

NEW YORK CENTRAL'S REBUILT OBSERVATION CARS



BY RICHARD L. STOVING

Back in the late 1920's, when the Central dished up passenger service in the grand manner, eight standard 70' steel coaches were converted to open platform observation cars for use on three deluxe coach trains. These rebuilds, elevated from obscurity among the ranks of hundreds of ordinary coaches, enjoyed places of honor bringing up the markers at the ends of the Day Coach DeLuxe, The Niagara Falls DeLuxe Special, and, for a very brief time indeed, the Motor Queen. The interesting histories of these trains have been well chronicled by Al Stauffer and Ed May in *Thoroughbreds*.

The accompanying chart discloses the origin, rebuilding data, and renumberings of each car. Although five of the rebuilds were designated lounge-observation cars and the remaining three were classed observation coaches, the eight cars were identical in configuration and capacity. Each car was furnished with 54 chairs.

It will be noted that none of the cars remained in the form of its original rebuilding past the year 1942. Three of the cars retained their status but lost their open platforms when converted to closed observation types at Beech Grove in 1940 and 1941 for the newly inaugurated Pacemaker and the streamlined James Whitcomb Riley. While connoisseurs of rail travel universally lamented the loss of the rear open platforms on crack trains, management rejoiced in the knowledge that all passengers were protected from flying ballast and other dangers which developed as train speeds increased. NYC 53 and 56 became 37-seat dormitory-buffet-lounge-observation cars for the Pacemaker; NYC 52 became a bar-lounge-observation car with 46 seats for the Riley. All three

remained in these service assignments until 1948, when they were replaced by new stainless steel observation cars from Budd. They were retained as protection cars and for extra movements until the general discontinuation of observation car service in the 1950's. According to Bill Edson, who reviewed the historical record cars for these cars, 53 was retired in 1955, and 52 and 56 were both scrapped in 1958.

The remaining five open platform cars enjoyed much briefer moments of glory. In answer to the demands of wartime traffic, they were rebuilt for a second time back to standard coaches at Beech Grove in 1942 and renumbered NYC 2118-2122. Each car was refitted with 83 seats, presumably the non-reclining walkover type. In 1959 coaches 2118-2121 were again renumbered, becoming NYC 2078-2081. The 2081 endured a third rebuilding in 1965, when it was converted to a crew rider coach, NYC 2721, by blanking out the middle twelve windows on each side and adding oil stoves for interior heating. This car was off the active roster by the end of 1967. The 2080 survived in revenue service at least until the PC merger in 1968.

Ed May's research in half-century-old issues of *Railway Age* has revealed references to the original "brown and fawn" livery of the CCC & StL and MCRR cars, but NYC 745, 746, and 747 were painted Pullman green with black roofs, underbodies, and trucks. In the original lettering configuration of the NYC cars, the corporate title NEW YORK CENTRAL was stenciled over a 21' 6" space at the center of the letterboard in 5" gold leaf Roman characters. The letterboards of

the CCC & StL and MCRR cars, in consonance with the standard procedure of the time, were stenciled NEW YORK CENTRAL LINES in 5" Roman letters over a somewhat longer space, while the subsidiary road initials, with periods, appeared in 3" Roman characters at both ends of the letterboards.

