

Carolina Conductor



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Monthly Newsletter of the Carolina Railroad Heritage Association, Inc.

October 2021

Preserving the Past Active in the Present Planning for the Future

Web Site: hubcityrrmuseum.org

Facebook: Carolina Railroad Heritage Association & Hub City RR Museum

Meeting Site:

Woodmen of the World Building
721 East Poinsett Street
Greer, SC 29651-6404
Third Friday of the Month at 7:00 p.m.

Hub City Railroad Museum and SOU Rwy Caboose #X3115:

Spartanburg Amtrak Station
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Spartanburg, SC 29301-2330
Wednesday 10-2 & Saturday 10-2

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Pullman Porters

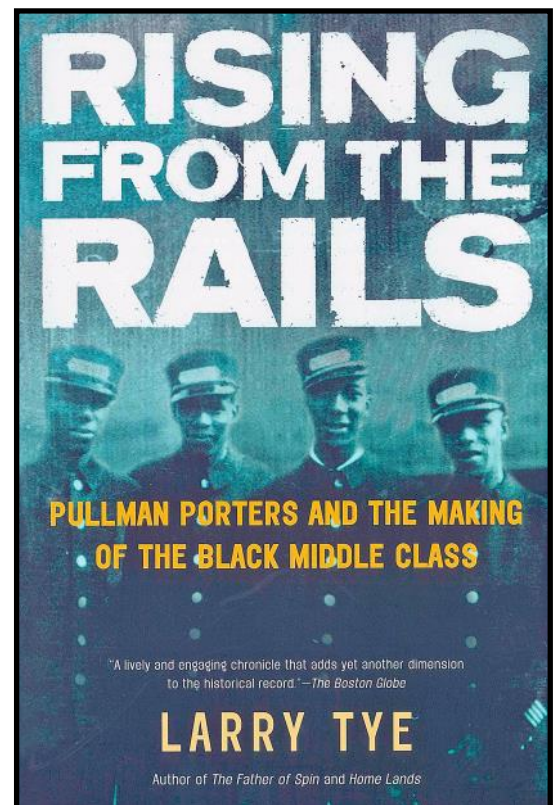
Rising From the Rails by Larry Tye

A book review by
Dave Winans

The Hub City RR Museum has added a display related to George Pullman and his sleeping cars that were used on almost all railroads. I started reading this book to help obtain some background regarding Pullman Porters and their role in American history. I am not an avid reader, but this book captured my attention, and I was reading it every chance I could.

The subtitle of the book is "Pullman Porters and the making of the black middle class".

George Pullman began recruiting Southern blacks as porters on his luxurious new sleeping cars just as the Civil War was ending, and the offer of a steady job and the chance to see the world proved irresistible. Scores of former slaves signed up to



serve as maid and waiter, concierge, nanny, and occasionally doctor and undertaker to cars full of well-heeled white passengers, making the Pullman Company the largest employer of African Americans in the country by the 1900s.

George Pullman hired Southern blacks intentionally for several rea-

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Museum Happenings

↙ Model train display shelf being readied for installation in bay window.



Member Ted Button thought there was a green and yellow steam locomotive coming. ↓



↑ Wayne Gallman's granddaughter Allie helps clean the newly installed countertop. She is the youngest volunteer we have had at the caboose, Unlike the two old geezers that total 176 years of inexperience.



← The Hub City Railfanners group has a birthday party at the museum. Before cake they had a talk by the Gideons.

Wanted—Articles for the Carolina Conductor

Submit an article of 200 words or more with some photos and captions and see them in print. Every one of us has some unique railroad experience that would make interesting reading for our membership. Your editor always needs more contributions of local railway history and news.

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Typical freshly starched Porter.

sons. He could pay them less than the white railroad conductors; they were used to do menial tasks; and they knew how to say “Yes Sir” with a smile on their face. They were told to practice the three “Ls”; Look, Listen, and Learn; from the passengers they were serv-

ing.

The book provides an insight into the porters and their daily lives. They had to “wear a mask” while working, putting up with the racial insults from the passengers they were serving, and always smiling. The job of being a porter was known as the best job in the community and the worst job on the train. Working 400 hours per month was not unusual.

The book goes into the struggle of the porters to establish a union in an attempt to gain some collective bargaining leverage. Unfortunately, the union was established just as the passenger ridership by rail was on the decline.

The final chapter of the book discusses the porters’ placing a premium on the education of their children. Like most families they wanted their children to have a better life than they had.

Many prominent blacks had their turn as a Pullman Porter at some point in their lives. Supreme Court justice Thurgood Marshall; Roy Wilkins of the NAACP; and Benjamin Elijah Mays, president of Moorhead Col-



Depending on train length the number of Porters needed made up a crew.

