



The *Martha Washington*, F-4b number 1036, shows off a coat of Pullman green paint in what is apparently its May 1923 builder's photograph. The leaded glass in the windows is clearly visible. (Ralph L. Barger collection)

# The B&O's Colonial Diners

## *Pullman Products Filled Huge Need in '20s*

By Mark Stewart

In the heyday of railroading, you could pick a level of service much as one would choose a four-star restaurant. Most people traveled with whichever railroad served the area where they lived. However, many a story I have read from various B&O Railroad files tell of quite a few individuals who went out of their way to enjoy the four-star amenities of the B&O.

Service in every car of the train was equal to or better than that of any other railroad. One place this was really apparent was the dining car. No matter who you were, everyone was treated like royalty. The quality of service, décor and food were second to none.

Early in the 1920s a big hole existed in the service that could be provided. After regaining control of their lines that the government had seized during World War I, the B&O executives took a look at several areas that needed immediate attention.

The diners that they had were getting old and were too few in number. It was obvious that the railroad needed to step up to the next level, especially on premier

trains. The answer was to have Pullman build new diners. And voila, the Colonial diners were born.

They were built between 1923 and 1930. The best description I have found was in the B&O employee magazine of August 1943.

"In these dining cars windows, side panels and overhead ovals of leaded glass were reproductions of a doorway in an old colonial home in Philadelphia. Delicate moldings near the ceiling were festoons characteristic of the work of Robert Adams, an interior decorator of the eighteenth century.

"The side wall brackets were suggestive of colonial pewter. The ceiling globes and side wall shapes were especially designed to emphasize the crystal prisms so characteristic of lighting fixtures of that period."

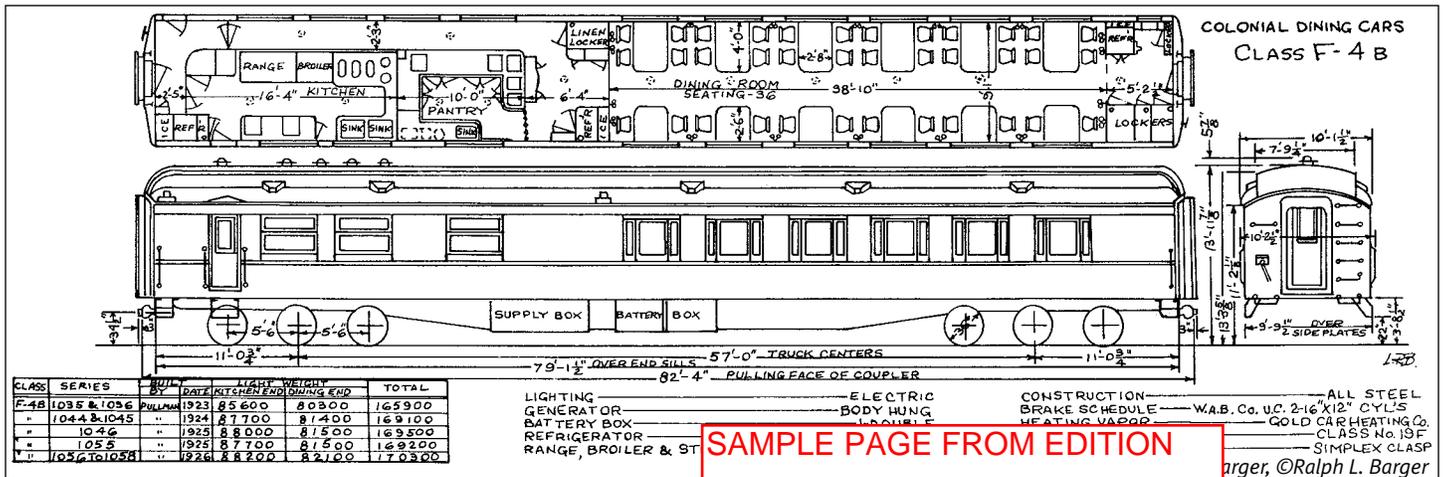
The Hepplewhite chairs upholstered in blue haircloth and furniture were carved out of solid mahogany; wall panels of mahogany and floors of blue carpet also were designed to mimic the Colonial feel. Add beautiful B&O-designed china and

you have an old feel that was very inviting to comfortably relax and enjoy your meal. Patrons were waited on by one waiter to each six people.

