



Few images exist of the equipment used by the Pullman Photographers. In this view we see the reflection of J. P. Van Vorst's camera, in the mirror of a private car, on June 17, 1906.

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# THE PULLMAN PHOTOGRAPHERS

## Don Horn

George M. Pullman knew well the marketing impact and power photography played to inform and influence. Photographs of his sleeping cars furnished the visual communication to make Pullman a name heard around the world. By 1873 Pullman was building, in a factory in Detroit, Michigan, sleeping cars that operated in England, France, Switzerland, and Italy.

Founded in 1867 the Pullman Palace Car Company soon outgrew its Detroit Shops and in 1880 Pullman began construction of an industrial community southeast of Chicago. Whether Mr. Pullman was mercenary or benevolent in his business practices can be left for discussion. What Mr. Pullman accomplished was to use photography as a visual language of communication to turn his sleeping cars into the world's standard.



Mel Horn is photographed by his assistant Tom Considine on June 2, 1955, taking a picture of the roof of a Southern Pacific Gallery Car.

For more than a century Pullman relied on photographers to illustrate his sleeping cars photographically to create desirability and need for his products. Before an in-plant photographic department was established in 1888, Pullman used local photographers.

John Jex Bardwell is considered to be the photographer who photographed Pullman's craftsmen and Palace Cars at the Detroit Shops in the 1870s and early 1880s. Bardwell was born in London in 1824 and moved to the United States with his family in 1834. By 1849 he was involved in the photographic profession. He was a member of the Detroit Photographic Association and wrote many photographic articles. From 1860 until the early 1880s he prepared and used collodion dry plate negatives in his outside assignments.

From 1882 to 1888, Thomas S. Johnson was the first known photographer to work on a part-time basis for Pullman photographing his town and railcars. He had a small studio in the rear of the Casino Building in the Town of Pullman. It was located near Cottage Grove Avenue south of 112<sup>th</sup> Street. He is best known for his panoramic views taken from atop of Pullman's Arcade Building. His small book *Picturesque Pullman* contains photogravure reproductions of his photos.

A local photographer, Henry R. Koopman, photographed the town and its workers from 1880 to the early 1900s. In 1893 he published a small book on the town, *The City of Brick*. Koopman had a studio at 11106 South Michigan Avenue in Roseland (Chicago). Advertising in a local telephone book stated he had six cameras and nine lenses, and said "We photograph anything and everything from a bantam pullet to a 160 ton locomotive." In 1918 and 1919 Koopman worked in the Pullman shops in the shell division.

J. W. Taylor, an architectural photographer, photographed the Town of Pullman for his portfolio in the early 1880s. Taylor was born in Chicago in 1846 and died in 1918. His series of twenty-four photographs was

reproduced in the Pullman Civic Organization's reprint of *The Town of Pullman* by Mrs. Duane Doty in 1974.

In-plant photography began when Wylie Dennison was hired on March 26, 1888. He became the first full-time photographer. He was assigned to the factory superintendent where he put together a photographic department. He began a day book and recorded each and every photo noting the negative number, description of the car, the type of view (interior or exterior) and lot number. Later he added the delivery date, the size of the negative, and how many prints he made. Normally he took one interior and one exterior view of every passenger and street car produced. Freight cars were generally one side view exterior. He began to build a captioned and indexed photographic file. The glass plate negatives were either 5x8 or 8x10. All photographs were taken outside in the daylight.

The first negatives were identified with a negative number and a lot number. As the years passed they began to include a plan number, the date the photo was taken, and the photographer's initials. The lot number identified the production order and the plan number designated the layout of the car being built. Wylie Dennison signed his negatives W.D. and in 1888 on the inside back cover of his day book he wrote, "Since long life is denied, we should do something to show we have lived."

Dennison was replaced in 1904 by John P. Van Vorst, who was born in Chicago on August 17, 1880. He was hired on July 16, 1897, in the Hammer Shop where he worked for one year. He was transferred to the Freight Shop for another year before being placed in the Upholstery Shop, where he spent five years before being hired as an assistant photographer on April 25, 1904. He retired on August 31, 1945. Van Vorst held the longest tenure of any Pullman photographer covering 41 years. He signed his negatives J.P.V.V.

