



# Train Talks

*Informal discussions by the Pennsylvania Railroad with  
its patrons on matters of mutual interest.*

AUGUST, 1950

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## Better Meals and Service For You on P.R.R. Dining Cars

**T**HERE IS SOMETHING about a meal in the dining car of a fast-moving express train that appeals to the average American.

The gleaming polish of silver against the snowy whiteness of fine table linen; the skill of the waiters; the ever-changing panorama of landscape viewed through the wide windows; the sense of being away, perhaps in far and unfamiliar places—all combine to give enjoyment to the meal and to the journey.

Indeed, it seems that nearly everyone anticipates with pleasure the break in the trip which follows the waiter's announcement: "First call to dinner—dining car ahead." And in order to serve you and other Pennsylvania Railroad passengers when meal time arrives, we operate

dining cars on 170 or more trains daily covering the 13 states which, with the District of Columbia, are served by the Pennsylvania System. Our dining cars also operate on through trains over connecting lines in several additional states.

Service is available on trains whose runs range from the 91 miles between New York and Philadelphia to the 1,051 miles between New York and St. Louis. On many trains the need is for but one meal; on others, two meals and, on a few all-day journeys, all three meals are served. Pennsylvania dining cars traveled an aggregate of more

than 25,000,000 miles in 1949 while serving over 4,400,000 meals.

### Our Aim . . . To Please You

Like most restaurateurs we believe that our first responsibility is to our patrons, and although we try to please everyone, our efforts occasionally fall short of the mark. In this Train Talk we want to tell you something about what we are doing to improve our dining car service. Our sincere aim, backed up by hard work, much thought and planning, is to give you the best food and service in the country.

We even hope to change the thinking of the small number of folks who are like the chap who developed a fondness for a variety of cheese that usually is available on our dining cars. One night one of our cars had sold out its supply of this particular cheese and the patron was greatly disturbed when he learned that he was to be deprived of his usual cheese-and-crackers dessert. A few moments later the train stopped at a station. The steward, seizing the opportunity granted by a brief lay-over, ran at full speed to a nearby delicatessen, bought a small quantity of the cheese and rushed back.

Proudly, the panting steward placed his find before the patron, who demanded to know its source. The steward, beaming modestly, explained what he had done—whereupon the patron became more irate than ever.

“Why,” he roared, “did you have to go and do a thing like that? Don’t you know I would much rather STAY mad at the Pennsylvania Railroad?”!!



Anyone who has had experience with the management of a restaurant knows that solutions must be found each day—and in rapid-fire order—to many problems. In operating our restaurants-on-wheels, however, we must grapple not only with food service problems of the routine type, but with a number that are unique to railroading.

### Few "Refueling" Stations En Route

A wide variety of food items, for example, must be loaded on cars, for, unlike the land-based restaurant which is close to its sources of supply, a dining car may travel hundreds of miles before additional provisions can be taken on board. Indeed, each dining car must carry a quantity of supplies sufficient to meet the needs of a fully-loaded train, although, with the exception of a few trains on which all space is reserved, the number of passengers who will be traveling cannot be forecast with certainty. Dining car men tell of a car that one day served only 35 patrons. The next day, on the same run under identical conditions, it served 125—and no one has ever been able to discover the reason for the sudden spurt in business.

Dining car service must, of course, be available at meal times. The cars must be manipulated among trains—and crews assembled to man them—on a fast-moving schedule. For these and other reasons, dining car service is costly and has long been known as the problem child of the railroad industry.

In a positive, constructive and broad-gauge approach



*Spic and span storage room in our new dining car commissary at Chicago.*

to these problems we are doing many new things, all of which are pointed at a two-fold target: First, to provide you better food and service than ever before at the lowest possible cost to you, and, second, to reduce our losses. We believe you would like to know what we are doing to accomplish these aims.

### Housekeeping on a Huge Scale

The size of our dining car operation alone stirs the imagination. Each day, marketing experts of the department's New York headquarters purchase meat, staples

and produce—all of the highest quality—in quantities sufficient to last the average family six years. These supplies are delivered to the huge, bustling commissary—home base of the Pennsylvania's Dining Car Service—in Sunnyside Yard, Long Island City. In addition, large amounts of top quality foodstuffs are purchased by other marketing specialists in mid-western centers.

Market prices of meats and other commodities often vary widely in different parts of the country and frequently are subject to sharp changes over the span of a few days. Among the many advantages which have accrued from the construction recently of a modern dining car commissary in Chicago, built at a cost of \$600,000, and from an additional investment of \$240,000 in enlarging and modernizing our commissary at St. Louis, are the speed and flexibility with which we now can purchase meats and poultry in quantity at those times when quality is best and the price most favorable.