Although class F-4c diners were also built during this time period and later, we'll look at the F-4b Colonial diners that had the prestige of originally being named. The names chosen were those of prominent women in American Colonial history.

Documentation shows that number 1059 was built to the F-4b plan like the diners we are describing. These show that number 1058 was named *Mollie Stark*, and 1059 was named *Abigail Adams*. However, some later documentation does not include number 1059 as a named Colonial diner. And number 1058 is named *Abigail Adams*.

Also, "ie" was originally used in the spelling of *Nellie Custis*; it was later changed to Nelly. Number 1035 was originally named *Mount Vernon* because the diners were to be named after Colonial estates; however, that idea was scrapped and the name of this diner was changed to *Betty Zane*.



The original setup of an F-4b Colonial diner, configured to seat 36 diners. The two seat tables were replaced by four-seat ones in 1942, helping accommodate World War II traffic. In February 1943 the order went out to remove the names from the cars.

If one includes the 1059/*Abigail Adams*, the names and numbers used were:

- 1035 – *Betty Zane*
- 1036 – *Martha Washington*
- 1044 – *Dolly Madison*
- 1045 – *Betsy Ross*
- 1046 – *Betsy Patterson*
- 1055 – *Molly Pitcher*
- 1056 – *Nellie Custis*
- 1057 – *Priscilla Alden*
- 1058 – *Mollie Stark*
- 1059 – *Abigail Adams*
- 1061 – *Margaret Brent*
- 1062 – *Virginia Dare*
- 1063 – *Rebecca Rolfe*
- 1064 – *Margaret Corbin*
- 1065 – *Ann Bailey*
- 1066 – *Mary Pickersgill*
- 1067 – *Catherine Greene*
- 1068 – *Hannah Dustin*
- 1069 – *Polly Provoost*
- 1070 – *Evelyn Byrd*

Modern as could be, they were soon upgraded with electric lights and air conditioning. The *Martha Washington* was the first to receive AC. Originally the car received a Carrier Engineering Corp. system. This was a vast improvement over the system tried in car number 1008 in 1906. That had been an ice system invented by J.C. Witter. Its trials went well, but many stops had to be added to replenish the ice. It was short-lived.

The Carrier system lasted about two years, then was replaced by the standard B&O York system that all the other cars received. Many other improvements followed over the years.

In 1929 when the electric lights were

installed, upgraded XLT elliptic springs and rubber inserts were added to the trucks to give a much smoother ride. 1933-34 brought flexible metallic steam heat connectors, followed in 1935 by deck exhaust fans in the dining rooms, and anti-rattling diaphragm supports to reduce noise and vibration. In 1940 locks on the exterior and interior doors and cabinets were installed.

1942 brought a change of interior paint schemes. Gray had been the color as built but this was changed to a golden tan. A new seating arrangement provided space for 48 people as opposed to the original 36. This was accomplished by changing the two-seat tables to four-seat ones.

New seats had a small foot on the backs of the legs to keep the seats from rolling backward. Although some rubber tiles had been replaced earlier, most of the rest were now replaced with a mosaic tile similar to the tiles that cars 1066-70 had been built with.

Over time age took its toll on the cars, which were in constant use. At a time when named trains were being upgraded, diners too were rebuilt to fit the interior and exterior looks of the newer trains to meet the public's expectations.

This included some new roofs, windows, sides with or without skirts, new blue/gray/gold paint scheme on some and blue with gold stripes on others.

Starting in the 1930s and continuing into the 1940s, a number of cars received roller-bearing trucks. But on February 15, 1943, the cars lost a little bit of their stature when the order was given to

remove the names as they went through the shops.

