

"Paint and Park"

The Lehigh & New England Railroad Caboose 583

Steamtown National Historic Site in Scranton, Pennsylvania, has over 100 locomotives and other pieces of rolling stock in its care, requiring varying levels of work. Time and resources do not permit a full Historic Structure Report (HSR) and restoration for each piece at present. Even if time did permit a full HSR, with recommendations for complete restoration, the park's Restoration Shop does not have the resources to restore all the railroad locomotives and cars in a timely manner before others would completely deteriorate. In the interim, a brief Cosmetic Painting and Stabilization Documentation, or "Paint & Park," report allowing for painting and stabilization of the structure is produced. The "Assessment of Action" (Section 106 compliance) has concurrence for the projects.

The "Paint & Park" report includes a brief historical study researching the ownership and revenue service history of the rolling stock to determine historically correct colors and markings for its home railroad during steam revenue service. Armed with this report, the Restoration Shop is able to provide basic maintenance and stabilization to the equipment, and a new coat of paint. The paint is a stabilizing agent that will allow the car to remain in the yard with a minimal amount of deterioration. The correct cosmetic painting will allow the equipment to fit into the park's theme.

Painting is a common way of preserving railroad equipment. While in service, most cars and locomotives were repainted as often as once every five years. Much of the equipment at Steamtown has been painted over the years. In most cases its current appearance does not reflect how it appeared when under steam revenue service. It is this period of time that Steamtown is trying to interpret. The Lehigh & New England Railroad (LNE) 583 caboose in the Steamtown

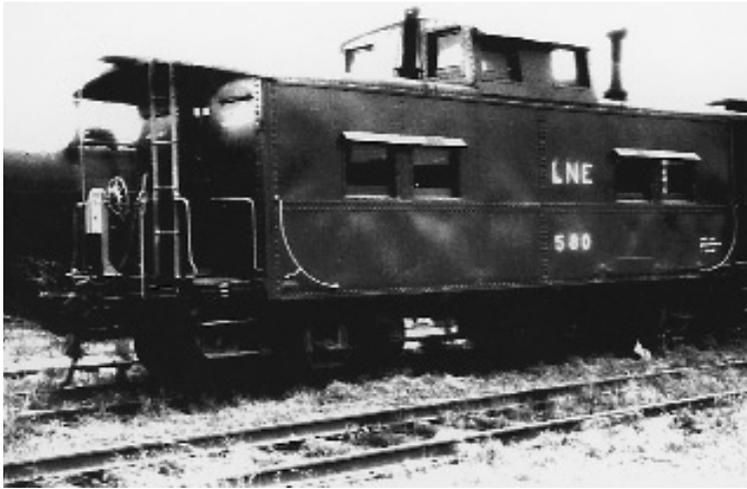
collection had a "Paint & Park" report done in early 1999. The caboose was in need of stabilization. The past paint job done during the mid-1980s was beginning to deteriorate.

History of the Line 583 Caboose

The Lehigh & New England 583 caboose was one of a fleet of five (series 580-584) steel cabooses rostered by the LNE. Constructed for the LNE during 1937, in the Reading, Pennsylvania, shops of the Reading Company, this style of caboose proliferated in the Northeast.

The LNE, created in 1895 from the remnants of the Poughkeepsie & Boston Railroad Company, operated until 1961. The Central Railroad Company of New Jersey (CNJ) then formed the Lehigh & New England Railway (also referred to as the LNE) to operate the still profitable parts of the LNE. In addition to the tracks, the CNJ acquired much of the LNE rolling stock at a cost of \$10.1 million.¹ The CNJ operated the line until 1974, when it pulled out of Pennsylvania. Shortly thereafter, the CNJ sold three of the five cabooses to Vermont-based Steamtown USA.² The CNJ sold the fourth caboose to MCP Fabricators who had taken over the rail yards at Tadmor, Pennsylvania.³ This caboose was later relocated to a suburban backyard in Bath, Pennsylvania. The fifth caboose remained in service and was incorporated into Conrail. Conrail donated this caboose to the Tri-State Railway Historical Society in 1988.⁴

Limited references appear about the 583 caboose until the summer of 1960. Synthesizing the history of this car required reviewing the history of the five constructed for the railroad. The LNE made an early modification to the original caboose design high-mounted grab irons on each end that were horizontal rather than the more-common vertical.⁵ During the 1940s, three of the cars, 580, 583, and 584, received an additional stove, resulting in two smokejacks, one on



LNE 580 caboose, November 19, 1967, after replacement of the "fried egg" herald with the letters "LNE." Courtesy Michael DelVecchio.

each end of the cupola.⁶ The LNE also added handhold loops to the top of the ladders similar to its older cabooses.

During the late 1950s, additional modifications took place. Small awnings were added to the windows and kick plates put on the end platform railings. The car markings also changed. The herald (unique marking for a specific railroad) and car number were moved off-center. The appearance of the caboose number switched from the traditional Railroad Roman to a style resembling New Courier.

The Lehigh & New England Railway made more changes, adding a high visibility iridescent orange disc on a black field to the cupola ends. During the late 1960s, the CNJ replaced the 'fried egg' herald with the letters LNE, simplifying the markings. They also filled in the window next to the stove on car 583 and removed the second smokejack at this time. Initially the 583 retained the LNE colors, but was ultimately repainted into CNJ's colors during the early 1970s.