Both buildings contain a number of modern room-sized refrigerators, which, in combination with similar units at Long Island City, offer what is among the largest railroad-operated refrigeration plants in America. Possibly you (if you are a homemaker) are among the fortunate ones who own a deep freeze storage unit and, like us, you keep a wary eye open for good "buys" at your grocery and meat counter. This, for you and us, is modern, efficient and economical housekeeping at its best.

We are finding new ways, too, to prepare food, all of which enable us to do a better job of serving you.

When you do the food shopping for your family you are no doubt accustomed to stopping in at the market in your neighborhood to select, in a matter of minutes, a steak, roast or other item that is pre-cut, wrapped in transparent material and, with the weight and price clearly marked, is ready for you to take home. The advantages of this new way to shop are obvious: You save time, you can see beforehand just what you are buying and you reduce waste.

Similarly, by the use of what we call the pre-preparation of food we have stepped up our efficiency and



reduced the amount of time needed to prepare food in the small dining car kitchens. In effect, we supply our train chefs with the same sort of pre-packaged food that you find so convenient in your own home.

Our choice steaks, for example, formerly were placed on trains in loin form—and it was the chef's job to cut off the steaks while the train, possibly, was moving along at 70 miles per hour or more. Chops, cutlets, fish and vegetables were taken from commissaries in substantially the same form in which they had been purchased and loaded on trains. Potatoes, too, were peeled on trains.

*Sirloin steaks—a full one inch thick—are pre-prepared at a commissary, saving valuable time in dining car kitchens.*



Today, however, all steaks are pre-cut in commissaries, reducing waste and assuring consistent, generous portions for every patron. Also cut, trimmed and pre-packaged at commissaries are our chops, cutlets and other meats and the fatty parts are rendered in commissary kitchens, providing a plentiful source of rich, sweet shortening. Potatoes, gleaming white and with never an "eye," roll from the newest in automatic peelers, saving hours of work in train kitchens.

### **Fish . . . In and Out of Season**

Fresh-caught fish, of course, is served in season. Also, under modern deep freezing methods, it is purchased in quantity at "the height of the run," is quickly cleaned, filleted and cut into individual portion size. Travelers on the Pennsylvania thus enjoy a wide variety of tasty seafood entrees throughout the year, including salmon steaks, swordfish, white fish, sole, halibut, sea bass and trout.

Another example is celery, always a popular vegetable. Like other foods, it formerly was put on dining cars in its original form. The best stalks were served and the balance often was thrown away. Today, the hearts of celery and the better stalks are trimmed at the commissary and are placed directly on cars when needed. The best leftover parts are used with other vegetables to add flavor and body to soup stocks.

In most dining cars, the kitchen and pantry together take up less room than the kitchen of an ordinary six-room house—yet it is not unusual to serve 300 or more

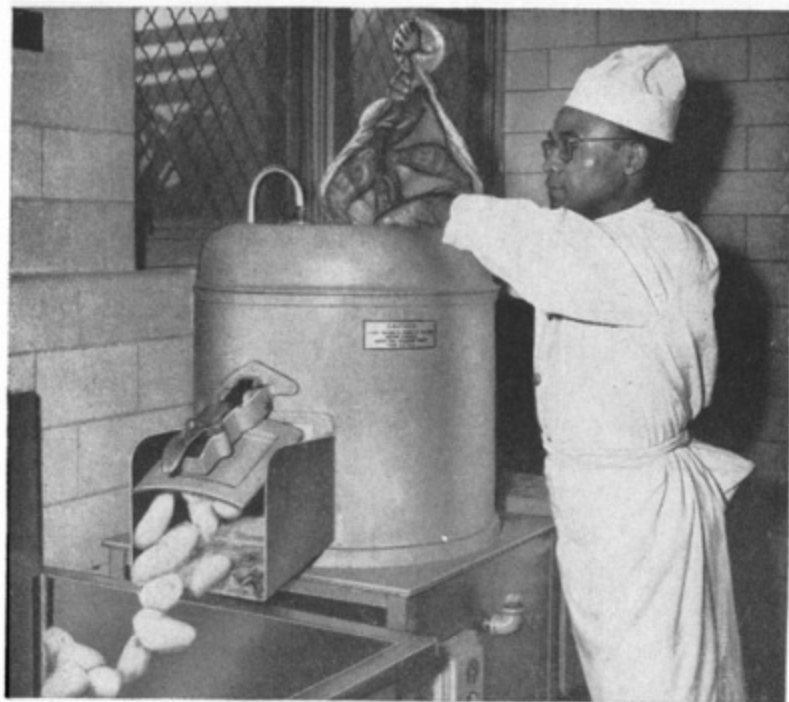
meals a day on some\* trains. Pre-preparation, together with other new things that we are doing to streamline and speed dining car service, is thus an important step in our program of service betterments.

