

HISTORY OF THE LONG ISLAND RAIL ROAD CLASS N52 CABIN CARS

by Bob Kaelin

THE ADVENT OF THE N52

By the early 1900s, the Pennsylvania Railroad and its subsidiary Long Island RR were still using all-wood, four-wheeled caboose cars, but all of this would soon start to change when the PRR built the first such car with a steel underframe as early as 1903, even long before such a "safety" feature would be mandated by law. Those first steel underframe cars were known as class ND and some of these became 'precursors of the eight-wheel type when they underwent conversions that would have two separate trucks instead of the straight four-wheel configuration. Trains were getting heavier and longer, while locomotives were becoming larger and more powerful and the caboose had to do more than just "keep up" with the end of the train, as it was often being subjected to terrific forces when sandwiched between the train and a helper engine pushing behind it at the rear.

Many of the four-wheelers were still relatively new, having been built as late as 1905. PRR shops throughout lines west of Pittsburgh dealt with the problem by salvaging the bodies of usable four-wheelers and rebuilding them into "stretch" versions that would be placed on top of eight-wheel steel underframes that had been prepared for them. These would become the very well known ND types. In 1914, PRR shops at Altoona built 'the world's first all steel eight-wheel caboose which would become class N5.

Replacement of the four-wheelers on the LIRR began in 1916 with the construction of numbers 33 thru 35 which were steel underframe, eight-wheel cars patterned after the N5 in dimensions and layout except that they were of "composite" construction (having an iron-reinforced wooden superstructure) and were designated as sub-class "N52." Three more of these (numbers 36 thru 38) were built the following year. These six were all built in the LIRR's own shops. Thus started the gradual disappearance of the old four-wheelers, the last of which was not taken out of service until ten years later. In the early 1920s, the LIRR started to purchase more of these cars from outside manufacturers. These were almost identical except for variations in the underframe and endsills and became class N52A. The first group was a batch of ten built by American Car & Foundry (ACF) in 1922 and these were numbered 39 thru 48. Pressed Steel Car Company (PSC) built 15 more in 1925 and these were given the numbers 16 thru 33 with missing numbers 17, 26 and 32 which were still assigned to three of the remaining four-wheelers still in use. These three numbers were never reassigned, but the first number 33 built in 1916 was wrecked at Huntington in February 1924; so this number was reassigned to the last of those 15 cars that were delivered from PSC the following year.

ACF built a final batch of five in February 1927. These were numbered 10 thru 15 with the exception of number 13, as that was still on the last surviving four-wheeler that wasn't taken out of service until later that year. This number 13 was never reassigned, either.

Thirty-six of these were built in all, but no more than 35 of them were in existence at anyone time due to the loss of the original number 33. Of this total, three or four more were lost in wrecks or fires over the years. The 30-odd that survived would remain in service at least until the late 1950s, after which they gradually started to disappear. Some had been sold, but most of them were scrapped, the last one (and also the oldest of them) being the number 34 which wasn't cut up until 1963.

Numbers 12 and 14 were among those sold and they survived over in Connecticut for the next 35 or 40 years. The 14 was brought back to Long Island in 1997 and has since been restored and displayed on a siding at the Railroad Museum of Long Island in Greenport. Number 12 was brought back to Long Island in the summer of 2002 where it has undergone a similar restoration and is on display at Oyster Bay.

LIRR N52 and N52A CABIN CARS IN ORDER OF CONSTRUCTION DATE

No.	Date Built	Builder	Disposition
33 (1 st)	April, 1916	LIRR	Wrecked February 1924
34	September, 1916	LIRR	Cupola removed 1959; remained in service until 1963
35	October, 1916	LIRR	Scrapped circa 1958
36	December, 1917	LIRR	Scrapped circa 1958
37	December, 1917	LIRR	Scrapped circa 1958
38	December, 1917	LIRR	Used as playroom Camp Pa-Qua-Tuck, Center Moriches, L.I., N.Y.
39	June, 1922	ACF	Scrapped circa 1958
40	June, 1922	ACF	Scrapped or wrecked prior to 1951
41	June, 1922	ACF	Given to Town of Huntington for Park; burned 1964
42	June, 1922	ACF	Scrapped circa 1958
43	June, 1922	ACF	Burned to trucks Long Island City yard; April, 1963
44	July, 1922	ACF	Scrapped sometime between 1949-1950
45	July, 1922	ACF	Scrapped 1963
46	July, 1922	ACF	Given to family at Remsenburg for playhouse 1963
47	July, 1922	ACF	Scrapped 1963
48	July, 1922	ACF	Probably scrapped 1947
16	May, 1925	PSC	Scrapped circa 1958
18	May, 1925	PSC	Scrapped circa 1958
19	May, 1925	PSC	Wrecked at Pinelawn, August, 1943 and scrapped on spot
20	May, 1925	PSC	Scrapped or wrecked prior to 1952
21	May, 1925	PSC	Scrapped circa 1958
22	May, 1925	PSC	Moved to Manorville, L.I., N.Y.
23	May, 1925	PSC	Scrapped between 1951-1958
24	May, 1925	PSC	Scrapped 1960
25	May, 1925	PSC	Scrapped circa 1950-1951
27	May, 1925	PSC	Scrapped circa 1958
28	May, 1925	PSC	Sold to Middletown & New Jersey RR, 1961, burned to frame.
29	May, 1925	PSC	Sold to Seashore Electric Railway, Maine, 1962
30	May, 1925	PSC	Possible scrapped circa 1958
31	May, 1925	PSC	Scrapped circa 1961
33 (2 nd)	May, 1925	PSC	Scrapped circa 1958
10	February, 1927	ACF	Scrapped circa 1958
11	February, 1927	ACF	Scrapped circa 1959
12	February, 1927	ACF	Sold to Branford Electric Railway, early 1962, to Oyster Bay Railway Museum 2002
14	February, 1927	ACF	Sold to Branford Electric Railway, early 1962, sold to Bob Seibert at Valley Railroad in Essex, CT., 1972. Sold to Railroad Museum of L.I. and moved to Greenport, L.I., N.Y May 1997
15	February, 1927	ACF	Scrapped circa 1957