During Van Vorst's tenure, the Photographic Department was moved from the





Two views of Pullman Car Works taken by local photographer H. R. Koopman about 1890 are courtesy of the Pullman Research Group.





Superintendent's Department to the Engineering Department. In addition, he became an assistant on the editorial staff of the *Pullman Car Works Standard* handling the photo assignments from May 1916 until the publication was discontinued in August 1919. Also in 1919 the Photographic Studio was relocated to the second floor of the southeast corner of Building No. 27, over the battery room of the car electric shops. Four rooms were used for the photographic work. One large room was a combination studio and office, while three smaller rooms were used for filing, chemical storage, and a darkroom. Over the next 40 years the studio would be eliminated and the negative storage area and darkroom would continue to be relocated from building to building.

The practice of photographing one car out of each new lot continued; however, sleepers, passenger, private, mail, and express cars were now photographed with six or more views taken of the interior and exterior. Freight cars, flat cars, and hopper cars continued to be photographed for the exterior side only; however, end views were now also being taken. Normally the first car in a production run was photographed. Now, in addition to photographing steel car construction and shop accidents, Van Vorst began handling requests for other departments and for company publications. Requests for photographic services continued to increase and put a strain on Van Vorst's ability to photograph, process, and store his negatives and prints.

In an article for the *Standard* in August 1919, Henry R. Koopman wrote that the prints from the photographic plates were made by the light of two 200 watt Mazda Nitrogen bulbs, which make each print in from five to eight seconds. He claimed that more than 250,000 negatives and many thousand more prints made from them were kept in separate files, numbered and indexed. Included in this negative count were X-ray plates taken at the Pullman Company emergency hospital, plates taken for the various departments, plates taken of

employees injured at a machine, plates taken of pensioned employees, and plates taken for publication in the *Standard*.

At times, Van Vorst was able to obtain help in running the photography department. Every now and then photos carried the initials of an assistant photographer: C.F.S., W.J. or E.B.E.

C.F.S. - Clayton Ford Smith was hired as assistant photographer on February 2, 1914. He was 21 years old and had gained some previous photographic experience at a company called Electric Studio. His initials appeared on a few photographs in September 1916 and his name was mentioned in the *Standard* in June 1919 as formerly in the photographic department. The initials W.J. appeared on a few photographs on September 25, 1922 and E.B.E.'s initials appeared on January 1, 1929. To date, neither of these two assistants has been identified.

Personnel seemed to change frequently because life as a Pullman photographer was not without risk. C. F. Smith was severely burned by flash powder while assisting Van Vorst in taking a picture on the first floor of the cabinet shop in April 1917. The *Standard* reported that he was recovering rapidly and was expected back at work soon. Van Vorst was given a six month leave of absence effective May 15, 1919, because

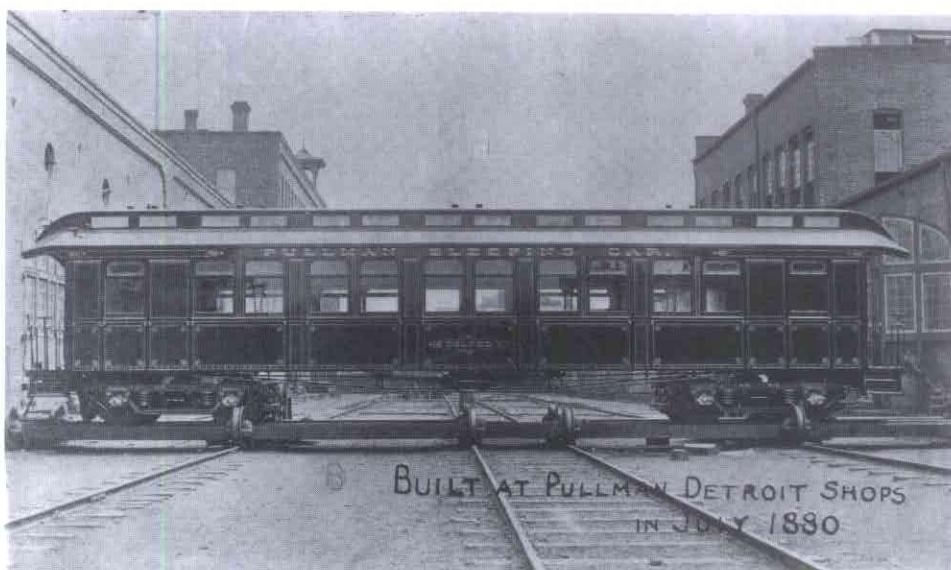
of "confinement over the chemicals in the photographic department and the assiduity with which he has kept up with his work during a heavy winter." As Van Vorst neared the end of his career he suffered from poor health and on several occasions took leaves of absence.

