained the business car fleet.
This was the very end of the private car era that began when railroads carried the privately-owned cars of the monied classes in the late 19th century. By the late 1920s, though, other accessories were becoming available on airplanes and luxury autos. Maintenance/use of private cars was a very expensive proposition similar to owning a yacht. Therefore, the number of private cars being hauled around on scheduled railway trains was gradually diminishing.

We don’t know why Kenny decided to sell the car, but Pere Marquette purchased it in 1939 and numbered it as PM 1.

The car itself was of steel construction, 198,100 lbs. in weight, with six-wheel trucks. It had a partial clerestory roof largely obscured by outside air-conditioning ducts. The rear platform was of standard design with large windows facing from the lounge/observation area. It had three large bedrooms, each with an oversized brass bed. These luxury beds were retained after the car was acquired by PM and later in C&O service. See the accompanying C&O mechanical diagrams for layout of the car in railroad service.

The car came to C&O with the Pere Marquette merger in June, 1947. The mechanical diagram states “PM business Car 1 restenciled C&O 15, 7-28-47.” At some point after 1950 it received C&O’s new standard three-color paint scheme. The addition of stainless-steel fluting along the sides under the window band to match C&O’s new lightweight cars occurred between 1963-1967.

No. 15 lasted beyond the end of passenger service into the Chessie System and CSX eras. It remained in service until 1988, was retired and displayed for a few years at White Sulphur Springs station, and finally was sold to private interests in 1999. Anyone having photos of the car in C&O, PM, or Chessie System service is asked to contact us at tdixon@cohs.org. We can always use additional images.

The car from the front or vestibule end. (C&OHS Collection, COHS 50995)

(Below) Rear of PM No. 1 No. 1 featuring its open platform. (C&OHS Collection, COHS 50996)

(Above) No. 1’s observation compartment had a desk at left facing to the rear as well as a radio on the right side of the door. Note the wood paneling. (C&OHS Collection, COHS 50998)
The dining table was small, with four chairs and a nice wooden buffet. (C&OHS Collection, COHS 50999)

(Right) In its last dress, No. 15 wears the CSX paint scheme on the rear of the eastbound Cardinal, just west of St. Albans, W. Va., Feb. 28, 1988. (Jay Potter photo, C&OHS Collection, COHS 51864)

No. 15 on the coach track at Hinton, W. Va. station on May 23, 1969. By this time the letterboard was plain in keeping with the C&O/B&O standard for passenger train cars. Fluting had been added by this time.
(T. W. Dixon, Jr. photo, C&OHS Collection, COHS 37768)

(Lef) Rear platform of No. 15 at Hinton, May 23, 1969. (T. W. Dixon, Jr. photo, C&OHS Collection, COHS 37769)
Overhead view of No. 15 in its Chessie System paint scheme at Toledo on Sept. 14, 1980. (Dwight Jones photo, C&OHS Collection, COHS 34950)

Mechanical diagrams for No. 15 revised to 1963 and 1970. The fluting was added between these two dates. (C&OHS Collection)
The Texas & Pacific did apply a similar device to a 2-10-2 in 1926 with a Coppus fan driven by a steam turbine. Along with special grates, a closed ashpan and other adjustments, T&P was able to measure an increase of 400 horsepower and burning lignite without sparks. But the application was not repeated.

According to Morrison's book, a Professor Goss proposed a turbo-exhauster. "Exhaust steam drove a turbine mounted inside the smokebox with its axis horizontal; a fan was mounted on the turbine drive shaft. The device was tested on a locomotive, but it is not clear to whom the locomotive belonged. Immediate problems were abrasion of the fan blades by cinders and reduction of the blade efficiency due to accumulation of oil." Well, it seems that these photos are positive proof that C&O was the railway that did the experiment.

Thus, we find another example of C&O's consistent experimentation and work toward improving engine performance that lasted to the end of steam.

(C&OHS Collection, COHS 45439)
Chessie System is Created
By Thomas W. Dixon, Jr.

We are all familiar with the bold image of the Chessie System era between 1972 and 1985. As mentioned in the article on Chessie in this magazine (page 18), CEO Hays Watkins wanted a new image for C&O/B&O and commissioned his Public Relations Department head, Howard Skidmore, to develop it.