In 1943 notice was given to a design that the NYC was using in their diners—glass partitions between tables in the dining cars. As a trial, Plexiglas partitions were incorporated in car 1070 during its upgrading in 1943. They were well liked, but this was the only car so equipped. In 1951 the federal government issued regulations regarding water quarantines, so new facilities were added to comply with these regulations.

Out of all the upgrades came several subclasses over the years. Between 1943 and 1945 all but four cars were upgraded to class F-4bm. The exception: Numbers 1061-62 were upgraded to F-4ba in 1942. Car number 1045 was upgraded to F-4bb in 1943 and car number 1035 was upgraded to F-4bc in 1946. Later several cars were upgraded to F-4bn from F-4bm.

F-4ba's have two dates shown for upgrading. The drawings show that these cars were approved for upgrade August 12, 1938. The equipment ledgers show car number 1061 as having been finished December 31, 1942, and car number 1062 being completed December 17, 1942. These cars received round roofs, streamlined sides, full skirts and full-width diaphragms. The skirts would be opened up later to allow easy access to the trucks. Full width diaphragms would also give way to narrow ones.

The Georgian windows were originally retained but were upgraded later. The blue, gray with gold stripe paint



SAMPLE PAGE FROM EDITION

Bruce Elliott believes this photograph was taken in one of two lunch counter coaches because of the serving arrangement and the Capitol Grill plates in use. Service with a smile, anywhere in the train. The photographs of B&O dinners scattered through this text are from a brochure for *The Columbian*. Anyone hungry? (B&O Railroad Museum collection)

# Cooking B&O

## *Where Did Those Recipes Come From?*

By Tom Greco

It was well documented that the Baltimore & Ohio's dining car cuisine—its food and service—stood head and shoulders above that of other railroads—and most restaurants. And it should be no surprise that this was due in great part to the direction and support of President Daniel Willard (1910–1942). For whatever faults or shortcomings the man might have had, Willard was a cult hero, his cult being the 50,000 employees of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, its customers and friends.

Willard was partial to epigrams—short, pithy statements meant to catch the eye and stick in the consciousness of his people. My favorite of these recognized the stark reality of competition while offering the means to prevail:

“No matter how hard we try, we cannot make the Baltimore & Ohio the greatest, straightest or richest railroad [can't you just see “Uncle Dan” rolling his eyes in the general direction of Broad Street in Philadelphia?], but we can, if we try hard enough, create for it the reputation of being the best railroad in the world in point of service. This we can do.” And this they did.

It was a time when railroad passenger service represented almost literally “the only way to go” for the medium- or long-distance traveler, and that business was deemed worth keeping, cost what it might. A carrier's dining car service, then, was regarded as a window through which one might view and assess all services offered by the company, be



Lamb chop dinner

that passenger or—more importantly—freight. It was felt that potential shippers who recognized good service aboard a B&O passenger train might expect similar conscientiousness to attend the transport of their goods.

Quality as perceived in a restaurant is based on numerous factors. Surroundings. Ambiance. Price. Cordiality of

# The Best in the Business

## Tales from Dining Car Service

The B&O was proud of its oft-cited reputation for offering the best dining car service in the country. Virginia Tanner, assistant editor of *Baltimore & Ohio Magazine*, wrote this in the March 1946 issue after plaudits from the redoubtable Lucius Beebe, author, railfan and all-around raconteur:

“For the facts, go to an authority! Recently a real orchid was handed the B&O’s meals by no less an authority on the subject of food than the widely read magazine ‘Gourmet’. In an article written by Lucius Beebe, well-known author and an authority in his own right on railroading and travel, the B&O’s dining car fare was rated as good as the best in the country, and high praise for its continued high quality throughout the war was given. In this much-appreciated tribute, *Manager of Dining Car & Commissary Department* H.O. McAbee and his staff may take justifiable pride.”