In 1937, Joseph McAllister was offered the job of assistant to Van Vorst. McAllister started working for Pullman in 1928 as a spot welder helper in the Steel Cabinet Shop after doing mining work in Oklahoma and Kansas. While working in the cabinet shop McAllister became interested in the job of plant photographer. He enrolled in a home study course offered by the American School of Photography and learned his trade in the evenings.

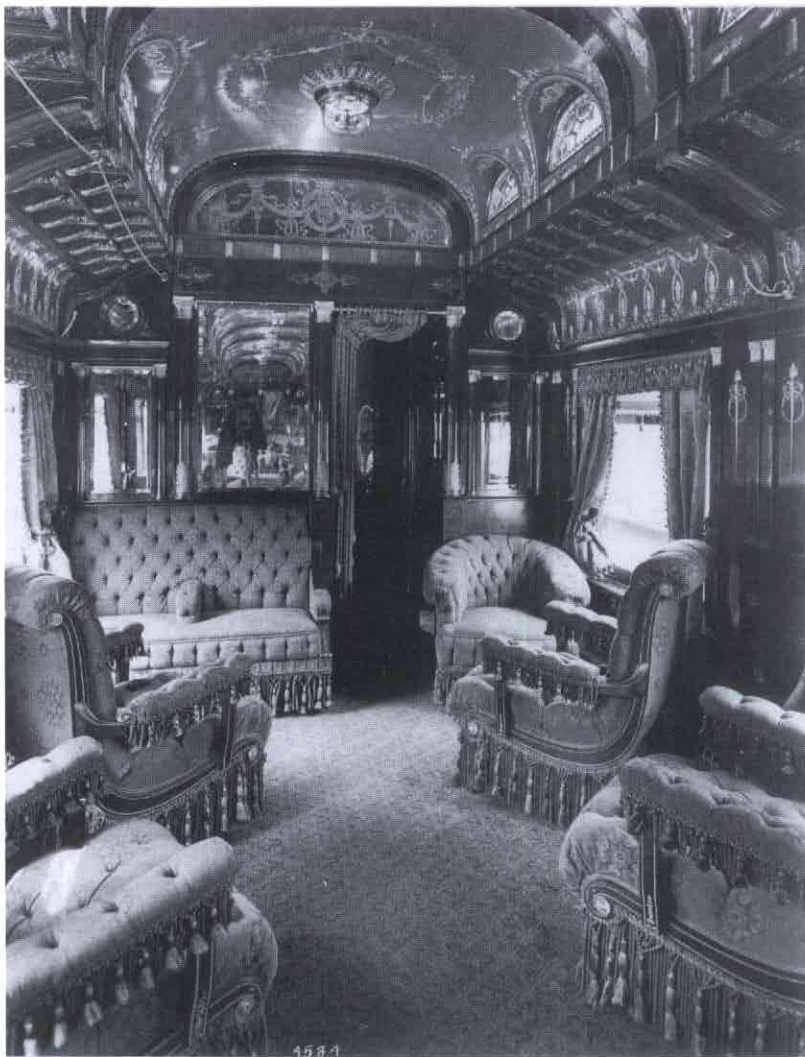
When Van Vorst retired in 1945, McAllister was promoted to Chief Photographer. At the same time Melvin C. Horn was appointed assistant to McAllister. Like McAllister, Horn started out in the shops. He started working in Pullman's Calumet Shops as a Trimmer Helper on March 19, 1937. After meeting Joe around the plant on

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**Jex Bardwell photo of Pullman Sleeping Car Toltec taken on transfer table at Pullman's Detroit Shops July, 1880.**







# PULLMAN

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various occasions he began studying photography in the evenings. He was promoted to Photostat Operator in the Engineering Department on August 14, 1940. In July of 1941 he entered the Army.