Note missing numbers 13, 17, 26 and 32. These numbers were assigned to four-wheel cabins (class ND) that were still in service up to 1927, with the exception of No. 17, which was taken out of service in 1925.

LIRR = Long Island Rail Road ACF = American Car & Foundry PSC = Pressed Steel Car Company

THE OLD TIMERS

Prior to the arrival of the N52 types, there had been a total of 24 little four wheeled "hacks" that looked a lot like the old ND cabins on the "Penn." Some of these still remained in service up until the end of 1927; this accounts for the missing numbers 13, 17, 26, and 32 that were never assigned among the N52's numbered 10 through 48. Numbers 13, 26, and 32 were built as late as 1911 and were among the five of them that actually remained until 1927. The other two had the numbers 4 and 5, which were not going to be reassigned anyway. Four-wheeler No. 17 went out in 1925, almost coincident with the delivery of the batch of new "hacks" that would ordinarily have included that number. Number 17 was never reassigned either.

ELUSIVE "GHOSTS"

There appears to be quite a mystery concerning "hack" No. 19, which was supposed to have been wrecked at Pinelawn in 1943 and scrapped on the spot. If it was indeed No. 19, and not another car, there's no question that it was destroyed; one end of the frame was compressed into a flat S-shape and it ended up on what was left of its roof with most of the body smashed to bits. However, research photos show a picture of two "hacks" coupled together in Patchogue in June 1948, and one of them has the number 19 on it! The other "hack" coupled to it is No. 33 in the contemporary livery, but this No. 19 still has the old style "L.I.R.R." in initials on the side. Closer examination of this photo shows this particular "hack" to have been built in June of either 1921 or 1924. It's difficult to know for sure, because what appears to be a "21" could actually be a "24," with the point of the digit "four" either obliterated or hidden in the wood joints. But that doesn't make any difference, because the mystery still remains as to where this "hack" came from. None of the other N52 types on the LIRR were built in either 1921 or 1924. Yet we see a No. 19 in the old style livery - badly deteriorated at that - and it has a repacked stencil that clearly reads "1948." It also still has arch bar trucks at that late date. One might guess that there were other N52 types in existence on other roads and that the LIRR might have purchased this one and reassigned the number from the No. 19 that was wrecked. But none of the listings show the arrival of any more "hacks" of this type after 1927. The old style lettering and the aged and decrepit appearance of No. 19 in this photo make it look like some sort of a ghost from the past.

There also remains a question as to the fate of N52 No. 48. Some of the existing listings that I have do show a number 48; while another list does not. According to retired conductor Bob Emery, there was a No. 48, and it was badly damaged at Glen Cove in 1942. All of these "hacks" took a hell of a beating at one time or another with sideswipes and so on. We think that it might have been stored in that condition for the next several years before being scrapped. In any case, it couldn't have lasted very long, because the number 48 was reassigned to one of the two NX23A converted boxcar cabins as soon as they came over to the Long Island from the "Penn" in 1947. The other NX23A received the number 49. These, by the way, were designated NX23A, with the "A" suffix because they had end platforms.