Correspondence with the folks at *Gourmet Magazine* yielded some information on what it was that Beebe said that made the B&O so happy. Beebe was writing in his monthly column “Along the Boulevards” in the January, 1946 issue of *Gourmet*. Some excerpts from this lengthy column follow.

Beebe criticized the poor quality of food on “many railroads, and to name names, the Pennsy in exaggerated particular,” which, he claimed, “Indulged their virulent hatred of the demon passenger to a degree of insolence and starvation combined.” Beebe then lauds “Trains which have kept the faith and provided comfort and good food throughout a period of general abuse and imposition”: the Baltimore & Ohio, the New Haven, *The Twentieth Century Limited* and *The City of San Francisco*.” Beebe had honed his opinion to the point of naming specific trains whose cuisine was noteworthy. But only one railroad besides the B&O rated a blanket endorsement for its dining service as a whole.



Always service with a smile. The B&O dining car crews were known for their friendliness and efficiency, and over time they developed a rapport with regular travelers on their trains. Nobody went hungry on the B&O; see page 22. (B&O Railroad Museum collection)

### A Tough Night on the Philadelphia Express

This was a memorandum from Howard O. McAbee, manager of the dining car department, to Vice President of Operations and Maintenance Charles W. Van Horn. When this was written, Train 36, The Philadelphia Express, left Washington at 6 p.m. It was scheduled to depart Camden Station in Baltimore, where this story begins, at 6:45. It was Saturday evening, November 8, 1941:

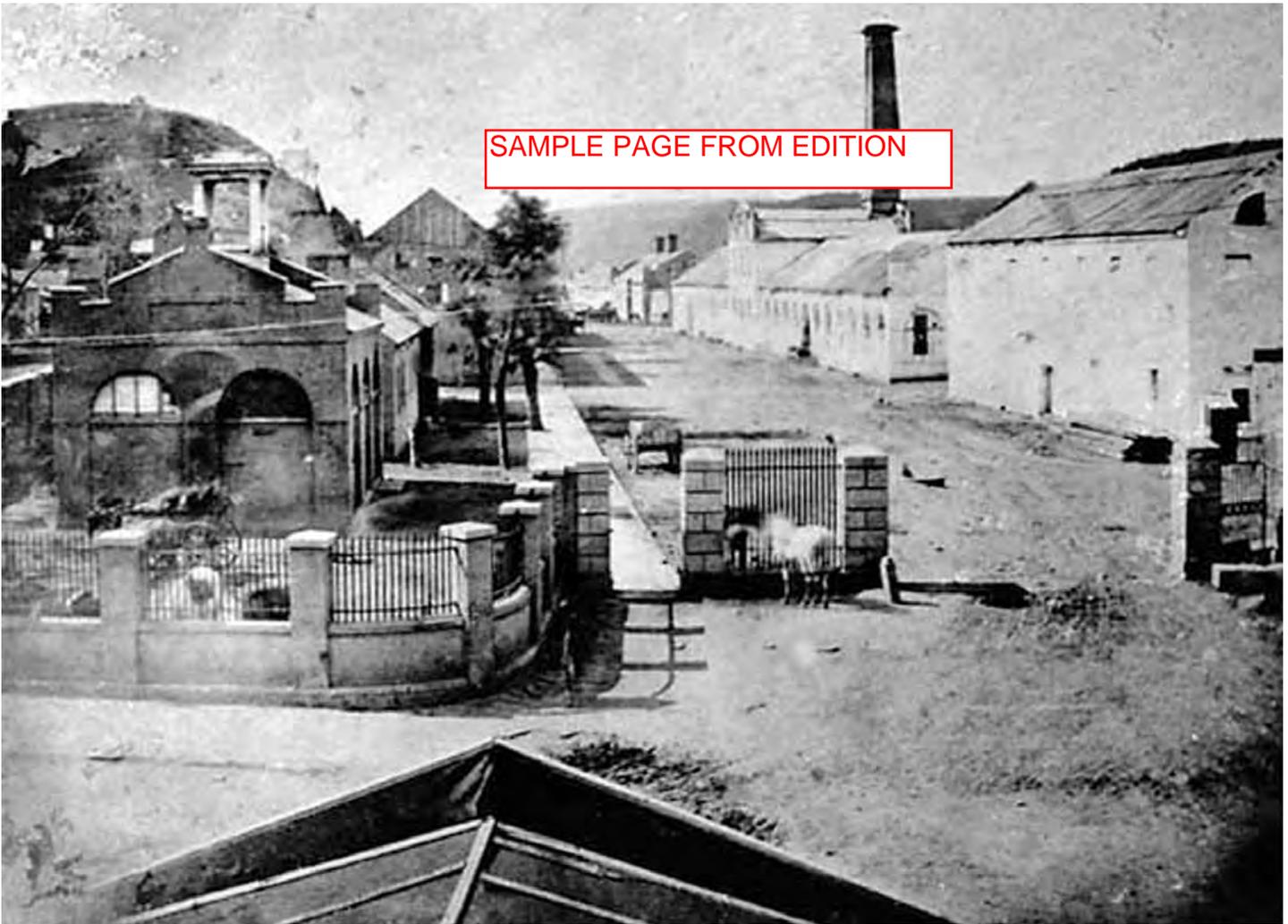
Baltimore – November 10, 1941

Memorandum for Mr. Van Horn:

As an indication of what some of our men have to contend with, am quoting report from Mr. George Bennett, Waiter-in-Charge, Car 2016 on Train 36, under date of November 8:

“Tonight the travel was heavy on Train 36 as result of the football game at Baltimore. Among the passengers who entered the dining room at Camden Station was a party of four whom this letter concerns.

“All twelve seats were occupied leaving Mt. Royal Station and several were waiting to be served... [The party in question] were in a very jovial mood assisted by artificial stimulation, but did not seem at the time to be over-intoxicated... As the meal progressed, the ‘party’ became more exuberant. It was found that they were consuming whiskey from a pint bottle which they had with them. I inquired of the two gentlemen not eating if they wished to be served dinner. Upon being told that they did not, I asked if they would object to relinquishing



This circa 1862 photograph shows the main entrance to the Harpers Ferry Armory. The “fire engine and guard house” (John Brown’s Fort) was the first building on the left as one entered the armory grounds. (Historic Photo Collection, Harpers Ferry NHP).

# The B&O Meets John Brown

## *Raid in 1859 Foreshadowed Railroad’s Coming Woes*

By Nick Fry

October 17, 2009 is the 150th anniversary of the attempt by John Brown to incite a slave insurrection at Harpers Ferry, now West Virginia. At the time Harpers Ferry was one of the major arms factories in the United States, capable of producing 1,500 to 2,000 rifles a month. A hundred thousand muskets and rifles were reported stored there. Brown intended to use arms captured from this site to arm slaves who would escape their masters and join his military force.

The insurrection was thwarted through a combination of poor planning and execution on the part of Brown and his men and the timely response of the

townspeople and militia companies of Virginia and Maryland. The insurrection was finally put down when a contingent of United States Marines under the overall command of Robert E. Lee, then a colonel in the United States Army, stormed the last refuge of Brown’s insurrectionists and handed the survivors over to the federal marshal for prosecution.

The B&O Railroad provided crucial help to the government forces during this event. The first reports of Brown’s uprising were relayed to Washington by way of B&O Railroad employees and the railroad carried the Marine contingent under Lt. Israel B. Green and Col. Lee

and his volunteer aide, Lt. James Ewell Brown Stuart, from the capital to the site of action.

Brown and his cohorts had spent the weeks prior to October 16 in the vicinity of Harpers Ferry. Brown rented a farmhouse in Maryland and began assembling a collection of guns and pikes to arm the expected thousands of slaves who would join his nascent army. On the night of October 16, 1859, after Brown and his subordinates had met at the Kennedy Farm, the group embarked on their short-lived and ill-fated expedition.

At 10:30 they approached the bridge that carried the B&O Railroad and the