In 1946, Ernie Stutkus joined the staff. He gained his photographic experience while working for Moffet Studios in Chicago. During the war he did photographic work at Douglas Aircraft in Park Ridge, Illinois. Before coming to Pullman he worked for Walingier Studios as a portrait photographer.

The three photographers were still together in 1949; however, sometime in 1950 McAllister and Stutkus were no longer mentioned and Horn was promoted to photographer in the Engineering Department, Color and Design Division. Horn was promoted to Chief Photographer in the Passenger Department in 1951. For a short period of time he had an assistant, Tom Considine.

In 1956 Horn's title was changed to Public Relations and Advertising Photographer and again in 1965 to Reporter-Photographer as his duties were expanded and he was also responsible for writing articles for the *CARBUILDER* and community publications. This included articles on the development, manufacturing and practical use of railroad cars, car components, and car equipment and human interest articles about employee activities.

Horn was backed up by in-plant personnel who served as part time photographers in the some of the plants: C. A. Cassaday in Bessemer, Alabama; Bob Bartley in Butler, Pennsylvania; Ernest Derjan at the Champ Carry Tech Center in Hammond, Indiana; and George F. Wilkie in Worcester, Massachusetts. Horn continued to handle assignments at the Hammond and Michigan City, Indiana, plants. During his tenure, his office and darkroom were relocated several times. In the early 1960s his office and darkroom were in room 109 Building #100 with the glass plate negatives stored in Building #89 at the Pullman Car Works in Chicago. In 1964 his office was



In 1893, Dennison photographed the interior of Pullman's Parlor Car Santa Maria (top). This car was part of Pullman's exhibit at the World's Columbian Exhibition in Chicago. When not photographing passenger cars, Van Vorst photographed the various departments. Here women in the Upholstery Shop are making curtains (bottom).



relocated to the corporate headquarters in downtown Chicago.

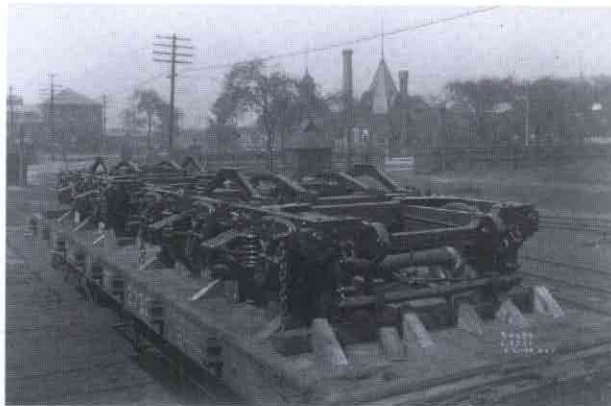
In May 1966 Mel Horn passed away following surgery. Donald J. O'Barski, formerly with the Illinois Central Railroad, was hired as chief photographer. Soon after the photographic department was relocated to Pullman's Michigan City Plant.

In 1972 the photographic department was expanded to serve all transportation equipment divisions of the corporation: Pullman-Standard Division (freight and passenger), Trailmobile Division (truck trailers, chassis, and intermodal containers), Pullman Transport Leasing and Pullman Incorporated. When the plant closed in the early 1970s, the photographic department moved to a reconverted brewery in Michigan City. Here, Pullman Graphics, the graphic arts and photography section, had spacious office and studio areas for O'Barski, photographer John Kniola, and graphic arts supervisor Paul Brown.