We're giving a great deal of thought, also, to our menus and the choice of food that is served on Pennsylvania Railroad dining cars and we are constantly seeking new dishes and food combinations which will prove popular with our patrons.

Menus are planned by a group of food experts that includes a fully-qualified dietician and new dishes and products are accepted for dining car service only after they have passed the critical examination of the food staff at a weekly test table clinic. Every untried item is tasted and compared with similar proven items placed side-by-side on the test table and is approved only if it measures up to our standards of taste, quality, attractiveness and appeal. Other items now in daily use also are subject to repeated test table examination in order to assure the maintenance of quality standards.

Among our newer entrees, for example, are several popular dishes that are built around the tasty sea-food, shrimp. Each was the subject of a number of test table sessions; each was sampled many times in combination with different vegetables and sauces until the food staff reached agreement that *this* was the perfect dish.

*\*NOTE TO MOTHERS' HELPERS: This means that there are several thousand items—including dishes, glasses, pots and pans and pieces of silverware—to wash, dry and put away every day. And each must be returned to exactly the right place, for there is no waste space in dining car kitchens.*



*Our new automatic potato peelers at the commissaries speed mealtime chores and are the envy of housewives.*

And so it is with every new item—whether a lowly cracker to be served with soups, a new brand of tomato juice or an entree. Our new, lower-priced Combination Suggestions, offering meals somewhat less elaborate than in regular Table d'Hote service, were developed over the test table and are meeting with favorable response on the part of our patrons.

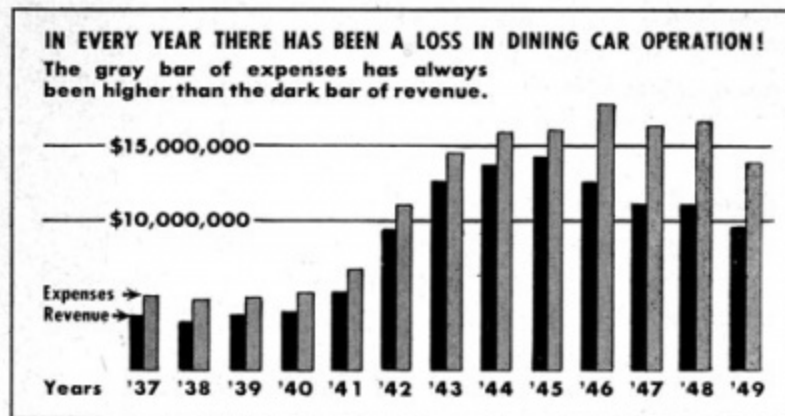
and demonstrate improved procedures. This new method, which has supplanted classroom refresher instruction at commissaries, is typical of the things we are doing today to improve our service and is an important segment of a broad program of education that is going forward in all parts of the department.

No discussion of dining car operation would be complete without something more than a passing reference to its economic side, for, in common with all railroads that offer mobile food service, the Pennsylvania has for many years absorbed the huge losses incurred in its dining car service.

### The "Why" of Dining Car Losses

At the head of the list of reasons why dining cars lose money year after year is the factor of wages, which necessarily have generally followed, cent for cent, the increases in hourly rates awarded other crafts in the railroad industry. While all costs have increased greatly within recent years, few, indeed, have kept pace with the rapid rise of the wage structure of our dining car employes. Cooks in one classification, for example, have received hourly wage increases since 1937 totaling 207 per cent; other cooks are now being paid 246 per cent more than in 1937, while the average wage of waiters is 350 per cent higher than it was only 13 years ago. Wages of other employes also have risen sharply.

Unlike the manager of a land-based restaurant, who can call in his employes on a schedule designed to meet



periods of heavy volume, we must keep dining car crews on cars between meal periods in order to have the necessary help on hand when meal times arrive. In order to serve but one meal—breakfast—on several trains, full crews must remain on the train overnight.

Combined, these factors resulted last year in payroll expense that alone amounted to more than 80 cents per dollar of dining car income. Food and provisions cost 40 more cents per income dollar. Other costs built up to put us "in the red" 45 cents for every dollar we took in. Nor does this take into account the many items of expense for which you pay nothing when you settle the price of your meal check with the dining car steward. Sharing further in the cost of your meal, the Pennsylvania pays the bills for building new dining cars; repairing and remodeling cars, hauling and switching dining cars; cleaning the outside of cars; the air conditioning, heating and

and in all our newer equipment, will be equipped with ultra-violet radiation.

