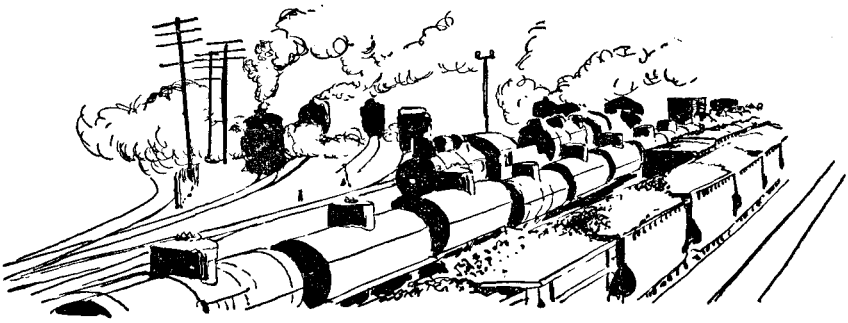


You Can't Lose a Freight Car

By Jack B. Kemmerer

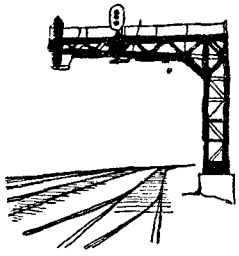
THE old woman who lived in a shoe could take some lessons from the railroads. They keep track of a brood of 2,060,165 freight-car "children" every day and, with the system employed, can't lose a freight car — for long, that is.

Today's freight cars are constantly on the move and spend little of their life at home. A good example is the check made by Union Pacific of one of its cars — No. 193346. This car was an ordinary boxcar of average age and condition. In four years, No. 193346 passed through the hands of 83 railroads, some as many as 10 times, for a total of 221 changes. It changed roads every seven days, was in every state at least once and several Canadian provinces; it passed through every major city of the United States and carried loads ranging from sewing machines to surveying instruments to furniture to "Bundles for Britain." Yet the Union Pacific could have located No. 193346 any time during its travels within an hour.

One recent Sunday evening, in the plant of a California chemical manufacturer, a steel drum filled with chemical blew sky-high in an earthshaking explosion. An immediate investigation revealed that something had gone wrong during the mixing process. As soon as the chemical was put up in drums it expanded. Suddenly the plant superintendent remembered that somewhere in the U.S. were five freight cars loaded with drums of chemical from the same batch, already building up deadly pressures and ready to explode into sudden death and destruction at any moment.

Racing for the telephone, he called

his freight agent. The agent immediately notified the Association of American Railroads in Washington, D. C., giving them the numbers of the cars involved. Teletype wires crackled across the nation. The five time-bomb cars were located in exactly 90 minutes, hauled to isolated sidings and the drums shot full of holes to relieve the deadly pressures of the chemicals.



The AAR and the railroads had cooperated to find the five freight cars in five widely separated areas of the United States — New Jersey, California, Iowa, Nevada, and Illinois!

For the chemical manufacturer and anyone not familiar with the way railroads keep track of cars, this swift and accurate plucking of five particular freight cars out of the 2,060,165 in the United States was nothing less than a miracle. For the railroads and the AAR, the emergency was all in a day's work.

KNOWING each car's location every hour of the day requires an intricate system and is a bigger achievement than finding a needle in a haystack. It's handled through an involved system of notification that uses punch cards, IBM machines, teletypes, and mail reports from other railroads and the AAR.

Every five seconds one of our 17,000 daily freight trains starts its run in the U.S. or Canada.

Six hundred and eighty-three companies operate more than 236,687 miles of railroads. All of them have one big problem in common — keeping track of freight cars and their billion-dollar cargoes.

Each railroad has a car record office with a car accountant in charge. By means of conductor's wheel reports (showing cars moving in trains), interchange reports (showing cars interchanged at junction points), and reports received by teletype from yard offices, each car record office keeps a complete up-to-date record of the movements of all freight cars on its own lines and all of its cars on other lines. When a car moves from one road to another, it is reported to the car record office of the line concerned, including the railroad which owns the car.