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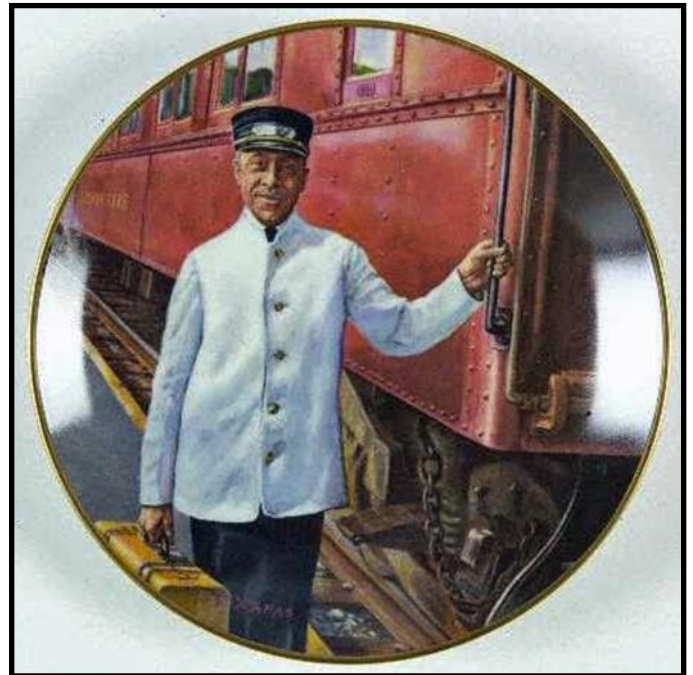
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lege, just to name a few. Many porters saved their wages and put themselves through some level of higher education. If you look at an affluent black family of today, it is very likely that there is a Pullman Porter in their family history.

This book is a well-researched and sympathetic history of a slice of Americana that is not highly publicized but is worth knowing about. ✓



Would you like me to make-up you bed Sir?



May I take your bag madam?

That smile George Pullman looked for.



Dinner in the diner was also a pleasant experience thanks to the Porters.



Pullman Car Building History

Pullman sleeping car "Chicosa".



Development of the "Palace Car"

George Mortimer Pullman was always an inventive, innovative entrepreneur. Legendarily, an extremely uncomfortable overnight train ride from Buffalo to Westfield, New York, caused him to realize that there was a vast market potential for comfortable, clean, efficient passenger service. He had a great deal of experience with compact and efficient sleeping accommodations thanks to his experiences with canal boats on the Erie Canal. He formed a partnership with former New York state senator Benjamin C. Field in 1857, one of his close friends and neighbors from Albion, to build and operate several sleeping cars. Pullman and Field secured a contract from the Chicago, Alton, and St. Louis Railroad to develop a more comfortable sleeping car. Pullman and Field converted two moderately successful cars. Field, more interested in politics than rail cars, assigned his interest to Pullman in exchange for future loans.

1863 and the First Cars

Pullman returned to Chicago in April 1863. Pull-

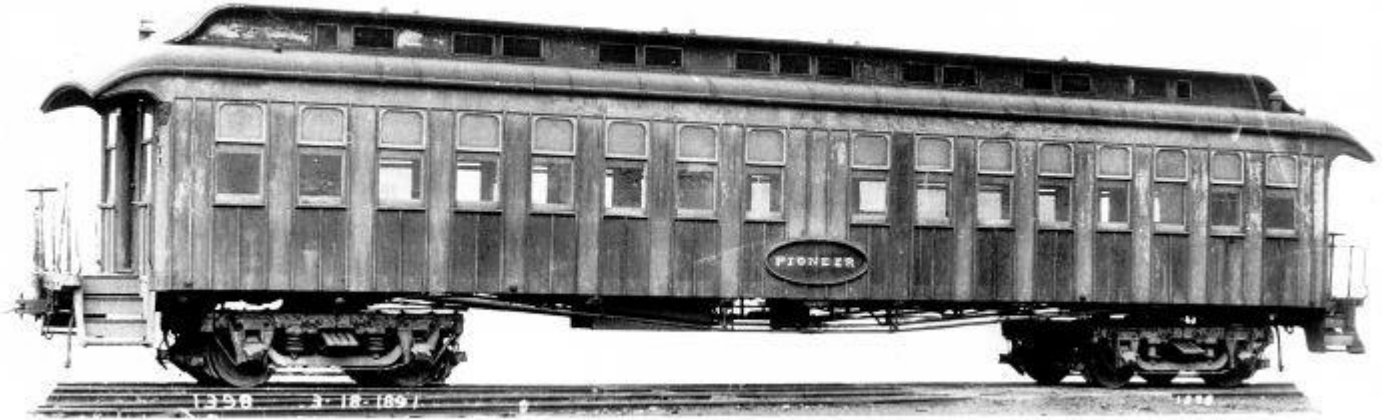


Pullman Sleeper class car.

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Pullman car "Pioneer".



man built the *Springfield*, named after the town, it was built in and President Lincoln's hometown, and the *Pioneer*. The cars were costly, comfortable, clean, and beautiful; the *Pioneer* alone cost \$18,000 to build. In 1864, Pullman was also called to the draft, but like many young men with means, he hired a substitute to take his place in the Union Army.

