

Pennsylvania Railroad Class N6B Cabin Car No. 980016

by John W. Smith
Project Chairman

The Pennsylvania Railroad constructed over 1100 of the N6B class of cabooses (or cabin cars as they were called on the Pennsylvania Railroad) from 1914 to 1923. This particular car was constructed in one of the PRR's freight car shops in June 1920. Although steel N5 class cabin cars were constructed at the same time as the N6B class, after the last N6B was constructed in 1923, all new PRR cabooses would be made of steel. The wooden N6B class was the most numerous type of cabin car on the PRR and made up over 50% of the cabin cars in service until the construction of new cars in the 1940's. In 1957 the PRR still rostered 867 N6B's and in all probability the N6B class represents the largest single class of caboose ever constructed. The N6B's were used across the length of the PRR system, although in later years saw frequent usage in local service. One N6B was assigned to the Enola to Rutherford daily local in the 1960's. This train traveled on the tracks between the Harrisburg Amtrak station and the Post Office. Other N6B's ended their service in maintenance of way service, as was the case with this car which was renumbered to 492883. All remaining N6B's were scrapped in the early 1960's and none were carried over into the Penn Central era. Only a handful are known to exist today and this car is the only one that has been restored to its original PRR livery. The restored paint scheme and number was worn by this car from the 1930's up until its removal from revenue service.

This car was in a very deteriorated state when the Chapter was given the car by the Robert M. Mumma estate in December 1986. The outside and inside condition of the car showed the effects of many years of exposure to the elements and inundation by the waters of the 1972 Agnes flood. After the removal of interior debris and mud, restoration began with the removal of exterior siding. The removal of the exterior siding showed that the underlying structural trusses (similar to what one would expect on a bridge) were deteriorated in places and needed to be patched or replaced prior to renailling the new siding to the car. Repairs were made and new beveled fir siding, a duplicate of the original pine siding, was purchased and installed. New roof boards were installed and metal braces were placed inside to remove pronounced sags in both ends of the roof. A rubber roof was installed in place of the original canvas one to insure weather tightness. A new roofwalk was constructed from a pattern of the original. New wooden end sills were cut and installed where needed. All exterior wood was primed, and the metal grab irons were removed, sandblasted, straightened and reinstalled. All of the windows were removed for replacement of rotted wood and installation of new laminated safety glass.

With the exterior of the car starting to show some of its future potential, work began on the interior. The wardrobe locker doors, which had warped badly after the 1972 Agnes floodwaters, were removed, rebuilt and reinstalled. The floor of the car, with holes that allowed inspection of the ground and undercarriage, was a challenge. The subflooring and final flooring were replaced, and the final flooring sanded and varnished. The peeling green paint was scraped from the walls and washed several times to remove

accumulations of "flood mud". The stove was removed, sandblasted and repainted, and the sink was rebuilt. Rotted interior wood was replaced, and the lower bunks were reconstructed. New quarter round molding was cut and placed in many places in the car. The interior was primed and sanded in preparation for painting in the original buff color.

While progress was now very evident, much remained to be done. Exterior paint was mixed to match chips taken from the end platform, with four gallons being required to paint the exterior. Original PRR lettering blueprints were located and the stencils traced and cut. The original number was found over one end door. The metal work on the end platforms was scraped, primed and painted. The corner grab irons were painted safety yellow. The final stage of the restoration involved mechanical work on the trucks and air brake system. Each axle was jacked up, new grease pads installed and the reservoir filled with bearing oil. The air brake system was disassembled; necessary new parts were located and replaced. An air brake test was done to insure correct operation of the air brake system. New interior caboose lamps were located, and the final detailing completed on the exterior and interior of the car. After over 2100 hours of labor, lasting over 16 months, the restoration of this historic car was completed.

The restoration was a group effort on the part of 24 Harrisburg Chapter National Railway Historical Society members who contributed over 2100 hours of labor to the completion of the project. Many more contributed financially to the project and helped at the chapter's fund raising train shows. Members who contributed over 50 hours of their time and who deserve a special thanks are:

- Fred Wertz 690 hours
- John Smith 350 hours
- Bill Kcenich 200 hours
- Earl Frey 115 hours
- Randy Watts 110 hours
- Dan Cupper 78 hours
- Sherd Doughman 76 hours
- Gary Sunday 66 hours
- Matt Loser 58 hours
- John Albright 56 hours
- George Cazakoglu 55 hours
- Brad Anderson 50 hours

One individual deserves more credit than can be given here. That individual is Fred Wertz. Fred's 690 hours represent one-third of the total restoration hours and covered almost all phases of the restoration effort, from replacement of the deteriorated framework, constructing numerous new wood pieces, replacement of the flooring, repairing windows, rebuilding of the bunks, painting of the interior and exterior, reupholstering of the bunks, and mechanical work on the air brakes. Another individual whose "can do" attitude was a great help during the restoration was Earl Frey. Earl, who

rode on N6B's during his career as a Pennsylvania Railroad conductor, shepherded the mechanical restoration of the car and its return to operational status.

The Chapter received support from the following organizations and individuals which made this project possible. We are grateful for their contributions.

- Pennsylvania Power and Light Company - for bringing in two 30 ton cranes to transfer the car from the detached siding to the Conrail tracks.
- Conrail - for assisting in the movement of the car from the siding and placing it in the Harrisburg Amtrak Station and for supplying the needed mechanical parts to restore the air brake system.
- Carlisle Syntech - for supplying roofing material and supplies to install a new one piece rubber roof.
- Clark Transfer - for allowing the restoration work to proceed in their warehouse and providing electric service during the restoration.
- Hennessy Products, Chambersburg, Pa. - for making new journal bearing pads for the axles.
- Mel Baker, retired Conrail mechanic - for supervising the restoration of the car's air brake system.
- Bob Radosevic, Kennedy Railroad Builders - for supplying air compressor and technical assistance in restoration of the trackwork necessary to move the car from the work location.
- Joseph Woltcheck, Harrisburg Chapter NRHS - for contributing a portion of the proceeds from the sale of the "Action at Rockville Tower" print to this project. Joe's print includes a N6B cabin car.
- Ken Murry, Lancaster Chapter NRHS - for supplying original PRR N6B blueprints.
- John Stewart, Ontario, Canada - for supplying original PRR lettering blueprints.
- PENNSY Supply - for moving the car from the storage location to the Conrail connection.
- Amtrak - for providing the space to display the car in the historic train shed of the Harrisburg Transportation Center.
- Robert M. Mumma Estate - for Mr. Mumma's foresight in preserving this rare car and the donation of the car to the chapter. Displaying the car in the Harrisburg was Mr. Mumma's idea which through many hours of hard labor and assistance from numerous sources has come to fruition.