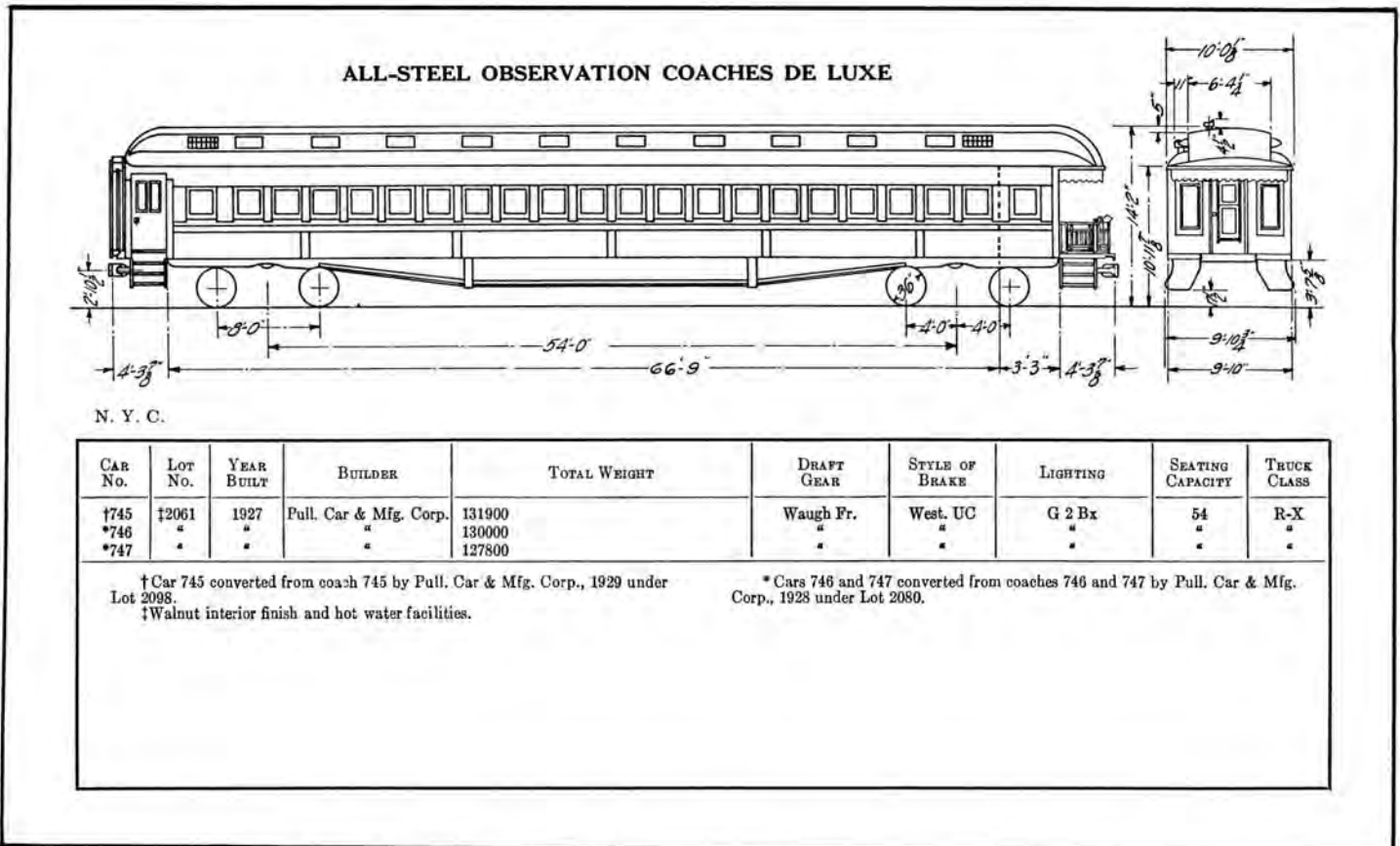
Before 1934, the cars carried road numbers on both ends of each side in a position over the truck bolsters and centered vertically between the bottom of the side of the car and the center of the belt rail. The numerals were 5" high and in the serif style. About 1934, as all NYC heavyweight equipment was shopped or repainted, the road numbers were moved to a single location at the center of each side. Presumably the eight observation cars were restenciled in this manner, but this writer has seen no photographs to support this assumption.

Beginning in 1939, and again as cars were shopped or repainted, Gothic or sans-serif letters and numbers replaced the Roman style. While it is conceivable that the five cars which survived as open platform types until 1942 may have received this treatment, photographic evidence is lacking. All second rebuildings of these cars, of course, featured Gothic lettering.

