THE DELIGHTS OF PULLMAN DINING USA 1866 – 1968

By Terence Mulligan

Pullman Car Services Supplement Edition - April 2007
Cover Photograph of Pullman hotel car "City of Boston" taken in 1867 with very substantial, plain china, the brand new silver plated flatware arranged in fanciful pyramid shapes, the water carafe, the waiter's silver tray and evidently a "City of Boston" menu or descriptive brochure, or both, set inside a drinking glass. T.Mulligan Collection.

Welcome to the first Supplement Edition to Coupe News

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Gilded Age Menu, 1896, for Extra Fare “Florida Special”.
PULLMAN HOTEL CAR

Note several Hotel Cars of 1867 had unusual, unsuccessful, eight-wheel trucks.

Trains cross the continent in a swirl of dust and thunder, the leaves flying down the tracks behind them. The great trains cleave through gulch and gulley, they rumble with spoked thunder on the bridges over mighty rivers, they toil through hills.... - Thomas Wolfe, “Telemachus”
It is 1929, a peak year in which Pullman carried 33 million first class passengers in 9,000 Pullman cars, or 90,000 a night, over 137 railroads. People of affairs in a hurry travel warp and weft across America aboard ninety Pullman-only Limiteds such as the “Crescent” to New Orleans, the “Broadway” to Chicago, and the “California Limited” to Los Angeles. Countless lesser trains of mixed coach, sleeper or parlor accommodation bring first-class rail service; it is said, within thirty miles of any American doorstep. These travelers are hungry.

You are sipping a cocktail in your green baize-upholstered sleeping car compartment. At hand in your long, dark green all-Pullman express, besides numerous sleepers, is a club car with library and cigars, shower, barber-valet, maid-manicurists, stenographers, ladies lounge in the observation, and one last luxurious essential for a supreme journey.

It is 6 P.M. Your stomach stirs. Brisk feet and voices pass in the corridor. You put out your cigarette, check your billfold and straighten your tie as a smiling waiter ringing C-F-A-C on Deagan hand chimes, or your white-jacketed Pullman porter announces: “Yes sir, ma’am, dinner is served in the dining car forward.” You leave your cocktail on the window sill to check track smoothness.

Moments later in the quiet light of the soberly paneled dining car, a waiter in a long white apron hands you a menu as good as your city club, you write your order on the check provided, note the flowers on the tables, the pink in the steward’s lapel, the glittering clientele from business, arts, politics, leisure, and marvel at this bubble of civilization moving across the land.

George M. Pullman adapted or invented this seamless sequence of living well – especially dining well – on a train. From the first meal in the first Pullman Hotel Car in 1867, his fetish for quality and his P.T. Barnum flair immediately persuaded the upper middle class and commercial travelers tired of indigestion and – much more slowly – the railroads themselves, to accept nothing less than white-gloved dining service.

Here are some menus and memorabilia of that journey.
Earliest-known Pullman menu, 1866, printed on silk. Before even the first Hotel or dining cars came into being, the Alton, CB&Q, C&NW and Michigan Central railroads ran Pullman sleeping car excursions for the press, railroad decision-makers and politicians to advertise this new overnight service. Superb cold refreshments were provided aboard. Dining tables and kitchens with stoves on Pullmans were still a year in the future. Image source: Private collection.
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Holiday Food Every Day

In 1859, Pullman introduced #9, his first sleeping car. Webster Wagner and other aggressive competitors were ahead of him. The Civil War interrupted but Pullman began producing lavish sleepers in 1864/5. U.S. railroad mileage was exploding. The new, long distance trains, running fast, stopped irregularly at railroad depot cafes so an entire trainload of hungry passengers, as many as three hundred, could leap off and in the words of the elder John D. Rockefeller, “stuff your cheeks like a squirrel and jump back on the train,” as it whistled off. Thirty minutes of tumult. Harvey Houses along the Santa Fe Railroad in the far west and a few others notable for extraordinary food and efficient service were exceptions.