Thinking back to a study done when the C&O/B&O affiliation first occurred, Skidmore immediately suggested "Chessie System," and Franklyn J. Carr, Skidmore's designer, went to work creating a new, bold, image. His aim was to fashion something that set the new company apart and gave it both a connection with its heritage and a "new look." After all, it was the early 1970s and exaggerated color schemes were the rage from clothing to automobiles.

The new, bright yellow locomotives, trimmed in blue and vermilion emblazoned with a striking CHESSIE SYSTEM font, made employees proud and shippers and the public take notice. Railroads at that time were getting bad press, with the Penn Central debacle and the general malaise of the era. The new Chessie system paint scheme seemed to say that it was still hard at work doing transportation for the nation.

As a salute to the past and to tie in with the name, Carr designed the capital "C" of the road name using an outline of Chessie in the central void. This would not have worked if he had not been sure that most of the people in the region had memories of the sleeping kitten. Otherwise, it would have simply looked like a very oddly shaped "C."

We are reproducing herewith a page from the Sept. 1, 1972 issue of the C&O/B&O employee newspaper, Chessie News. In it, Hays Watkins holds one of Franklyn Carr's renderings of a caboose in the new Chessie System livery as he explains about the revamped corporate image. (See page 34).

By the early 1980s most of the C&O and B&O locomotives had been repainted and, of course, all the new ones came with Chessie System paint from the builders. Likewise all the new freight cars had the big "Ches-C" as the capital letter was known. It served as the herald when the full road name wasn't used.

Carr's Chessie System styling for cars and locomotives lasted until 1985 when it was finally supplanted by the first of the several CSX paint schemes that have been used since that time. During the 1972-1985 period of its use the scheme always included large lettering indicating to which of the three railroads the equipment belonged: C&O, B&O, or WM. All the subordinate companies were merged into CSX Corporation in 1986 and that apparently was taken as the occasion to implement a redesign of the equipment. Although the CSX announcement of 1981 said that those letters would never appear on equipment, no other design was ever selected, and the initials did become the herald/logo.

(Above) Franklyn Carr's rendering of his Chessie System concept on a locomotive. He chose B&O 1977, which was another salute to history and heritage as 1977 would mark the 150th year of operation for B&O. It was a GP40-2 delivered in November, 1972. (C&O Ry. photo, C&OHS Collection, CSPR 12460)

(Right) Franklyn Carr and his assistant Mary McCarthy are at work on the Chessie System designs in the Cleveland Public Relations Department office in mid-1972, looking toward a debut of the designs later that year. (C&O Ry. photo, C&OHS Collection, CSPR 12457-1)
The Chessie News staff photographer visited numerous locations to get employee reaction to the new "corporate image" and to take a few photos for the paper. This scene was taken at Fostoria, Ohio as employees pose with a Chessie System rendering. (C&O Ry. photo, C&OHS Collection, CSPR 12463-11)

(Above & Left) Unveiling of the Chessie System paint scheme at Clark Street yard in Cleveland, August, 1972. Hays Watkins looks on from the speakers' podium as a bevy of pretty girls unveils the first Chessie System unit. (COHS Collection, CSPR 12469-D24 and 12469-D28)
The first new engines delivered with the Chessie System paint scheme were GP40-2s. Here a set of two, fresh from the builder, brings one of five special trains into the station at White Sulphur Springs, W. Va., as General Motors executives arrive for a conference. What better way to introduce the new design? (T. W. Dixon, Jr. photo, C&OHS Collection, COHS 31065)

A short train of newly-painted Chessie System equipment was sent on a tour around the system in late 1972. This is a photo of the display at Chicago in October of that year. Businessmen are checking out the cars while a couple of Chessie System technicians, replete with their lab coats, attend to the exhibit. (C&OHS Collection, CSPR 12483-a14)
A Message From the President

Now we are Chessie System. And we have a brighter, more modern look.

Representative numbers of you at various points on the system recently voted in favor of the change. I hope those who are learning of it for the first time through this special advance announcement in Chessie News will be similarly enthusiastic.