### Millions for New Dining Cars

More than \$4,000,000 will be spent this year and next on the Coffee Shop Lounge cars, the all-electric cars, and on redesigning and modernizing 36 other dining cars. A number of the latter, like new in every respect, will be in use before the end of 1950, with several in the New York-Philadelphia-Baltimore-Washington service.

Our dining car fleet has been augmented during the last two years by 22 completely new dining cars of the most modern design. These include 16 twin-units, built at a cost of \$335,000 each, in which one entire car is given over to dining room area seating 68 passengers in spacious comfort, and six single-unit cars of the latest type costing \$165,000 each. In all, the Pennsylvania's investment last year and this year in new and modernized dining car equipment, including 15 fine new Buffet Lounge cars now in service, will total over \$10,000,000.

New equipment, while of great importance, can be effective only to the degree that our more than 2,000 dining car people—particularly those who serve and come into daily contact with our patrons—carry out their duties. New employes of course are given thorough training in which emphasis is placed on courtesy, deftness and cleanliness in food handling. Our cooks and chefs, for example, receive careful training over a period of many weeks in commissary kitchens and must pass rigorous tests in the art of cooking before joining dining car

crews on the road. And, as standards are bettered, we have found that refresher training is required by even the most experienced dining car steward, chef, cook or waiter, many of whom have built outstanding records over a span of 10, 15 or 25 years or more.

To meet this need, picked training teams, working under a supervisor of food and service, travel constantly over the system, observe dining car crews in action and, following the meal, point out weaknesses in the service

*A skilled chef prepares a salad in the spotless kitchen of a P.R.R. dining car.*





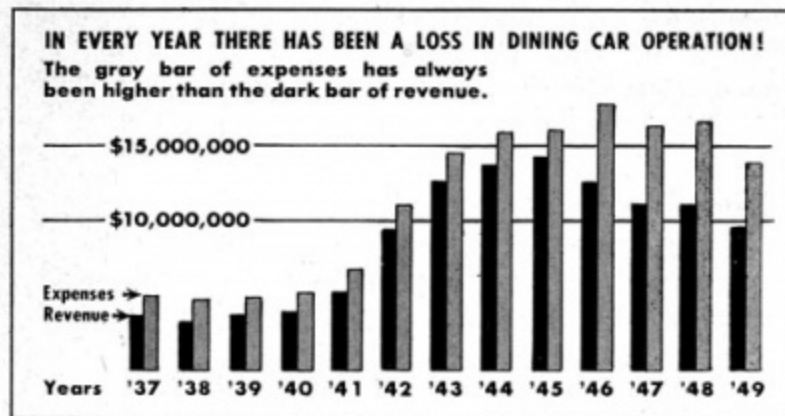
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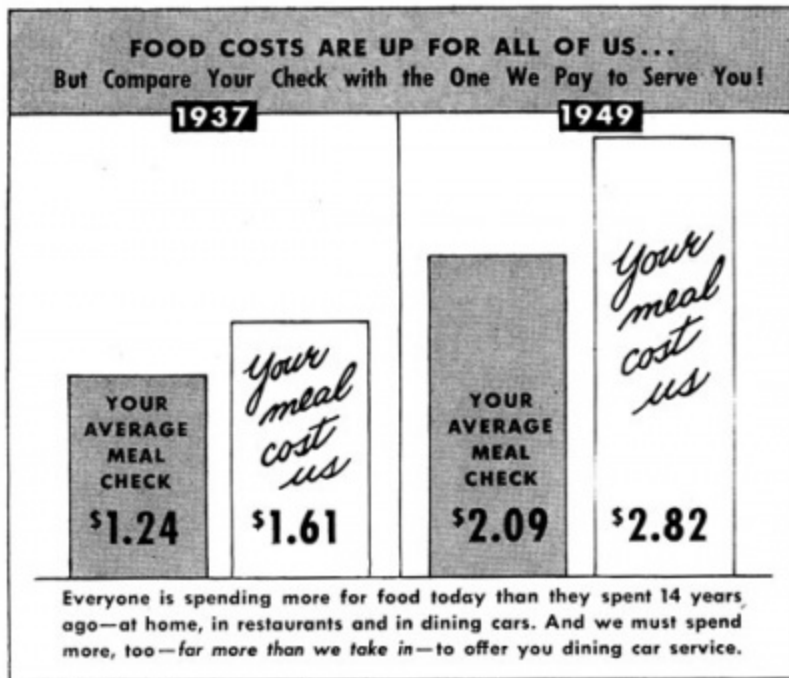
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lighting of cars, and, in addition, pays taxes, interest on its investment and costs of amortization. None of this expense is reflected in the operating deficit of the Dining Car Department, which last year for food service alone amounted to \$4,162,995.