At first to relieve their new Pullman patrons of this jumping on and off dining stress, a few roads, the Great Western Railway of Canada, the Michigan Central and the CB&Q in 1866-67 contracted to lease from Pullman something altogether new, sleeping cars with actual dining facilities aboard. So-called Pullman Hotel Cars, named “President,” “Kalamazoo,” “Western World,” “City of Boston,” “Aurora” and a few others, some with the new 16 wheels, were the novel result, built by the railroads to Pullman’s instructions. Small one-man kitchens sat in the middle of the cars, table tops were inserted among the numerous seats of the sleeping sections on either end of the cars at meal time. A cook and a porter/waiter provided service. Florence Leslie, writing in her husband’s “Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper” in 1877, noted that on such a car on a transcontinental journey west from Chicago she delighted in: soup, fish, entrée, roast meat, vegetables, dessert, black coffee. And at sensible meal hours. Pullman Hotel Cars on the Pennsylvania Railroad at that time offered additional delicacies: tongue, lobster, game birds snipe, quail, plover, teal; even bottled Worcestershire sauce, tomato catsup, and considerable still and bubbling alcohol.

But there was a drawback: these new Pullman Hotel Cars served only their occupants. To rectify this limitation, the next year, 1868, Pullman devised and had built the very first full dining cars, dedicated cars, restaurants on wheels, “Delmonico,” “Southern,” and “Tremont” to serve meals to everyone on a train, obviating the meal stops altogether. It quickly became clear, however, that these cars and more a-building operated at a loss, especially under obligatory-profit Pullman lease, and the railroads balked, the aforementioned Santa Fe, for example, not ordering any dining cars until 1891, relying like most railroads on their profitable line side eateries, many turning to dining cars on long distance trains only when their parallel competitors did so. The Union Pacific, B&O, CB&Q and Pennsylvania, however, were early users on their most prestigious trains. In time, cars were built by Pullman himself in Detroit, later in Chicago where Commissary headquarters were established also.

In 1892, Pullman itself operated 50 full dining cars leased to several railroads, 4.4 million meals being served in that one year.
These 1876 chromolithographed trade cards (fill in your business name and message in the white space), were printed by L. Prang & Co. of Boston, who also printed the first U.S. Christmas cards. Collectors relished them for extravagant meals promised aboard Pullman Hotel Cars.
Victorian diners toast each other, upper berths indicate a hotel car, not a full diner.
In 1896, on particularly lavish runs, such as the “Florida Special,” drinks exceeded meal offerings, excepting while crossing Indian Territory or, in this case, half the states the train traversed.

Overwhelming prosperous Victorians from the beginning with opulence and superabundance in car building, food, drink and every amenity, thereby persuading them to go Pullman instead of the competition, was one bare knuckle tactic employed against Mann, Wagner and others who fought for the same highly profitable first class rail passengers.
Dining car “La Rabida,” built for display at Chicago’s 1893 Columbian Exposition had a surprisingly restrained exterior, belying the most over-the-top dining car interior in the company’s history. The standard Pullman brown exterior color scheme with florid gilding lasted until exactly 1900, when black-based Pullman green with simpler gold fine lining replaced it system-wide, excepting Tuscan red for cars leased to the Pennsylvania and deviations for a few other powerful renegades. After Pullman abandoned the color, the identical brown, identified in the public’s mind with Pullman excellence, was adopted in 1915 by UPS for their delivery truck fleet and remains today.
The Puritan and a Sea Change

When George Pullman died of a heart attack in 1897, ex-Secretary of War and Pullman’s General Counsel, Robert Lincoln, an austere man, son of Abraham Lincoln, succeeded him as interim and in 1900 permanent president of the company.

Menu New York Central Sleeping Car Co, later called Wagner.

In 1899, William H. Vanderbilt also died, the key backer of the Wagner Palace Car Company, Pullman’s greatest and last major American rival in the sleeping and parlor car leasing business. After this death, the Pullman Company by an exchange of stock valued at 36 million dollars, bought out Wagner at last, December 30, 1899, picking up all New York Central and lesser routes,
534 sleepers, 136 parlors, one diner, one hotel car, 9 private cars, Buffalo, N.Y.
car shops and three members of the Wagner board, including the then president,
Doctor Webb.