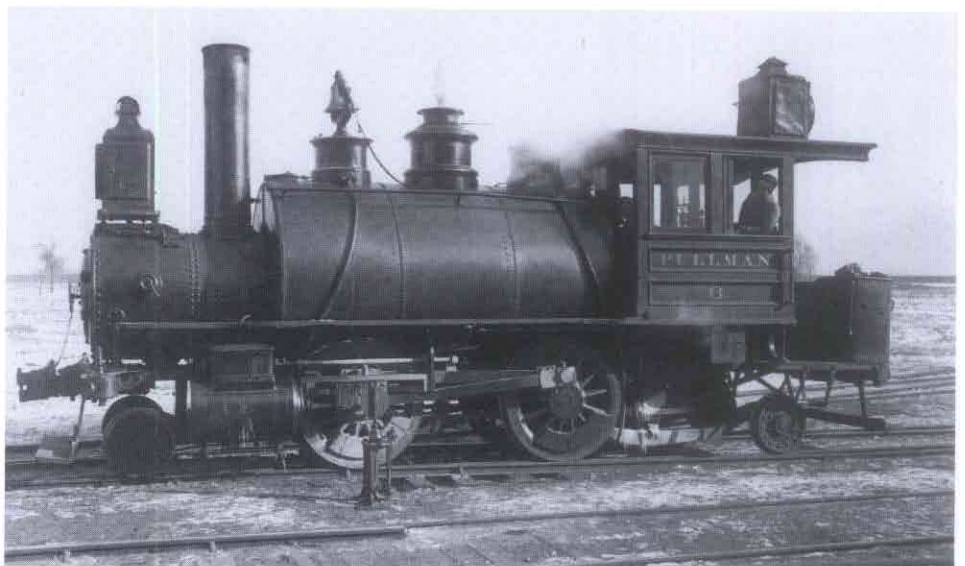
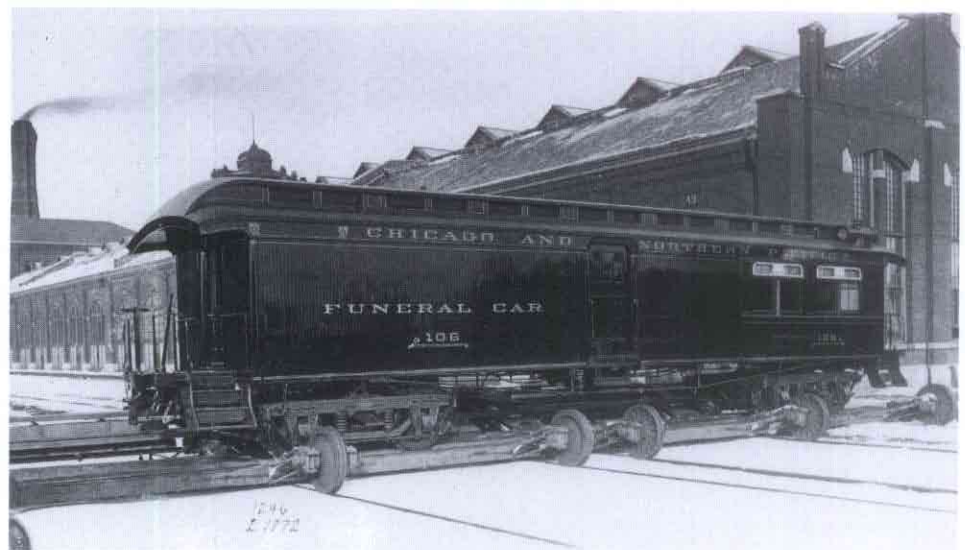
With this last move and the closing of the Chicago plant in 1981, the Pullman Photographic Department came full circle. For more than a century of photography, from glass plates to video tape, the Pullman photographers proved to be an indispensable asset in communication. George Pullman realized their power early on and used them effectively to turn an idea into the standard of the world.

*The photographs with this article are part of Melvin Horn's personnel collection. In 1957, during a thunder storm, he saved thousands of the glass plate negatives and photographs from the dump heaps when the order was given to destroy the material. Regrettably only two of George Pullman's personal files could be saved, one on his life and the other on his town.*