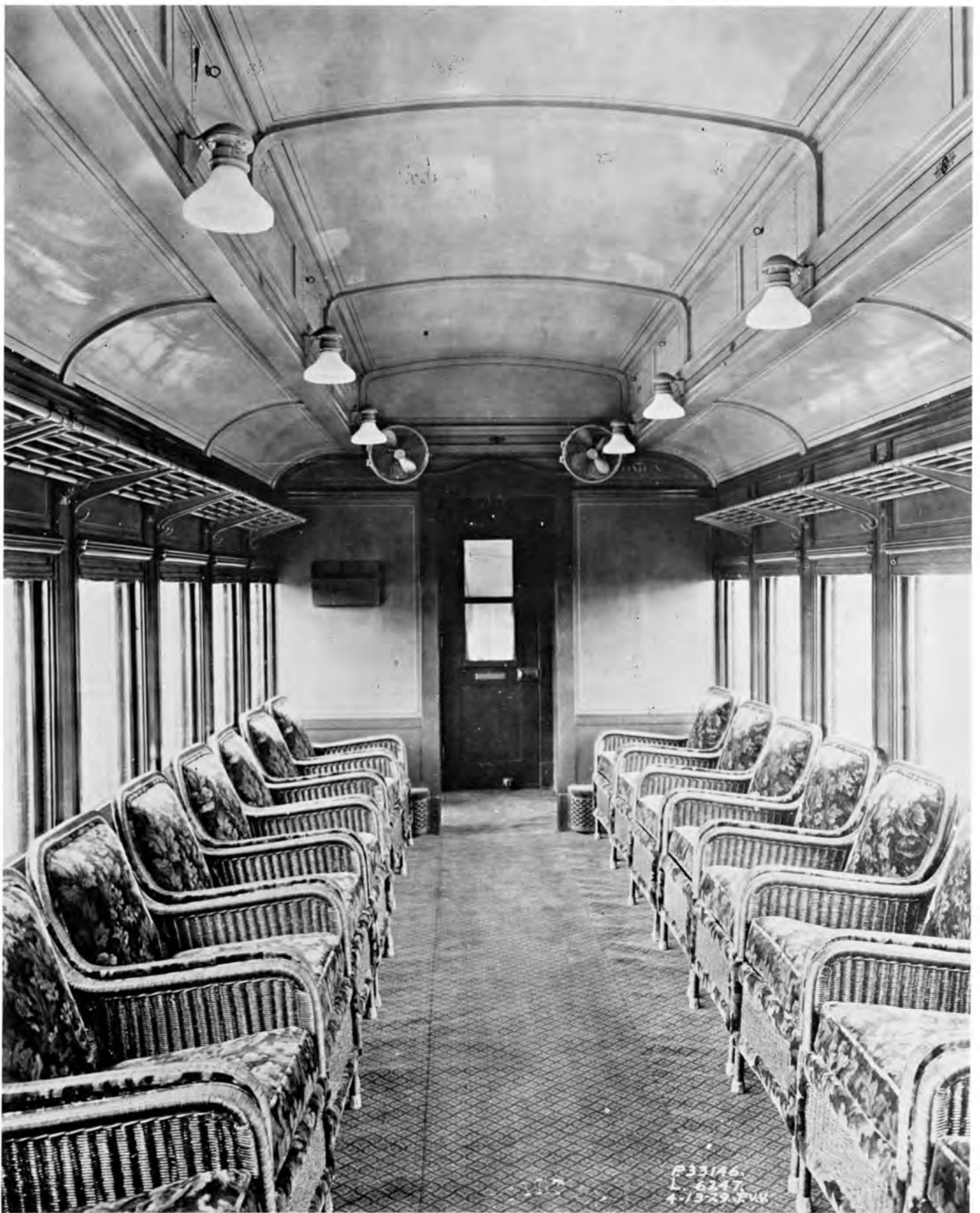
For HO modelers who wish to recreate one of these cars in its glory, j-c Models, P. O. Box 455, South Bound Brook, New Jersey 08880 has brought out a kit, HO-17, which fairly well represents the prototype. Carefully prepared drawings and step-by-step instructions will be particularly helpful to those who have not tried heavyweight passenger car construction. Those who have built j-c or Walthers coaches will find the construction of an observation car an interesting change of pace.



Builder's photo of observation coach No. 745 as it appeared after first rebuilding by PC&M Corp. in 1929.



Official diagram for observation coaches 745, 746, and 747 as rebuilt by Pullman in 1928-29.



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4-13-29 J46

Interesting interior view of observation coach No. 745 as it appeared immediately after first rebuilding. Note that although company records classified this car as an observation coach, the original coach seats have been removed and lounge-type chairs installed.