This left Pullman a near monopoly provider of first-class rail service in the United
States and some parts of Canada and Mexico. Having bested all comers in its
first thirty-three years in business, and with Pullman himself, the master of
display, dead, lavishness on the cars as a marketing tool disappeared. Even the
brocaded name "Pullman's Palace Car Company" dropped simply to "The
Pullman Company" in 1900. Plainer tastes were pushing out Victorian glories
anyhow with the new century, but while 50% of a new Pullman car's cost in the
90s could be expected for woodworking, carving, painting, gilding, decorating
and mind-boggling upholstery; the new Lincoln regime let it go. Uniformity and
restraint of design and decoration came in. Extravagance of historical styles was
replaced by Arts and Crafts and Mission car interiors, moving to a quiet
classicism later. The gilded age was over; food service became simpler, too.

The majority of Pullman staffed, furnished and operated full dining cars were built
for premier trains in the 1880s and early 1890s. Their tenure was short. By
1900 most had been sold outright to the railroads to operate themselves,
providing their own crews, style of regional cuisine, linen, monogrammed or
lettered china, silver flatware and hollowware, and with the railroad name, not
Pullman, on the dining car letter board.

As early as 1892, of all 2,239 Pullmans on the rails that year, 650 were buffet-
sleepers or buffet parlors. After roughly 1900 and until 1932, these cars or newer
cars like them provided what meal service the company offered, outlined in this
notice of 1917:
Glass plate photo of PRR all-Pullman flagship “Pennsylvania Limited,” at Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, 1894. Dining car, lit by electricity, is second behind locomotive’s tender.

“No dining cars are regularly operated by the Pullman Company, but dining car service is almost invariably provided on trains to which Pullman cars are attached; and on those runs on which no dining car is provided, Pullman buffet cars are frequently operated, containing a small kitchen which is attended by the porter. The Pullman Company’s chief business, however, is the furnishing of sleeping car and parlor car service.”

Pullman flourished meanwhile, the building of freight and passenger cars, streetcars, eventually even automobile bodies, and its leasing arm, growing to 4,138 cars in 1905 were its chief business. The full dining car of the 19th century was a little ahead of its time, needing a bigger economy, but by the booming 1920s, railroad operated dining cars were commonplace, and outstanding cuisine could shift the passengers of one railroad to its competitor.
Where George Pullman’s regime ordered highly decorated china, oyster plates and all, from firms in Limoges for his Hotel and dining cars also for private cars; Lincoln’s administration, for the sleeper buffet and parlor buffet cars which replaced them by the early 1900s, went to a stark, utilitarian hospital-white china with a thin pinstripe, the “Calumet” pattern, generally avoided by collectors today. This was made by Bauscher and Rosenthal in Germany; made in the teens, 20s and until the early 30s by Syracuse China. To accompany it, new severely plain knives, forks and spoons in the “Cromwell” pattern appeared, and would have pleased the stone faced Puritans of the Jamestown Settlement.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT PULLMAN MENU  October 6th 1902.
The grand, folding Pullman menus of the 1890s shrank to one side of a card, but quality remained. On buffet cars after 1900, the mutton chop was a favorite. In the late 1920s, stardom shifted to the Double English lambchop, outselling every other offering, even beefsteak, and it remained the favorite through the 1950s.

**LAMB CHOP MENU RIDER** Pullman’s most-requested meal, 1920’s through 1950’s.

**TONGUE MENU RIDER---FDR’S FAVORITE** Franklin D. Roosevelt’s favorite Pullman lunch.
During the First World War, Pullman rebuilt hundreds of old wooden sleepers to carry troops to embarkation and mustering-out points, and, under U.S. Government control 1918-1920, provided basic food service to the doughboys. Hospital trains, seven of them with kitchen cars, were likewise provided by Pullman.
“No Chaperone, Let’s Misbehave” – the 20s

Before 1914, a limited number of Americans traveled first class by train. In the 1920s, they traveled in droves, reaching a peacetime peak in 1925, and it was cheap. Lincoln retired in 1911; Champ Carey, the next president to influence dining by his appointments, took over in 1922. In addition to selling dozens of dining cars to railroads, between 1924 and 1930, Pullman built and leased 30 full diners to railroads for seasonal surges. The nationwide prosperity of the country was that good. All new cars were now steel, the company having introduced the first steel sleeper in 1907, and built no further cars in wood after 1910.

