

This unique cabooses, horizontally wood-sheathed with steel frames and outside bracing, started life as a 40-ton Class B-2 boxcar. It was probably built in 1915 by the Bettendorf Company of Iowa. (It rides on Bettendorf trucks, and the steel under-frames were cast in 1914.) The boxcar served on the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railroad for about thirty years.

When the Rock Island RR needed more cabooses in the early 1940's, about 200 B-2 boxcars were converted in their shops, either in Chicago or Silvis, Illinois. At this time, the United States was preparing for or engaged in WW II, and rail transport became critically important. Twenty boxcars were converted to an unusual passenger/baggage/crew configuration with three sections: passenger seating, baggage room with sliding external doors, and a cupola-topped crew compartment. CRI&P No. 1772, shown below, is located at the Mid-Continent Railway Museum in Wisconsin.



However, our cabooses, CRI&P No. 17834, was modified differently, exclusively for train crew use. It is believed this conversion was accomplished in 1943. The car was shortened by removing the middle section where the sliding doors were located. (Look carefully, and you can see where the frame sections were spliced.) Platforms were added to each end, a steel cupola was mounted on the roof, windows were cut into the sides, and the interior was outfitted with crew bunks, a toilet, conductor's desk, benches, a stove, and an ice box.



The Rock Island probably used this car until the 1970's when cabooses were taken off active service by all railroads. Around this time, Caboose No. 17834 was acquired by John Kirkpatrick Jr. of Oklahoma City. He parked the car next to his lumber yard and supposedly used it for meetings and parties. In 1978, the cabooses was donated to the CORC, predecessor of the ORM, by the Kirkpatrick family. For a time, it was on display at the Omniplex Science Museum.



From there, it went into storage where it was allowed to deteriorate. Interestingly, Rock Island No. 17834 became a “movie star” in 2010. While sitting on the Owanda siding at the ORM, it was used as one of the sets for the movie, “Bringing Up Bobby.” (See a short video on You Tube and the article in “Remember the Rock,” Vol.6, No. 3.)



Restoration began in about 2010, funded in part by a 2012 grant from the National Railway Historical Society. Most of the interior and exterior walls were replaced, as well as part of the flooring. The roof was completely remade, and many of the interior fixtures were crafted in our wood shop. Side windows, including those in the cupola, were fabricated and installed.



The interior and exterior were repainted with appropriate stenciling applied. The toilet compartment was too deteriorated to repair and was therefore eliminated: it was replaced with a sink from a newly-acquired Frisco caboose. The pot-belly stove also came from the Frisco caboose. Electric lights, rather than lanterns were installed. The original smoke jack was reinstalled, and new roof-walks were fabricated. Finally, new seat cushions and bunk mattresses were made.



The newly-completed No. 17834 looks like a pretty comfortable residence for train crews away from home. If only someone would provide a decent set of wheels, we could be back on the rails again!