Shortly after pulling out of Pennsylvania, the CNJ offered the Steamtown Foundation the opportunity to bid on four of the old LNE cabooses. They accepted Steamtown's bid of \$6,200, plus \$1,508 each for freight charges.⁷ It is not definitively known what happened to the other three cabooses purchased from the CNJ. No documentation exists confirming any transfer from Steamtown USA to another entity. Only one caboose, the 583 (though notes refer to it as the 580 at this time), made its way to Scranton, PA, when Steamtown USA relocated around 1984-1985. In 1987 a video clip of Steamtown shows the caboose being repainted red, but no

markings added yet.⁸ In 1988 it received cleaning on the interior and exterior, including repainting.

In reviewing the history of the LNE cabooses, there seems to be a distinctive difference between the modifications of the steam era and post-steam era. Images available indicate the caboose maintained its simple, assembly-line look from 1937 and into the early 1950s. The car's appearance of this period needs to be preserved.

Images dating after 1960 (the post-steam era) indicate significant changes. Window awnings and kickboards appear in these photos as well.

Recommendations

Using the results of the research from the "Paint & Park" report it was determined that the caboose retained a similar appearance throughout its operating days in the steam era. This could be done with relative ease and little effect on the historic fabric. All bad paint and rust were removed, with some rusted-out sections replaced. The Restoration Shop primed and repainted it caboose red with white markings and lettering as documented in historic photographs. Plexiglass windows were replaced with regular glass where possible. Kick plates and awnings (post-steam era modifications) were also removed. It was suggested that a cover over one of the windows be removed, as well as a second smoke jack be added to reflect its 1940s appearance. The latter two recommendations were not followed at this time.

One of the most significant changes made to the caboose was numbering it as the '583' as opposed to the '580.' At some point, the caboose was repainted with an incorrect number. Numbering of locomotives and rolling stock within the railroad industry is very systematic. Research tied to the "Paint & Park" report, and physical evidence on the caboose indicated '583' is the correct number. That change, and the centering of the herald and the number has brought the caboose back to a steam era appearance.

Final Product

The work that results from a "Paint & Park" report is by no means a full-scale restoration. It is a better approach than allowing the structure to deteriorate for want of basic stabilization work. Researching the appearance of the structure during the steam era makes the resulting product more significant to the site. Had the park decided to repaint the '583' as it appeared before the report, the caboose would have had a non-steam era appearance, as well as an incorrect

number. Now that the car is stabilized, a HSR and full restoration will be undertaken in the future.

A number of “Paint & Park” reports have been completed on other pieces of railroad equipment over the last year at Steamtown. Two box-cars, a flatcar, a gondola and two switcher locomotives have received reports. Most of these have received stabilization and cosmetic painting. If the Restoration Shop had to wait for a full HSR to be generated, only one or two of these might have received needed work. It must be noted, however, that the “Paint & Park” reports are an interim measure, and are not intended to replace the HSR.

Notes

- 1 Christopher T. Baer, William J. Coxe, and Paul W. Schopp, *The Trail of the Blue Comet, A History of the Jersey Central's New Jersey Southern Division* (The Kutztown Publishing Company, Inc., 1994), 371.
- 2 Bank checks information for stub numbers 2582 and 2584. Steamtown National Historic Site Archival Collection—Steamtown Foundation Papers (STEA 3287).

- 3 Doug Lilly, “Wood, Steel and Fried Eggs: Caboose of the Lehigh New England,” *Flags, Diamonds and Statues*, 6:1, Issue 21, Lehigh New England, Nostalgia Series, Videotape (VHS) (Chalfont, PA: Stewart Hobbies, Inc., 1990), 45.
- 4 DelVecchio, Michael (MDelvec952@aol.com), “Re.: Questions about LNE caboose 580.” E-mail to Patrick McKnight (PAT_MCKNIGHT@nps.gov). [8 December 1998].
- 5 Dick Steinbrenner, “The Ubiquitous Northeastern Caboose,” part 3 of 3, *Railroad Model Craftsman*, (September 1982): 83.
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 Central Railroad of New Jersey “Invitation to Bid” to Steamtown Foundation. STEA 3287.
- 8 Lehigh New England, Nostalgia Series.

R. Patrick “Pat” McKnight is the park historian and archivist for Steamtown National Historic site, where he researches various aspects of Steamtown, including its rolling stock, and oversees an extensive archival collection.

For more information on the LNE 583 or Steamtown's other restoration projects, visit the park's website <www.nps.gov/stea>.

R. Jay Conant and R. Patrick “Pat” McKnight

The Rutland Railroad's Caboose No. 28

Steamtown National Historic Site in Scranton, Pennsylvania, has a collection of over 100 pieces of railroad rolling stock, including locomotives, various types of freight cars, passenger cars and cabooses. These pieces represent dozens of railroad companies that operated in the past. One of these companies was Vermont's Rutland Railroad, which ran from 1860 to 1961. One piece of equipment at Steamtown is the Rutland Caboose #28, which has been fully restored and is on exhibit at the park.

Author Conant, a member of the Rutland Railroad Historical Society, discovered that no line drawing of the #28 exists today.

Corresponding through email from Montana with park staff in Scranton, Pennsylvania, he has been able to put together a reasonably accurate representation of this caboose using computer aided drawing (CAD) tools. The resulting document will aid Steamtown National Historic Site (NHS) staff in interpreting and preserving the caboose, and provide the Rutland Railroad Historical Society with previously unavailable information.

Caboose #28 is one of a group of supposedly identical wood cabooses, numbered 25 through 37, built in 1920 at the railroad's shops in Rutland, Vermont. However, comparison of the length and height of #28 with caboose #36,