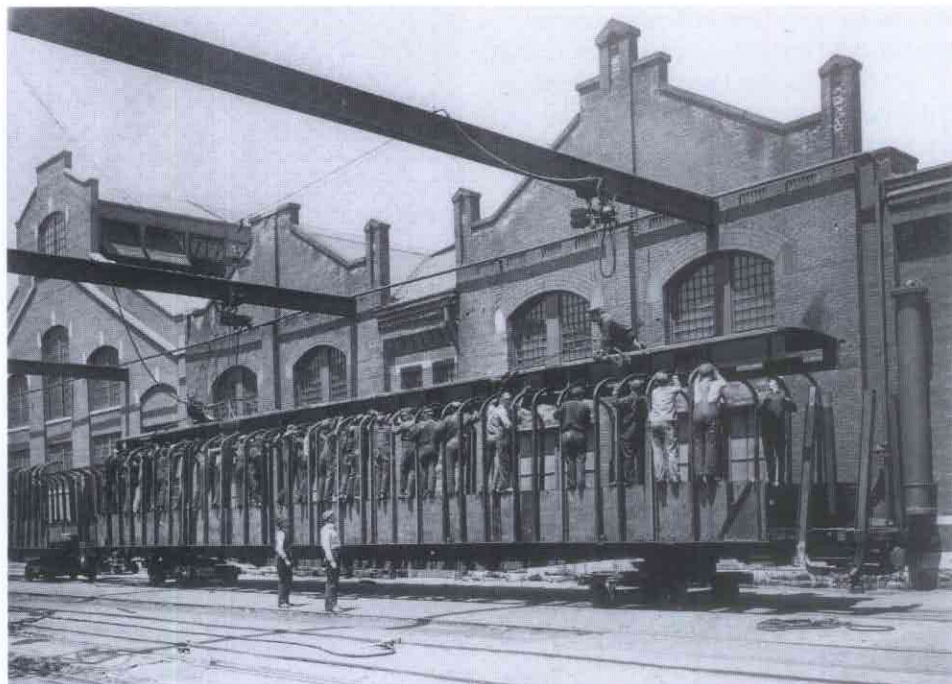
*I got hooked on photography and Pullman while watching my dad develop prints from those old glass plate negatives. For thirty years I have maintained his collection and I am always amazed at what can be created with light, paper, and a few chemicals. Don Horn*



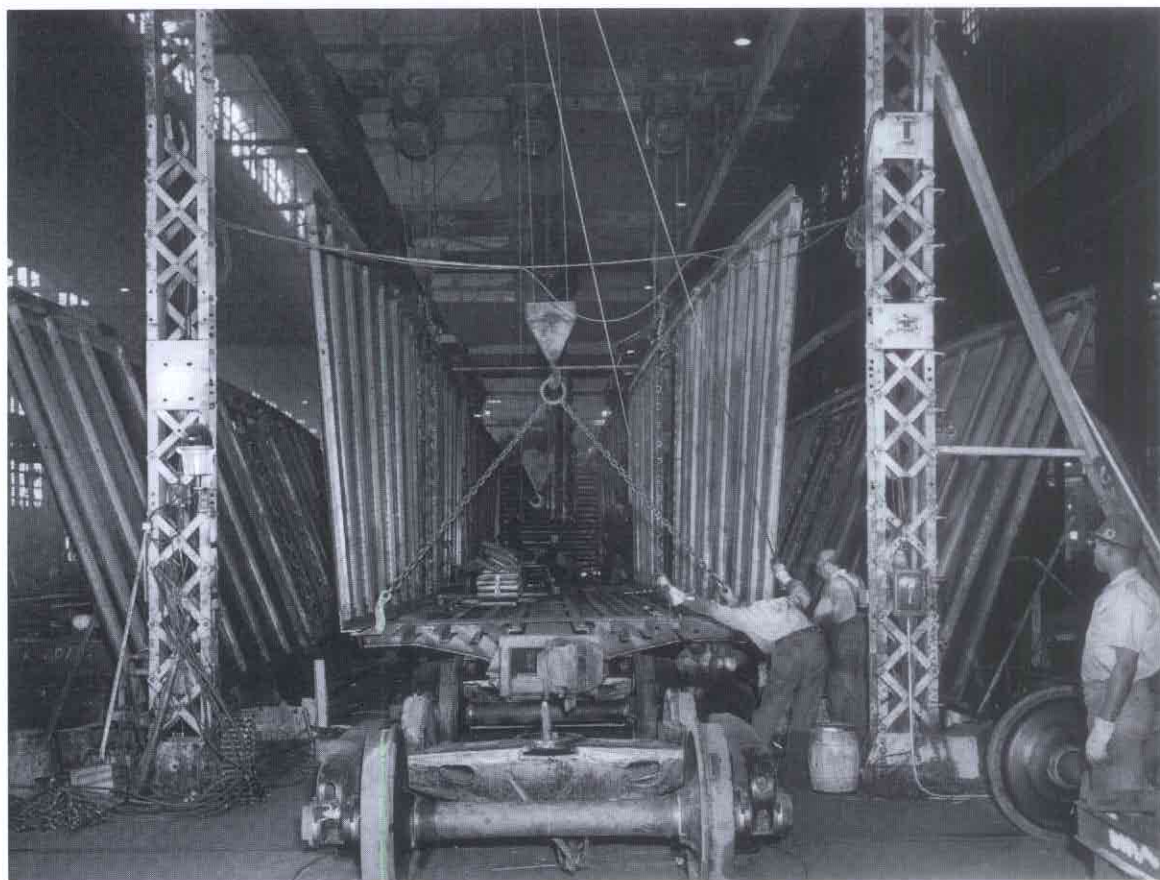
Van Vorst's 1907 photo is of passenger car trucks ready for shipment (left). Dennison shows Chicago and Northern Pacific's Funeral Car #106 on December 2, 1890 (center). Pullman required about 20 locomotives to position materials and equipment at its Chicago Car Works. Van Vorst took this view as Engine #6 was getting into position to pull a string of freight cars.