C.F. Coursey was hired to head the Pullman commissary, 1922-1926 and immediately a happier and colorful china pattern – Indian Tree – was ordered, over time from four manufacturers. Sleek, prosperous looking silver-plate flatware copying the pattern of the new, 1924, Hotel Roosevelt in New York City accompanied it. The earlier patterns were retired by attrition.

Under Coursey’s follower, Lucius Armfield, 1926-1948, the official cookbook expanded to 100 menu possibilities, added to any standard printed menu by a series of clip-on card stock “menu riders,” with color pictures, descriptions and prices of specials of the day.

As a snapshot of 20th century service, should a passenger order the same meal on a train in Denver or Philadelphia, he or she received the identically cooked meal. Pullman dispensed service with almost military uniformity nationwide. Meals were cooked to order, never from a steam table, and the raw materials were of the best. Even orange juice was squeezed one glass at a time, to order, it had to be fresh. The service of beer, after repeal, required twelve distinct steps from gathering equipment and chilling the glass, to serving the passenger, to the waiter’s silent removal of the equipment to the buffet. Instruction manuals and, beginning in the 1930s, recipe books detailed procedures, even deportment to each dining employee. The sergeant was always watching. An incognito Pullman inspector might quietly appear on a restaurant car at any time. Should he purposely order an elaborate cooked meal just before the car’s arrival at an end terminal, and the cook refuse to prepare it, the cook was written up. A 1914 pocket manual “Drinks,” by Jacques Straub, was provided to waiters after repeal, telling them how to make any of 700 popular alcoholic drinks, if the raw materials were available on the car, so there was no hesitation if a connoisseur ordered a “Soul Kiss,” “Fourth Regiment,” “Lusitania,” or “Pouffle Fizz.”

While crews on meal cars were black from the earliest, beginning in 1925, Pullman began recruiting in Manila for Filippino cooks and attendants on meal and lounge cars.
Sweets and sweet drinks proliferated in Pullman meal and lounge cars between 1920 and 1933, as Prohibition was abroad in the land, and Pullman staff were prohibited from providing “set-ups,” glasses with only ice in them, anywhere on a train. Sweets substituted, and continued after 1933 in the remaining dry counties and states, after repeal.

Continuing a pleasurable 19th century practice, passengers could request meal service in their sleeping or parlor car rooms, delivered by a waiter from the kitchen, whether railroad or Pullman. Crews called this “upstairs service.” Silver-plate hollowware appeared on dining tables where Pullman employees could keep an eye on it, ceramic or china duplicates mainly substituted in upstairs service.

Return to Full Dining

Pullman in 1867 began with luxurious dining on Hotel and dining cars, reduced then to, really, a polite businessman’s lunch on buffet cars from ca. 1900 until 1932, then, all unexpectedly, returned to full meals with the 1930s Depression. From the Wall Street crash in October 1929, through 1932, Pullman sleeping and parlor car patronage shrunk 50%. As the Depression deepened, secondary

1932 interior of newly rebuilt Pullman restaurant car West Virginia ready for service
passenger railroads such as the Erie, the Rutland, Nickel Plate, Pere Marquette, Soo, Chicago Great Western, and secondary trains on major carriers, saw patronage evaporate and railroad-operated dining cars which in the prosperous 20s might lose 23 cents on the dollar when full, fall deeply into the red when empty. Beginning in 1932, for eventually 19 railroads, Pullman essentially revived the idea of the early Hotel Car as a substitute for a railroad’s own full diner/lounge/sometimes observation car.

In late 1929, early 1930, the Pennsylvania Railroad accepted seven new parlor-buffet cars in the “Club” series from Pullman for first class daytime operation New York-Philadelphia-Washington. To begin these had a small kitchen with only coal grills. Each car had a drinks lounge on one end with comfortable easy chairs, sofas, smoking stands, spittoons; then four dining tables or more, often separated from the lounge by a decorative glass screen; then the kitchen in the center of the car, finally, on the other side of the kitchen, a large swivel-chair parlor section. These are remembered with great nostalgia, one car may still exist.