ORIGINS AND REBUILDINGS OF NYC ALL-STEEL HEAVYWEIGHT LOUNGE OBSERVATION AND OBSERVATION COACH CARS

AS BUILT

FIRST REBUILDING

SECOND REBUILDING

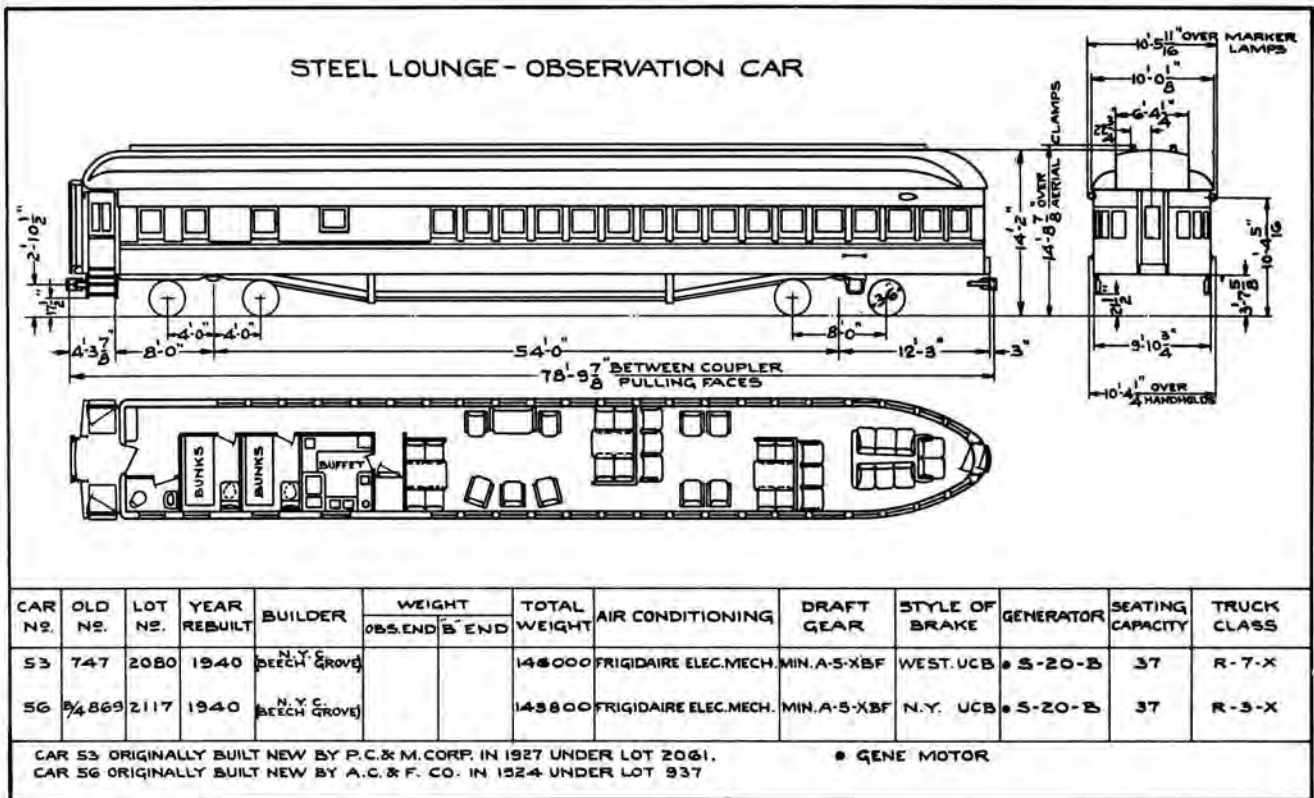
CAR NO.	CAR TYPE	LOT NO.	YEAR BUILT	BUILT BY	NEW CAR NO.	NEW CAR TYPE (7)	(1) NEW LOT NO.	YEAR BUILT	RE-BUILT BY	COMMENTS (3)	1936 Re-numbering	New Car No.	New Car Type	(1) New Lot No.	Year Re-built	Re-built By	Comments
NYC 745	Coach	2061	1927	PC & M	N/C	OBS Coach (Open End)	2098	1929	PC & M	Probably rebuilt for a protection car for "Day Coach Deluxe"	NYC 51	NYC 2118	Coach	2154	1942	B.G.	Renumbered to 2078 in 1959
NYC 746	Coach	2061	1927	PC & M	N/C	Lounge OBS (Open End)	2080	1928	PC & M	Used on "Day Coach Deluxe" when this train was inaugurated in 1928 (2)	NYC 52	N/C	Bar-Lng OBS (Closed End)	(5)	1941	B.G.	Rebuilt specifically for "The James Whitcomb Riley" streamliner which was inaugurated in 1941
NYC 747	Coach	2061	1927	PC & M	N/C	Lounge OBS (Open End)	2080	1928	PC & M	Same as for NYC 746 (2)	NYC 53	N/C	Dorm-Buf-Lng-OBS (Closed End)	(5)	1940	B.G.	Rebuilt specifically for the "Pacemaker" (6)
MCRR 438	Coach	2059	1927	PC & M	N/C	OBS Coach (Open End)	2099	1929	PC & M	Used on "The Niagara Falls Deluxe Special" when this train was inaugurated in 1929 (2)	NYC 57	NYC 2121	Coach	2154	1942	B.G.	Renumbered to 2081 in 1959 Converted to Rider Car 2721 in 1965
MCRR 439	Coach	2059	1927	PC & M	N/C	OBS Coach (Open End)	2099	1929	PC & M	Same as for MCRR 438 (2)	NYC 58	NYC 2122	Coach	2154	1942	B.G.	—
CCC & St.L 869	Coach	937	1924	AC&F	N/C	Lounge OBS (Open End)	2117	1930	B.G.	—	NYC 56	N/C	Dorm-Buf-Lng-OBS (Closed End)	(5)	1940	B.G.	Same as for NYC 53 (6)
CCC & St.L 870	Coach	937	1924	AC&F	N/C	OBS Coach (Open End)	2102	1929	B.G.	Used on the "Motor Queen" during the short life of this train in 1929 (2)	NYC 54	NYC 2119	Coach	2154	1942	B.G.	Renumbered to 2079 in 1959
CCC & St.L 871	Coach	937	1924	AC&F	N/C	OBS Coach (Open End)	2102	1929	B.G.	Same as for CCC & St.L 870 (2)	NYC 55	NYC 2120	Coach	2154	1942	B.G.	Renumbered to 2080 in 1959