The problem of arranging dining car runs to meet the needs of travelers while at the same time getting full production and efficiency in the assignment of dining car crews is receiving close attention. On many trains breakfast may begin before 7 a.m. and dinner may be

prolonged until after 10 p.m. Meal periods are spread still further in different time zones and in summer under daylight saving time. Assigning crews and returning them frequently to their "home ports" is a giant game of chess, an expensive and complicated game, moving nearly 2,000 men on a board stretching one-third of the way across the continent.

### Dormitories on Wheels

Typical of the economies made as the result of work on this problem are those achieved through the use of dormitory accommodations for crews in twin-unit dining cars. These dormitories make possible the use of "through crews" on many trains in the round trip between New York and our two westernmost terminals, Chicago and St. Louis. "Deadhead" or non-productive time is reduced, and the expense of outside accommodations for these employees is eliminated.

We must be ready at all times to answer unforeseen calls on short notice, to provide dining cars for extra sections of regular trains and for unexpected travel too heavy to be handled by one car. Special movements of large magnitude, such as the Boy Scout encampment at Valley Forge, Pa., this summer, which involved nearly 40,000 meals en route; Presidential inaugurations, the annual Army-Navy football game, heavy holiday travel and other occasions require extra equipment, extra personnel and much carefully detailed planning. It all adds up in cost.

To the task of bettering our service we are daily

**WAGE  
INCREASES  
OF P.R.R.  
DINING CAR  
WAITERS**

1937 30½c per hour	1949 \$1.07 per hour
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The wages of most dining car employes necessarily have followed the upward trend of wages for the railroad industry as a whole, rather than that of the restaurant industry. This has resulted in a payroll expense which last year took 80c of every dollar of dining car department revenue. This is considerably higher than restaurants generally and is a principal reason why high quality dining car service is operated at a loss to the railroad.

applying all of the knowledge of dining car operation gained over many years of experience, to which is added the best of modern techniques in restaurant operation and food merchandising. Our staff includes men of

broad restaurant and hotel experience, as well as those with railroad background.

Recently, for example, we hired a young man, not only thoroughly trained academically in the art and economics of food preparation and service, but with wide experience in the serving of food under mobile conditions in other fields. He has set up, with a corps of food experts and seasoned chefs—many trained abroad—a special unit in the department charged specifically with betterments in our food and service. This unit is constantly developing new dishes, improvements on old dishes, attractive and tasteful ways of serving them, new combinations, new techniques and new efficiencies, all designed to give you better meals at reasonable prices with less loss to us.

### What's In A Name

An interesting sidelight on new and improved dishes is the importance of the name given them. We recently tried out chicken fried in a special way and offered it as Pennsylvania Dutch Fried Chicken. There were few takers. Then the name was changed to Fried Chicken, Kentucky Style, and the dish became a best seller overnight. It is now one of our most popular items. Yes, names mean a lot in this business.

It takes a lot of clean linen—more than 1,500,000 pieces each month—to maintain our spotless standards of service. A modern laundry which we operate at Long Island City washes, irons and folds this vast pile of linen and our savings over commercial rates exceed \$100,000 per year. This is typical of the things that we are doing

today to achieve greater economy, as is also a new print shop, recently installed, which enables us to turn out on short notice the thousands of menus needed over the railroad. Menus can now be planned with a far greater degree of flexibility than in the past and can be quickly changed when opportunities occur to make a good purchase of popular food items in the nation's markets.

*Enjoying dinner in the spacious comfort and attractiveness of a twin-unit dining car. The Pennsylvania now has sixteen of these new cars in service on through trains.*



New dining cars, new types of service; improvements in menu planning and food service; the pre-preparation and pre-portioning of food; our employe training program and increased efficiencies throughout the department—these and other activities are significant as we continue our unceasing efforts to improve and streamline our service while cutting our losses. If, sometimes, as with all things human, we should falter in some detail of our work we ask you to bear with us in knowledge of what we are so earnestly trying to do. Our goal is the world's best dining car system, with the finest of food, equipment, courteous and attentive service and genuine hospitality.

**A**LL OF THE NEW THINGS that we are doing to improve our Dining Car Service . . . all of the new and modernized dining car equipment in service now or on the way . . . are a part of a broad post-war program of improvements in Pennsylvania Railroad service and equipment—the greatest in our 104-year history—which has been under way for several years and will, when completed, cost more than \$247,000,000 for new and improved equipment alone.