Our salesmen said the popular, short-form system name for C&O and B&O would help them in their job of selling our services. Chessie, they said, “symbolizes the care with which the patron’s freight is handled.”

Our safety people, after field observations of our present locomotive paint scheme, said a brighter design would increase visibility.

Our operations and maintenance people said they were more than ready to place a new system designation and revised color scheme on our rolling stock. The lawyers gave their blessing, as did the tax, finance, purchasing and personnel people, and all the others concerned in one way or another.

With that, our public relations people, who had produced the original study recommending the short system name, went to work to create the new color applications, the “Chess-C” mark and the distinctive letter forms of the new signature.

I am pleased to say that the whole job, from concept to execution, was homegrown. Our people worked together, produced something good and saved us a lot of money.

Some of you may wonder why, since we have recently been using The C&O/B&O

Railroads as our short name, we could not simply change it to The C&O/B&O System. The answer is that C&O/B&O combines two separate, distinct designations and, therefore, suggests duality. Chessie System describes a single unified system, though the separate corporate identities of the two companies continue.

Some may also wonder why a completely new popular name could not be devised, rather than drawing one from the heritage of one of our two railroads. The answer is that a completely new designation would require time and immense advertising expense to make it familiar to customers, shareholders and others.

As reported elsewhere in this issue, both B&O and C&O people have a fondness for Chessie. As one salesman said, “It is more than a cat, it is a personality. No other railroad has such an appealing and effective symbol. I strongly urge that it be adopted for the combined system.”

All of us will undoubtedly be sorry in some degree to say goodbye to two old favorites, the B&O Capitol Dome and the C&O For Progress symbols. Times change, however, and those of you who participated in the study of the proposed new system designation readily concurred that the Dome is more suggestive of government than of transportation and the Progress symbol is more graphically out of date.

Chessie System can not, of course, bloom overnight on every locomotive, billboard, sign, letterhead or printed form. That extensive task will be accomplished over a period of time. However, even when the system designation appears, as on the hundred diesel locomotives that will start arriving soon, the B&O or C&O initials will continue to be displayed prominently. And there is no change, naturally, in our full corporate names of The Chesapeake and Ohio Railway Company and The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Company.

But something important has changed with the adoption of this popular, short name for ourselves.

Firstly, it shows our readiness to welcome change, to adapt to the different in our technology, the way we do our job and the services we provide. We are ready to greet the unexpected and mold it to our goals.

Second, it reaffirms our dedication to safe, on-time rail transportation. While images, names and color schemes all are important, performance, as you and I both know, is the most important ingredient of all in a good reputation.

Years ago, before affiliation took place between our two railroads, a postcard was received at the B&O office in Baltimore. On it the message read, “Please send me a calendar with your famous cat, Beossie of the B&O, on it.” Linked as they were already in the public mind through their similarity of names, C&O and B&O seemed destined to get together.

Now Chessie System says to the world that two great railroads are as one in their commitment to carefulness in handling freight and decent consideration in all human relationships.

*Reprint from Chessie News, Sept. 1, 1972. This entire issue of the magazine was devoted to the new Chessie System corporate images and included many photos of employees across the system voting for Chessie as the new image for the company.
This article uses several photos taken by C&O’s Public Relations and Advertising Departments illustrating a facility being built by the Ratliff-Elkhorn Coal Company for its truck-supplied tipple at Ratliff, Ky., on the Marrowbone Branch off the Big Sandy Subdivision.

Most truck mine tipples were rather non-descript, rickety, home-made contraptions that grew to serve coal originating in small mines not located on a railroad line. The coal was loaded into to highway trucks, taken to a truck mine tipple, and usually dumped directly into waiting C&O hopper cars. See an article about this type of tipple in the May/June, 2019 issue of this magazine.

We were surprised to find photos in the C&O archives’ official collection showing a very “modern,” substantial, and apparently high-tech (for the era) truck mine tipple being built in 1964. All we know about it derives from the seven negatives in the collection.

The photos reveal a traditional truck dumping platform on a hillside, shored up by timber cribbing. From this spot the coal truck tipped its load into a large conical steel hopper below the berm of the hill. Instead of going directly into C&O hopper cars as
in virtually every other truck mine we have seen, the hopper delivered the coal to an underground conveyor belt.