ABBREVIATIONS:

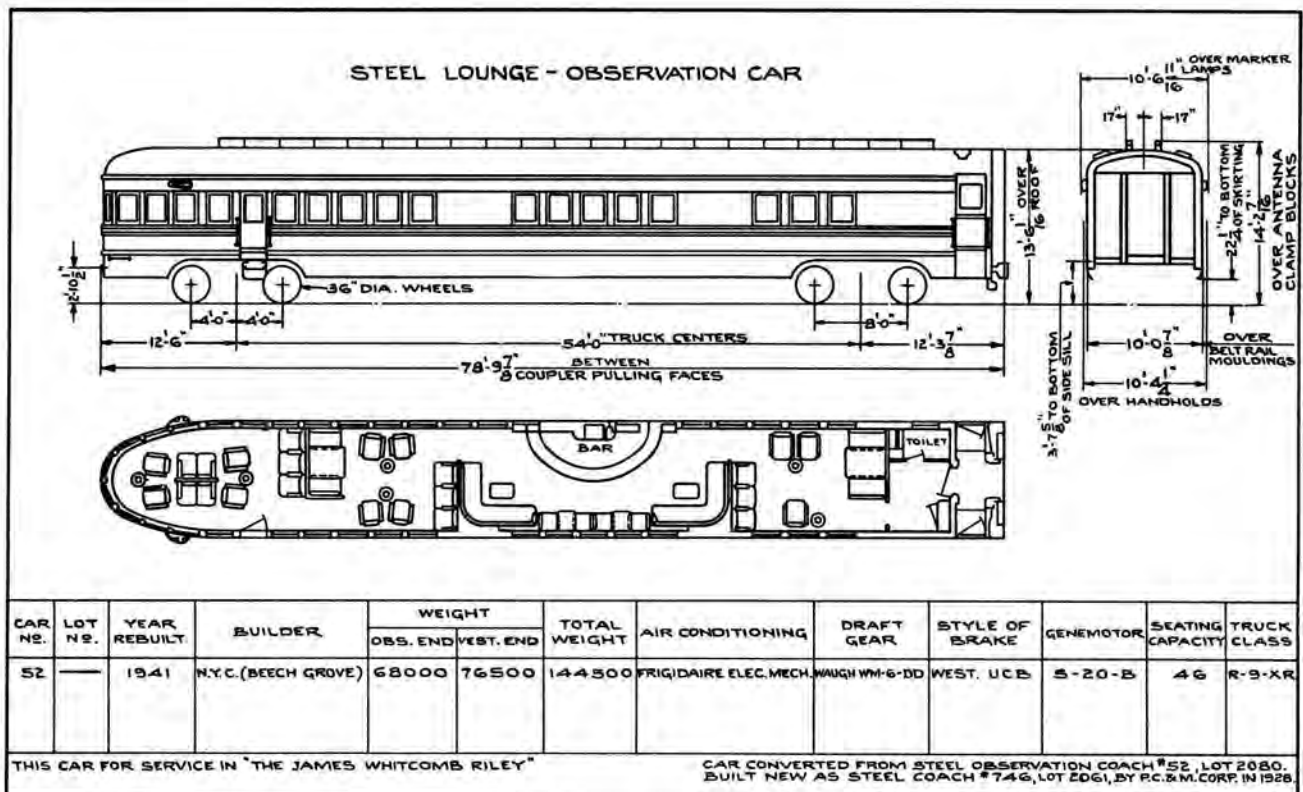
NYC = New York Central
 MCRR = Michigan Central
 CCC & St.L = Big Four
 PC&M = Pullman Car & Manufacturing Corp. (Pullman, Ill. Shops)
 AC&F = American Car & Foundry (St. Charles, Mo. Shops)
 B.G. = NYC (Ex-Big Four) Beech Grove, Ind. Shops
 N/C = No Change