1868 and Expansion of the Company

With his own fortune and that of his investors, Pullman greatly expanded the company. He created his first hotel on wheels, the *President*, a sleeper with an attached kitchen and dining car. The food rivaled the best restaurants of the day, and the service was impeccable. A year later in 1868, he launched the *Delmonico*, the world's first sleeping car devoted to fine cuisine. Both the *President* and the *Delmonico* and subsequent Pullman sleeping cars offered first-rate service which was provided by recently freed former house slaves who served as porters, waiters, chambermaids, entertainers, and valets all rolled into one person.

In January, Benjamin Field dissolved the partnership, and the company became known as the *Pullman Palace Car Company*. The company charter was approved by the Illinois Legislature on February 22, 1867. The board of directors of the company elected Pullman as president and general manager. Pullman mostly handled marketing sleeping car services, while his brother Albert managed the manufacturing end of the operation. Lawyer Charles Angell, who later embezzled thousands of dollars from the company, handled the company's financial and legal affairs.



Pullman Hotel class car.

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Pullman Parlor class car.



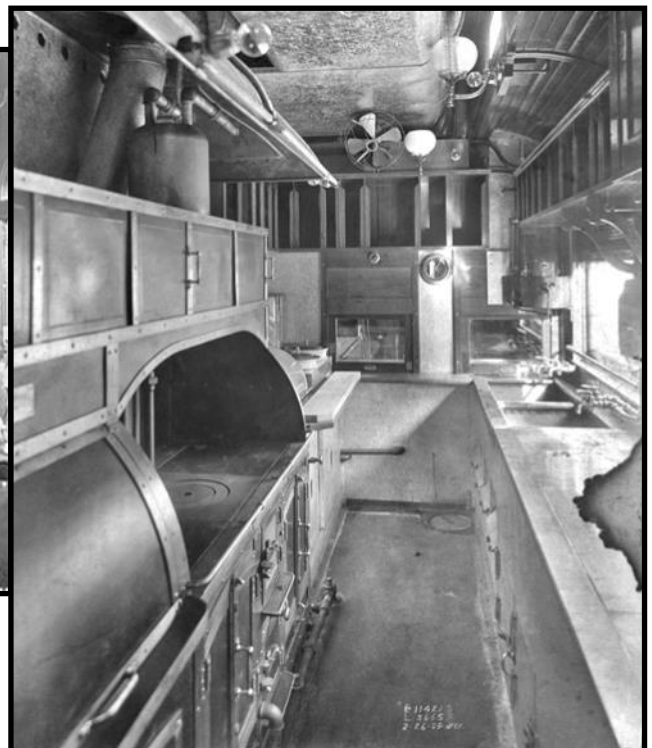
Pullman Recliner class car.



Pullman Diner class car.

1869 and Detroit

In 1869, Pullman bought the *Detroit Car and Manufacturing Company* to consolidate all his manufacturing operations into one facility. He built 5 classes of cars: hotel cars, parlor cars, reclining room cars, sleepers, and



Pullman dining car kitchen.

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diners. Pullman also aggressively pursued his competitors, buying out the *Central Transportation Company*, his main competitor, in 1870. By 1875, the company had built a successful business model, of leasing Pullman cars to railroads and providing complete service for the traveling public.

The Growth of the Company

The popularity of Pullman's sleeping car service outstripped his production facilities. In 1880, Pullman bought 4,000 acres near Lake Calumet some 14 miles south of Chicago on the Illinois Central Railroad for \$800,000. He hired Solon Spencer Beman to design his new plant there, and to solve the issue of labor unrest and poverty, he also built a town adjacent to his factory with its own housing, shopping areas, churches, theaters, parks, hotel, and library for his employees.

By 1883, Pullman had shops in St. Louis, Missouri; Detroit, Michigan; Elmira, New York; and Wilmington, Delaware as well as several factories in Europe and England. The company manufactured sleeping cars, boxcars, coal cars, baggage cars, chair cars, refrigerated cars, streetcars, and mail cars.

Pullman Car Comes to Area Museum

Norfolk Southern Corporation recently gifted the historic Marco Polo rail car, a car President Franklin D. Roosevelt used while in office, to the Southeastern Railway Museum in Duluth, Georgia.

The Pullman Company built the Marco Polo in 1927 as part of a small fleet of cars named for world explorers, reserving them for VIPs who chartered their own

railcar. Roosevelt traveled in the car when he was governor of New York and later as president, using it on trips to and from Warm Springs, Georgia.

The museum plans to display the car on its 35-acre campus alongside the Superb, a Pullman car used by President Warren G. Harding. The car also transported many dignitaries over the years, including Madame Chiang Kai-Shek, the wife of China's wartime president. She used the Marco Polo during a United States tour in 1943.

The Central of Georgia, a Norfolk Southern predecessor railroad, bought the car in 1944 and converted it into an office. The Southern Railway assumed ownership of the car in 1963 after it merged with the Central of Georgia. Over the years, the railroad has displayed the car, which was later renamed the Savannah, in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and at Union Station in Washington, D.C. For more than 25 years, Washington commuters walked past the Marco Polo, most not knowing the railcar's history as a predecessor to Air Force 1.



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