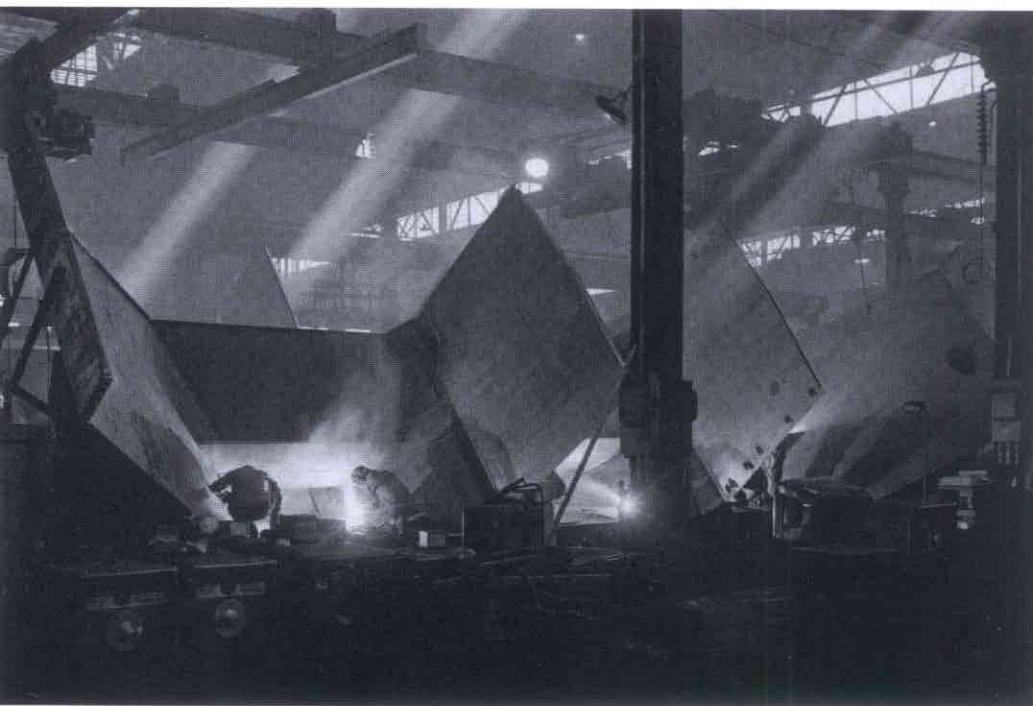




An early production view as Pullman converted from wood to steel construction (top) displays the steel framework of a street car by Van Vorst. This early steel construction view (top right) shows just how extremely labor intensive the changeover was from wood to steel. More than 30 men are visible in this Van Vorst photo of workers attaching roof section to side frame supports of passenger car. Mel Horn's photo at Pullman's Butler Shop (right) shows side sheets being attached to the underframe of a freight car.







Mel Horn's view at Pullman's Michigan City Shop (left) shows slope sheets being welded for hopper cars. Pullman Palace Street Car (center right) taken October 11, 1890, by Dennison is the enclosed exhibition car. Horn posed Chicago & North Western's commuter cars (below) from an overhead crane in building #100.