The conveyor then carried the coal underground for what looks to be about 200 feet. It emerges from the ground and goes over the Marrowbone Branch track on a steel framework. It appears that there is a siding at this point on which hopper cars could be positioned for loading.

This is a neat arrangement and quite unusual, perhaps unique on C&O. When this tipple was built in 1964 there were few truck mine tipples left. Most of the small operators that used them went out of business since the boom days of 1910-1945.

This might be an interesting small facility on a model layout.

(Above) The tipple from the bottom of the hillside showing the large steel hopper that received the coal and delivered it to the underground conveyor belt.
(C&O Ry. Photo, C&OHS Collection, CSPR 11431-B6)

(Right) This photo was taken atop the conveyor belt support structure, looking back toward where it emerged from the ground and farther back to the tipple area. The whole complex is under construction, so the belt itself has not been installed yet.
(C&O Ry. Photo, C&OHS Collection, CSPR 11431-B3)
C&O/B&O-N&W Merger Cabooses
By Thomas W. Dixon, Jr.

The accompanying photos are of a C&O caboose in the new blue paint scheme adopted in 1968, and of a N&W blue caboose of the same era. This was the result of the C&O/B&O-N&W merger talks that were underway at that time. (See page 19 of this issue.) Everyone thought that the merger would be accomplished eventually. Therefore, a committee was selected from each railway to do what they could in advance that might expedite the integration of the two operations, once approval was obtained. This included some number rearrangements for locomotives, and the paint scheme for cabooses.

C&O had adopted a yellow scheme in 1956 for its cabooses, but this was superseded in 1968 with a solid blue styling that would coincide with the N&W's cars. The first cabooses to get this styling were being rebuilt at Grand Rapids shops at the time (C&O 3500-3600 series). The first new cabs with this styling were the extended vision cars (3100-3300 series) built by International Car Co. in 1968-71, as illustrated in this article.

Of course, by 1971 the merger was dead. Then, in 1972, the yellow Chessie System scheme was introduced. Therefore, within a little over a decade C&O cabooses had three different paint schemes: The old red up to 1956; the yellow after that until 1968; and then the blue scheme until the Chessie System design was introduced in 1972.

The full story of the failed N&W merger is contained in our book Chesapeake & Ohio - Decades of Change - 1961-1981 - in Color, available, from chessieshop.com or phone 540-862-2210, as catalog No. BK-17-893.

A typical N&W caboose of the late-1960s with its blue paint scheme. (C&OHS Collection)
The Railway Post Office (RPO) has been written about extensively. The story of how it revolutionized mail transportation through en route sorting, and created probably the best mail service in history for the period 1900-1960, is fairly well known. However, the transportation of mail between stations and terminals that was not sorted or managed during the trip has been neglected and is largely unknown or misunderstood by railfans, historians, and modelers. Yet it formed an important part of mail transportation.

Mail contracts between railroads and the Post Office Department (Railway Mail Service (RMS)) called for a per-mile payment for hauling cars loaded with mail. The most money was paid for carrying RPOs with their contents and crews of postal clerks. Cars that carried mail in sealed bags (termed variously storage mail, closed pouch mail, or sealed pouch mail) were transported at a lower rate of pay. Together, the two types of mail often contributed an important part of the revenue for a passenger train. Indeed, as ticket sales declined after World War II, mail income often supported a train and kept it running.

The Post Office began shifting transportation away from trains and onto highways and airlines during the postwar period. When mail contracts were withdrawn from trains the trains themselves were often discontinued by the railroad because they could not support themselves well enough by transporting passengers alone. This became a self-perpetuating cycle in the 1950s-60s. Trains were cut, so the vast and intricately interconnected mail
transportation system began to become disconnected, and as that happened the Post Office discontinued rail mail routes, substituting airlines and highway trucks. As routes were withdrawn trains were cut, and so on. An argument can be made that this rather rapid disintegration of the railway mail system was one of the principal causes for the end of the privately-operated passenger train in America.

That the loss of mail contracts had a decidedly adverse effect on C&O and the railroad passenger system in general is generally agreed upon. On the surface, it is undeniable. However, David P. Morgan, the famous long-time editor of Trains magazine took a different approach to the problem in his classic full-magazine article “Who Shot the Passenger Train,” in the April, 1959 issue of Trains. Morgan postulates that though mail revenues were important, railroads still incurred many otherwise avoidable costs.