NOTES:

- (1) It was NYC practice to assign a new lot number whenever a car was altered significantly.
- (2) It is likely that these cars were rebuilt specifically for use on these trains.
- (3) These comments drawn largely from PP. 274-277 in THOROUGHBREDS by Stauffer and May.
- (4) All cars air-conditioned either during second rebuilding, or at some time between 1934 and second rebuilding while still in open-end observation configuration. Exact dates of AC installation not known.
- (5) Apparently this rebuilding was not considered significant enough to warrant assignment of a new lot number.
- (6) According to Stauffer and May in THOROUGHBREDS, these cars replaced car Nos. 2598 and 2599 (Ex-Pullman/Lounge/OBS. cars "Catskill Valley" and "Seneca Valley") which were used temporarily when the "Pacemaker" was inaugurated in 1939.
- (7) The car types listed are those used on official railroad documents. Records show that all eight cars were actually identical as first rebuilt, in capacity and configuration, with 54 chairs.



Official NYC diagram of lounge observation cars No. 53 and No. 56 after second rebuilding in 1940 for use on the "Pacemaker."

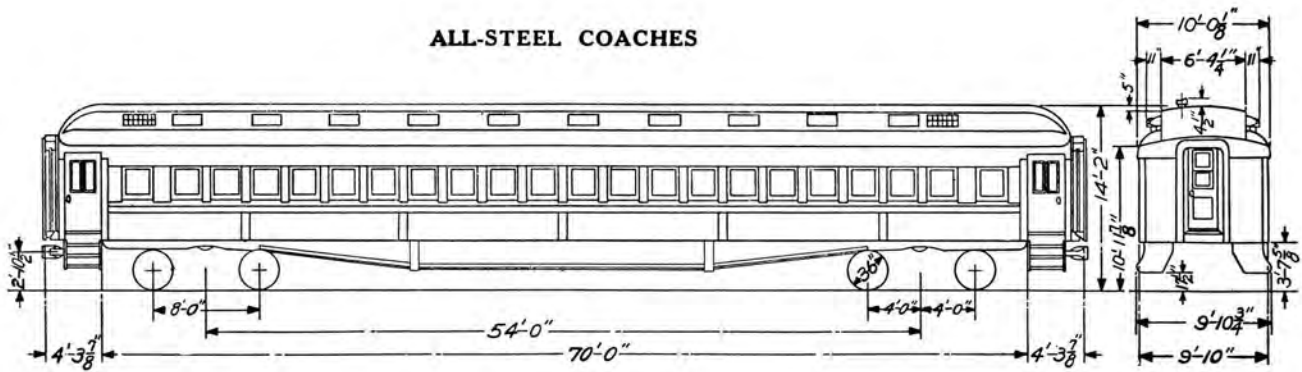


Official NYC diagram of lounge observation No. 52 after second rebuilding in 1941 for use on the streamlined "The James Whitcomb Riley."



Unusual observation end view of either lounge observation No. 53 or No. 56 as it appeared at the Beech Grove shops in 1940, undergoing its second rebuilding for use on the "Pacemaker."

ALL-STEEL COACHES



Official diagram for coaches 745, 746, and 747 as built new by Pullman in 1927.