Between 1932, the bottom of the Depression in the U.S., and 1936, Pullman shops in Chicago rebuilt 90 older steel cars into parlor-diners similar to this “Club” model; and between 1932 and 1939 rebuilt an additional 51 older steel cars into sleeper-diners with rooms or open sections for overnight travelers. All these were called restaurant cars, and all were air conditioned. An extremely important selling point for Pullman. Pullman had an enormous air conditioning program for heavyweight cars all through the 1930s. These two-man or sometimes one-man cars often replaced the four cooks, steward and six to eight waiters of a typical railroad-operated dining car, and sometimes all the Pullman sleepers or parlors on a train. They were popular and very versatile, a whole first class train in one car. Long after the Depression was over, the last was not retired until October 1967. Two of these restaurant cars, with sleeping accommodation, the “Dover Harbor” and “Kitchi-Gammi Club” are Amtrak certified and operate on private charters today.
1920 – 1933
Sweets replace booze during Prohibition.
World War II

During World War II, Pullman sleeper loads exceeded the prosperous 20s by two and one-half times, half were military moves. The U.S. railroads moved 45 million soldiers, sailors and fliers between 1941 and 1946.

After the war, Pullman manufacturing and operating units were divided by Supreme Court decree, as being a monopoly. The operating arm was bought by the 59 most interested railroads. Pullman traffic rose until this point, 1947, and giant orders of new lightweight sleepers were filled just in time, unhappily, for a permanent traffic slide.

By 1950, domestic airlines were up to 16 million passengers, while Pullman was down to 16 million passengers. Losses mounted. 1948 was Pullman’s last profitable year. The 1950s interstate highway system took what the airlines hadn’t. Railroads which carried heavy tourist loads in the west and took happy vacationers to Florida still did well in bookings until the mid-1950s. There was swift decline elsewhere. In the Midwest and east, in October 1956, due to declining patronage, the Wabash, Pennsylvania and New Haven railroads took over operation of their Pullman parlor car services, the last to offer them in the country.
Pullman restaurant car kitchen, 1932.
With this went most of the Pullman dining service. Little remained by the mid-1960s but snacks, drinks and peanuts in lightweight Pullman lounge cars; a tiny handful of restaurant sleepers patrolling the last routes, usually on charters to large events such as the Kentucky Derby, Boy Scout jamborees, business conclaves. Certain railroads still provided excellent full meal service in their own dining cars, of course, a few keeping very high standards such as the Southern Railway and Santa Fe, right up until Amtrak in 1971, beyond in the case of the Southern. An unmarked, plain “Deville” china replaced “Indian Tree” about 1960.

On December 31, 1968, Pullman USA ceased most operations, the railroads taking over what was left of sleeping car routes, and the last Pullman meal service on the last day had dwindled to one train only, the “Butte Special,” between Salt Lake City, Utah and the national forests area around Butte, Montana. One roomette in a streamlined “American” series lightweight 6-6-4 sleeper was converted to a tiny kitchen with stove, and sink with silver sterilizer, and the roomette across the corridor was converted to table service for four. There was, however, a remarkable menu, cooked by the versatile car porter, leading with an open faced steak sandwich. I would like to say Pullman never served a hamburger, but on this last train, they did.

Where today can you dine on a double English lamb chop? There are dozens of successful dinner trains in the United States. Each year, “Railroad & Railfan” magazine lists them all. In addition, roughly fifty privately owned, restored historic first class cars are certified for private charter to couple to any Amtrak train going anywhere on the system. Most have dining service. AAPRCO represents them. For example, “Hickory Creek,” a streamlined observation car built by Pullman for the 1948 edition of the 20th Century Limited, and now splendidly restored from its retirement ordeal on a circus train, has a superb kitchen and runs many trips each year. The absolutely authentic Pullman heavyweight classic restaurant car “Dover Harbor” carries on the dining tradition as if it were 1934. And the former American Orient Express, now renamed “Grandluxe Express,” sports first class American built sleepers, diners and lounges mainly from the 1950s and approximates the experience.
AUTHOR DINES PULLMAN STYLE ON HICKORY CREEK

Aboard the 20th Century Limited Pullman lightweight observation car Hickory Creek. 
Author Terence Mulligan (right) discusses menu choices with Bill McKelvey (left) president of Friends of the New Jersey Transportation Heritage Center.
Indian Tree pattern china, Roosevelt pattern flatware, Luxembourg pattern hollowware, 1920’s through 1950’s.
Presidents of Pullman USA.

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Heads of Pullman Commissary USA.

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