First, they had to build and maintain cars for the exclusive use of the RMS. Second, they had to build and operate major terminal facilities in large cities that were dedicated just to mail (or mail and express) use. Third, they had to employ laborers to load and unload mail to and from trains, not only in dedicated terminals but in smaller on-line stations. Fourth, handling of mail often slowed the schedules of trains in an era when faster movement was becoming paramount for passengers. Fifth, a management structure was necessary for coordination of mail transportation on the railroad and with the RMS. Sixth, additional motive power was required because of longer, heavier trains. Morgan thought
This was sometimes carried in an RPO, stored at one end where a small space was allocated for it. Usually it was carried in the baggage car and handled by the C&O’s baggageman. A “working” storage mail car might also deliver closed pouches to way stations. The “working storage mail” car was also operated by C&O’s baggageman and carried next to the baggage car. In this case the RMS paid the C&O a “per pouch” rate based on the number of bags handled.

C&O handled much of the storage mail routed over it on the mainline local passenger trains. Consists of these trains often comprised more mail and express-carrying cars than passenger coaches. Mail and express traffic is often referred to as “headend business” since these cars were usually handled at the head of the train between the engine and the cars carrying passengers.

Many railroads, especially in more densely populated areas, ran trains comprised only of mail and express cars, without passenger accommodations. This allowed the bunk of mail and express business to be handled by the slower locals, where speed was not a primarily

that, at least in 1959 when he was writing, mail transportation was essentially freight transportation and incompatible with passenger operations. It may have made sense in 1925 but not in 1960.

Whether or not one accepts Morgan’s analysis, the fact remains that mail traffic was an integral, important, and valuable part of railroad operations from the earliest years, almost up to the end of the traditional passenger train.

The RPO was the leader in importance because it generated the most income for the railway and carried the highest priority mail (first class letter mail and second class newspapers and magazines). Lower class mail consisted mainly of less time sensitive publications and “parcel post” packages of over 13 ounces sent at a much lower rate of postage than first class letter type mail that only went up to 13 ounces. This mail was not carried in RPOs or sorted en route. Rather, it was sorted in post offices, usually in major cities, and placed in bags/pouches that were labeled for other major post offices. These bags were then put on trains and off-loaded at their destination stations/terminals. An entire car might be sent on C&O for example from Washington, D.C. to Charleston, W. Va. On arrival at Charleston it was unloaded and the “closed pouch” storage mail in it opened and resorted at Charleston. It was either delivered in the city or sent to other nearby localities. Therefore, storage mail often moved in sealed cars that were not opened between their origin and destination.

Some closed pouch mail was also carried to smaller stations along the car’s route.
consideration. The dedicated mail and express (M&E) trains were run similarly to local freight trains, since no consideration had to be given to passenger accommodation.

C&O did not operate dedicated M&E trains until 1943 when the press of both headend and passenger business during WWII required them. Nos. 103 and 104 were placed in service for this purpose. No. 104 was eventually consolidated with local passenger train No. 14 about 1950, but No. 103 continued as M&E-only until October, 1958 when both Nos. 14 and 103 were discontinued. From that time forward all headend business was handled by the through name trains.

During Christmas mailing seasons C&O (and most large railways) added special all-mail and express trains, usually as second sections to the regular trains, to handle the extra mail. At other times the mail traffic was sometimes very heavy. For example, the arrival of Sears & Roebuck mail order catalogs (large 1,000-page softbound) often required extra working storage mail cars. One of the M&E trains might have to stop at a station for a long time just to unload the catalogs that went to almost every home in America, especially in rural areas. This was not a problem for an M&E-only train.

The pouches themselves were assembled in post offices or prepared in what were called “Terminal Railway Post Offices.” These facilities operated the same as regular RPOs with RMS clerks, but they were stationery, usually located near or at a major city’s railroad passenger terminal. They handled lower class mail, mainly parcel post.

Storage mail (other than the small amount handled in baggage cars for way stations) was accommodated by C&O in express cars until the early 1950s. However, 10 express cars were rebuilt and lettered “STORAGE MAIL” starting in 1950.