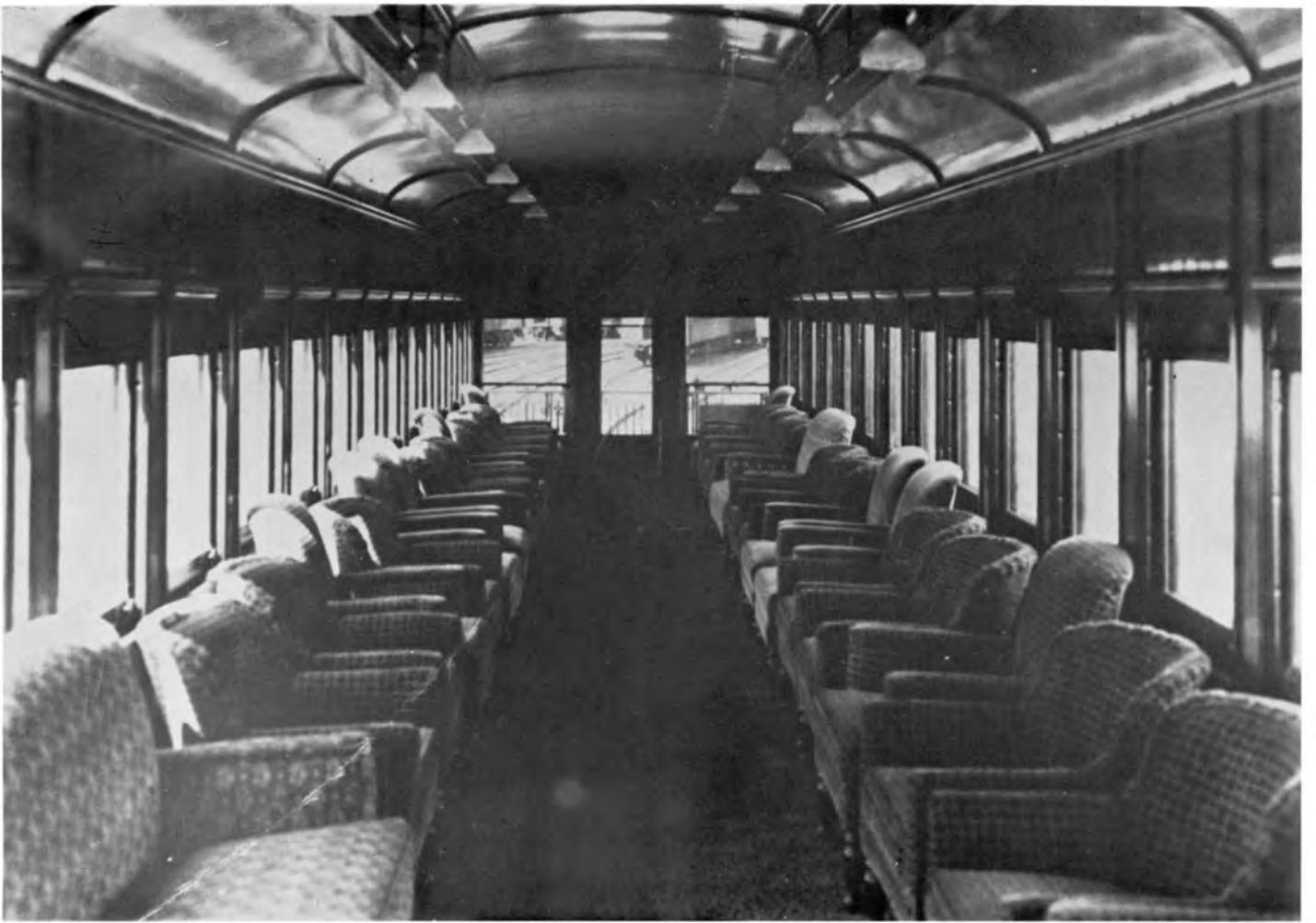
N.Y.C.L. (M.C.R.R.) observation 439 as rebuilt from coach by Pullman in 1929. This car was converted back to a standard coach by Beech Grove (Indiana) Shops in 1942. Paint scheme on car appears to be "brown and fawn" as mentioned in text. George E. Votava Collection