CLASS N52 COMPARED TO THE PENN N5

As previously mentioned, the original N52, No. 33 of 1916, must have been a direct offshoot of the N5 design. If not a stepchild of the "Penn" in its plan, it was surely a stepchild in its construction, which was definitely less expensive than its all-steel counterpart. In a way, this was a decided advantage, and the N52 had the reputation of being a very comfortable caboose. They were very well liked by the LIRR men and perhaps the very nature of what some may consider to be "second rate" construction was indeed an asset for one thing in particular - they were easier to heat. When new, these N52 "hacks" were very well insulated. The inside walls were paneled lengthwise in what appeared to be wood planking of the same material as the exterior siding. The entire ceiling was planked and insulated in a similar manner; the transverse roof ribs (known as "carlines") were not visible except under the roof overhangs of the end platforms.

The interior layout was the same as in the all-steel N5. The centerline of the cupola was likewise situated approximately twelve inches from the center of the car body. In the "short" end were bunks on each side, having cushions measuring 78" x 30", the backs of which were hinged to the wall and could be chained to the overhead to make a double bunk, as in usual PRR practice. In the other end, there was a similar bunk with a hinged back and chain arrangement on one side. This bunk fell a few feet short of the end wall, which had the usual PRR-style hinged-top desk measuring approximately 28" x 30" between the bunk and the end wall. Adjacent to this desk, usually on the sidewall, was one kerosene lamp which was the sum total of the original interior lighting scheme. The train line air gauge was on the end wall, adjacent to the doorjamb. On the side opposite, there was the usual coal and tinderbox,

the standard PRR cabin or "estate" stove, a shelf that served as a table, and a washstand. The washstand and sink originally had the same 16-gallon water tank mounted overhead as in the N5. A milk can was usually carried in the hack so that hot water could be hosed over from the engine. When the diesels came into use, a hot water rig was needed, and I recall having seen in later years an additional tank mounted up inside one of the cupola end walls, with insulated piping going down to what must have been a heater coil in or near the stove. This was probably a thermo-siphon system, in which the heated water would circulate up into the overhead tank and as it cooled it would descend again into the coil to be reheated. Some "hacks" also got a larger cold water tank over the sink at that time.

The cabinet and locker arrangement was again similar to that of the standard "Penn" N5, including a dry hopper toilet in one of the wardrobe lockers. One feature characteristic of the LIRR N52 type was an upright pipe with a weather cap adjacent to one corner of the cupola. This was a vent pipe for that toilet. The lockers on the opposite side had an icebox in the lower center compartment. The tops of the lockers were not cut out into the seats; they instead ran straight across, forming another 78" x 30" bunk on each side, with the same sort of curved steel armrests as the N5. The cushions in the cupola were usually overlaid with another stuffed and pleated cushion or comforter that could be tipped up at the ends to make a backrest. A steel pipe support member about 2 1/2" in diameter ran lengthwise through the center of the cupola cutout on a level with the roof of the main car body. This made it handy to swing down from the cupola seats.

PAINT JOBS

The interiors of the N52's were originally painted in the same mustard yellow color that all "Penn" cabin cars had and, of course, the same PRR red and lettering style was on the outside. Around 1947 or 1948, however, the interior paint scheme was changed. As the "hacks" were shopped over the next few years, the interior walls came out painted dark maroon up to a few inches above the lower sills of the side and end windows, as were the entire faces of the cabinets below the cupola. Everything overhead was white, including the interior of the cupola, except for the inside window moldings which were trimmed in maroon. The aforementioned exterior paint scheme still remained the same as the PRR standard until the late 1950's, when some of the few remaining N52 types were painted bright orange with the name LONG ISLAND in large blue-grey letters.

RETROFITS AND UPDATES

Over the years, the LIRR N52 types underwent the same changes, as did the other cabins on the PRR system as dictated by law or necessity. As first built, they had archbar trucks and "K" brake systems. Some also had "possum-belly" toolboxes, but these disappeared with the changeover to AB brake installations. Spike mauls, a re-railing slug, chains and other such items formerly carried in the "possum-bellies" usually ended up inside, stored in one of the lower bunk boxes or crammed into the seldom-used toilet locker.

In the 1940's, other changes included the conversion to cast-steel integral journal box trucks. Some had leaf springs and others had coil springs. In some instances the trucks were not entirely new; only the side frames would be changed with the cast-steel replacing the arch bar type. At about that time, these "hacks" also got raised railing extensions on the end platforms, along with a remote control angle cock shutoff on each end, including two chains: one for pulling the drawhead pin and the other for disconnecting the air hoses. The angle cock shutoff and chains were used to cut off a pusher engine "on the fly." The entire operation could then be performed from the relative safety of the platform.

The N52's had a brake wheel and outside retainer valve on one end only, but the cars differed. If you were to thus identify the end of the car with the brake wheel and retainer valve as the "B" end, you would discover that what might be the "B" end on one N52 would actually be the "A" end on others. As best I can figure out, all of those built by ACF had the brake wheel on the shorter (bunk compartment) end of the car. All the others built by the LIRR shops and Pressed Steel Car (PSC) Company appear to have had the brake wheels on the other end.

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