Though these cars were dedicated to storage mail use, this did not preclude storage mail being carried in cars still lettered for express, depending on the traffic volume.

The rebuilding of these cars was simple. First the wooden doors were replaced with steel versions fitted with rounded-corner windows. This same treatment was given express cars in the same period. Inside, 31 pairs of floor-to-ceiling metal pipes were installed through the car (see diagram accompanying this article). These allowed bags of mail to be stacked high, the steel pipes supplying steadying stanchions for the stacks. This steadying factor also prevented the mail from shifting as the train moved.

Most of these cars remained on C&O’s roster to the last years of passenger operations. Indeed, storage mail cars continued to operate after the last RPOs were cut from the mainline in May, 1968, and on the Northern Region in December, 1969.

All the storage mail cars were painted in the tri-color blue/yellow/gray scheme after 1950 to match the passenger cars.

The full story of RPO and storage mail operations on C&O and predecessors 1839-1969 is covered with photos, diagrams, and data in the C&O Historical Society’s quarterly History Series book No. 14, titled Chesapeake & Ohio, Mail by Rail, by this author. It is available as catalog No. BK-16-878 - order through chessieshop.com or phone 540-862-2210 weekdays 9 a.m.-4 p.m.

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C&O Mechanical Diagram for storage mail cars Nos. 244-245. Note the 31 pairs of floor-to-ceiling pipes that were installed in these cars to support stacking of mail bags. C&O rebuilt 10 express cars for storage mail use in 1950. (C&OHS Collection, from catalog No. DS-7-050)

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This is a good example of storage mail at major terminals. A three-door (or six-door depending on your terminology) ex-horse express car is in use for storage mail. It is being loaded under the train shed at Main Street Station, Richmond, Va., in 1966. (C&O Ry. Photo, C&OHS Collection, CSPR 11662-12)
This is a working storage mail car unloading parcel post on No. 4, The Sportsman, at Alderson, W. Va., on July 15, 1967. Note the U. S. MAIL placard on the side. C&O's train baggage man is handing a package down to agent F. L. Dameron. As mentioned in the article, way station storage mail was handled by C&O employees, not postal clerks. The railway was paid by the number of pieces handled.

(T. W. Dixon, Jr. photo, C&OHS Collection, COHS 41891)

This page from a 1965 C&O consist book lists the storage mail and express routes still being operated at that date. Note that some are shown as working and some as sealed. The working cars delivered mail at way stations while the sealed cars went terminal-to-terminal without being opened. (C&OHS Collection, extract from catalog No. DS-8-138)
Just as Charleston was a principal mail handling location in West Virginia, Clarksburg served a similar purpose on the B&O. This scene from Nov. 21, 1967 shows a large amount of storage mail being transferred from B&O train No. 11, The Metropolitan. Note that most cars are C&O. (T. W. Dixon, Jr. photo, C&OHS Collection, COHS 44109)

Mail & Express-only No. 14 with two E8s near South Fayette, W. Va., in 1954. Note the long string of mail and express cars. At least four are storage mail. (C&O Ry. Photo, C&OHS Collection, CSPR 3395)
felt pretty much like your typical westbound run. As we made our way up Powell Hill and then west towards Walbridge, it would get dark about 5:15 p.m., so it was easy for us to see the lighted Christmas decorations on houses and businesses in the towns through which we were passing. The Christmas lights seemed to shine their myriad of bright colors directly through the cab windows onto us as they sang their joyful messages of holiday spirit. Even the block signals showed their Christmas spirit by displaying red and green lights. There was an increase in auto traffic at crossings as people headed to church, out of town to grandma’s, or to the homes of relatives. As we passed cars waiting at crossings, we could see lots of gift-wrapped packages piled high in the back of family station wagons and lots of children in the back seats of cars.

Eastbound crews on the trains we passed were counting themselves fortunate knowing they would be home tomorrow for Christmas. One of the conductors of an eastbound we passed had hung a Christmas wreath on the outside of the cupola of his caboose for all to see. The decorations and lights, combined with the warmth of the engine cab, the rocking and swaying of the engine, and the monotonous yet soothing drone of the diesel engines seemed to somewhat temper being away from home and family.