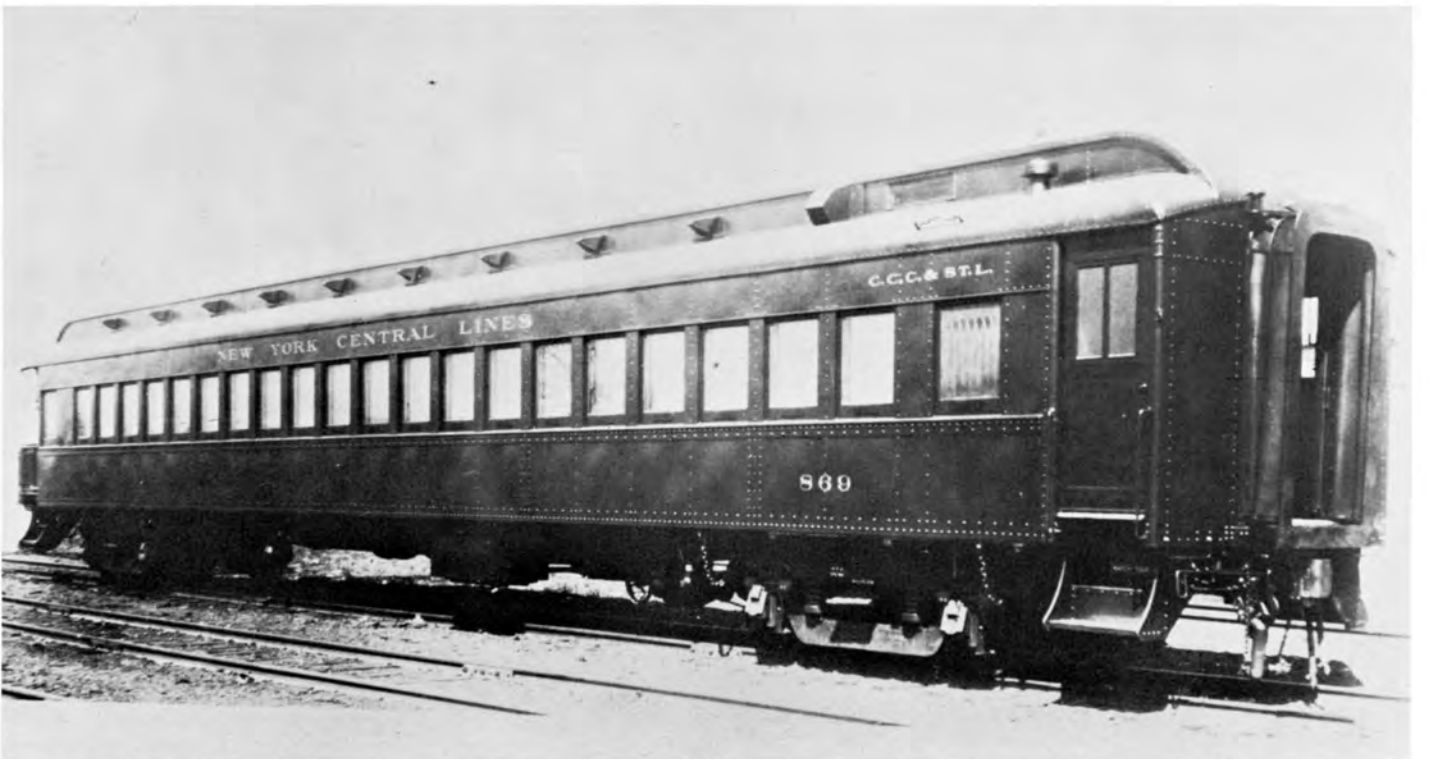
N.Y.C. Observation Coach No. 54 is seen at Rutland, Vermont with a special trip sponsored by the New York Division of the Railroad Enthusiasts Inc. on June 18, 1939. Car was rebuilt and renumbered again only three years later. Photo by William Lichtenstern—George E. Votava Collection



Another view of N.Y.C. No. 54 wearing Railroad Enthusiasts Inc. drumhead. Car was originally built as coach No. 870 for the C.C.C. & St. L. in 1924 by A.C. & F. It was rebuilt in 1929 for a short stint as an Observation coach on the "Motor Queen" and was again rebuilt into a coach and renumbered 2119 in 1942. In 1959 this number was changed to 2079. Photo by William Lichtenstern — George E. Votava Collection



Interior view of C.C.C. & St. L. Observation coach No. 869 as rebuilt by Beech Grove Shops in 1930. Note different types of chairs with varied upholstery patterns. George E. Votava Collection



"Rebuilders" view of C.C.C. & St. L. Observation coach after conversion from a standard coach by Beech Grove Shops in 1930. George E. Votava Collection