Two or three hours before midnight, we’d pull into Walbridge, get our rest, and be called for an early Christmas morning empty train back to Parsons. When we left Walbridge around 8:00 a.m. or 9:00 a.m. on Christmas Day, we’d pass through small towns north of Fostoria and then Fostoria itself. Through the frosty windows of houses near the tracks, we’d see families opening their gifts under the lights of their Christmas trees. The kids were happy with their new toys and the dads just stared at their new neckties. The moms were happy with their gifts but kept looking around to see if they had somehow missed any

Editor's note: This interesting “you are there” memory from former C&O conductor and current COHS Vice President Cliff Clements describes a round trip that he worked from Parsons yard in Columbus on Christmas Eve and returned from Walbridge near Toledo on Christmas Day in 1966.

--Editor

For several years when I was working C&O’s Hocking Division extra board, I spent nearly every holiday working road trains and could count on working every Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year’s when the regular crews were looking for any excuse they could find not to work. For most of those years, I was still single, so it didn’t really bother me if holidays found me at home or working on the railroad. I always told the crew callers that I would be available to work, which would give the family men some holiday time at home. Unlike today when the railroads typically park all their trains and shut down for the holidays, back then we worked whenever there were trains to run, holiday or no holiday. That is not to say that everyone liked it, because they didn’t. There were always a lot of crewmen marking off for the holidays which always left the crew callers short of people to call. When I told them that I would work the holidays, they were nothing but smiles and I suddenly became their new best friend. They made note for the other callers of my offer to work and I never failed to be called to work during holidays.

On Christmas Eve, I would typically get a call to go on duty around noon or 1:00 p.m. for a westbound coal drag. I’d show up in the crew room at the Parsons Terminal building (crews called it “The Brick”) only to be serenaded by the rest of the crew complaining about their having to work on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. Their lamentations would last until we left The Brick and walked over to our train. Leaving Parsons somewhere around 1:30 or 2:30 p.m., it was still light and
very small box that might possibly contain jewelry. Everybody on the crew knew they would be back in Columbus by late afternoon and they, too, would be opening presents with their own families soon afterwards. I settled back into my seat and looked through the cab windows at the lights, the decorations, and the happy families. Just like you see in a Norman Rockwell painting, the combination of frosty white snow on the ground, the warmth of the engine cab, and all the Christmas sights I was seeing outside as we passed through each town, combined to create a perfect picture that all was right in the world and that life was good.

But of all the trips I made on Christmas Day, there was one in 1966 that stands out above all the others. I was called at Walbridge for a 9:00 a.m. eastbound empty train with 150 cars. The engine crew and I walked through the blowing snow from Fitzgerald’s Hotel to the roundhouse and picked up our power, which was two SD35s. We were all glad to see the 35s since they were relatively new and had good cab heaters that were much better than those on covered wagons or geeps. When the engine crew had finished their checks, I called the yardmaster to get our lineup to the eastbound yard and find out which track our train was in. We left the roundhouse, went to Walbridge, and then up the inbound track to the eastbound yard. I tied the engines onto our train and went into the yard office to talk to the conductor. He told me that we had no pickups or set offs and that our train was a complete train of the new Westinghouse ABD brake valve equipped hopper cars that were being tested. At the time, ABD brakes were fairly new and a big improvement over traditional AB brake valves. They used internal rubber diaphragms and O-rings instead of brass slide valves and were faster acting, less susceptible to cold weather problems, and had a quicker release time. After we had completed our air test and were ready to pull, I walked down the lead, lined up the switches, and gave a highball signal to the engineer. He whistled off and started to pull. I climbed aboard,
told him about our experimental ABD brake equipped train, and sat down in the brakeman’s seat for the trip to Parsons.

We pulled out of Walbridge and headed east through LeMoyne, Pemberville, Bradner, and Rising Sun while seeing many Christmas lights and houses where Christmas festivities were taking place. At Fostoria, we crossed the old Lake Erie & Western (Nickel Plate) at the C&O depot, crossed the B&O, Nickel Plate, and NYC at F Tower, and headed for Alveda. Continuing east, we saw lots of Christmas travelers on the roads at Carey, Upper Sandusky, Harpster, Morral, and Marion. It was at Prospect that things changed.

The approach to Prospect from the west was straight track, but it then changed to a long, sweeping curve past the depot and a street crossing near the depot. While still some distance away and as we got closer to the curved track near the depot, I saw a car stopped at an odd angle on the track and it appeared to have its right front wheel off the crossing and on the ties between the rails. I yelled for the engineer to dump the air and he immediately did. None of us thought that there was any way we could stop before hitting the car. That would have been true if we had a train with the older AB brakes, but we didn’t. We felt the brakes on our train of new ABD brake valves immediately take hold and begin to slow us down. With our eyes focused on the car, we watched the distance between us shrink and prayed that whoever was in the car would get out of it in time. But that wasn’t happening. We were getting closer and in the car windows, we could see mom and her three kids looking at us and screaming in abject fear and unable to move due to that fear. This was in the days before seat belts and car seats, so all four car occupants had their hands plastered to the windows and were looking at us and screaming as our train bore down on them. The train continued to slow and all of us in the engine cab thought that maybe if we slowed enough and hit the car at a slower speed, maybe the occupants would not get hurt too badly.

As if to answer our prayers, our train continued to slow and came to a stop only about 20 feet from the car. I climbed down from the engine, went over to the car, and opened the driver’s door. Mom was crying and as I helped her out of the car, she hugged me and couldn’t stop saying, “thank you, thank you, thank you for stopping” over and over again. The engineer and fireman were right behind me and checked on the kids who were scared, but OK. Mom let go of me and went over to her kids and took them into her arms to hold them tight and comfort them.

After a few minutes, the kids stopped crying and mom was able to tell us what had happened. They were on their way to grandma’s house across town and she had started over the crossing but had misjudged where the edge of the crossing was due to the snow. Her wheel had dropped off the crossing between the rails and she couldn’t back off the track because her rear tires just spun on the snow. At that point, she looked out her car window and saw our train coming. She was so afraid that she couldn’t get out of her car or do anything else to try to get off the tracks. Fear and terror are strange things in that they can paralyze us and keep us from doing what we want to do or need to do. She thought she and her children were going to be killed by our train, but when we got stopped in time, the only thing she could do was to cry in relief and gratitude.

We asked mom if she would be able to drive or if she wanted us to call someone. She had recovered her composure and said she was able to drive, so we had her get in the car and the three of us pushed her off the track and back onto the street. There was no damage to her car. She got out of her car and again thanked us for getting stopped in time and hugged each of us. The kids were fine now and as she drove away, we watched her car’s tail lights fade into the distance, once again on her way to grandma’s house. The three of us climbed back onto the engines and just sat there for a few moments contemplating what had just happened. The engineer called the conductor and dispatcher on the radio, told them what had happened, and that we were ready to head for Parsons. We got the OK and then headed for home to our own families after having been given the best present we could have received on that Christmas Day.

I have thought about that day over the years and about the kids in the back seat. They would now be in their middle 60’s with children and grandchildren of their own. Their mom would have enjoyed her own children, her grandchildren, her great grandchildren, and maybe even great-great-grandchildren. None of that would have come about had we not been able to get our train stopped that day. I have no doubt that God was riding with us in that engine cab over 50 years ago. How else could so many factors have come together to prevent a tragedy if He weren’t? We had a whole train equipped with new and improved brake valves, I was looking in the right place at the right time, it was still light outside so that I could see that far, the engineer didn’t delay in dumping the air, we were at the right speed to stop, we had the perfect number of cars, and all of those factors came together perfectly. Add one more car, one more mile per hour, darkness, or a half-second of delay in dumping the air, change any of it, and there would have been a tragedy. Divine intervention? I think so. Best Christmas ever!

Back Cover: Eighty years ago - C&O always presented an interesting cover for their magazine at Christmas. This is the December, 1939 issue of Chesapeake & Ohio Lines Magazine. It features Santa Claus checking his schedule with a C&O ticket agent. The actual photo was taken by the PR Department’s photographer at the Washington, D. C., C&O city ticket office on Nov. 6, 1939. (C&OHS Collection, COHS 41569)