After a car has been spotted at a shipper's dock and loaded, a bill of lading is issued, the car inspected, sealed, and a waybill written. It is then taken to the classification yard, which is to the railroads what the sorting rack is to the postoffice. Here all incoming trains are broken up and respotted according to destination, along with cars originating in this area.

Mistakes can happen in any man-made system. Mr. E. R. Prueter, car accountant of Illinois Central,

recalled an error made before the railroad even received the car. A Chicago packer ordered a refrigerator car to ship a load of fresh meat to the Eastern seaboard. A car was spotted at the loading platform; bill of lading issued and signed; car seals applied by the packer; and a waybill made showing all of the necessary information.

The IC delivered it to a connecting railroad and it arrived safely at destination on schedule. The original seals were broken and the car doors opened. To the amazement of the consignee — the car was empty! Screaming robbery, he yelled for the freight agent. Upon immediate investigation, the packer in Chicago admitted ruefully that through an unexplainable oversight, car seals had been applied before the car had been loaded and that the meat was still at his plant.

THE opposite happened when the railroad made a mistake. Sid Meyers, Santa Fe car distributor, remembers a shipment he'd like to forget. The Santa Fe loaded a car with fresh cabbage in Los Angeles and headed it toward New York. An interchange report was received when the car left the Santa Fe lines at Chicago and again upon its safe arrival in New York. That was the last heard of the car, except when it changed railroads headed for home a report came in. About two months later the car showed up and was switched to a citrus packer to be loaded with oranges for the East.

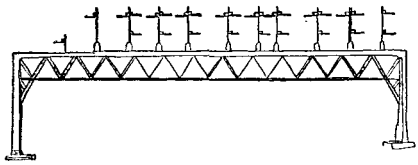
When the dockmen opened the doors, a terrible stench and gas surged out that was so bad two men passed out. The car had never been unloaded in New York and was still full of what had been fresh cabbage.

The smell of rotten cabbage had permeated the car so badly that it was almost six months before the car could be returned to active duty.

In the classification yard, after the train has been made up, it is taken over by one of the key men on the railroad — the dispatcher. All train movements, both freight and passenger, are handled by the dispatcher, who controls every foot of operating track owned by the railroad. He's the man that keeps the goods moving, putting a freight on a siding for a fast passenger train, or a "local" in the hole for a manifest freight train.

To assist in handling freight cars between railroads and in accounting for car hire, it was necessary that regulations be formulated. The AAR promulgated rules governing the movement of cars, known as Car Service Rules, and regulations for the settlement of car hire. Car hire, or per diem, means that a railroad must pay the owner of a "foreign" car on its lines $1.75 per day. On a large railroad like the Santa Fe, the daily car hire charges that the Santa Fe must pay to other railroads is approximately $50,000.

Foreign cars are supposed to be returned to their home lines with



the least possible delay. Every effort is made to return the cars carrying a load but when this is impossible, they are returned empty.

Like all rules, however, this one is somewhat elastic. If a railroad happens to need rolling stock at a particular moment and has foreign cars available, they will use them.

It will be recalled that some years ago American railroads threatened to discontinue carrying coal to Canada because U.S. lines claimed that Canadian lines were not returning the empties fast enough.

DESPITE per diem charges, the average railroad has more foreign cars on its lines than its own. A recent survey made of six major roads proved that out of every 100 freight cars operated, about 70 per cent were foreign.

The interchange of cars, which has made the growth of American industry possible, hasn't always been possible, for freight cars in the early days were stay-at-homes. Each railroad kept its cars on its own lines. When a car reached the end of its lines, it was unloaded and the freight transferred to the connecting railroad's cars. On long-distance hauls, transfers took place many times and shipments were slow and costly.

The biggest difficulty to overcome was the difference in gauge of the rails of various railroads. In 1871, 23 different gauges, ranging from three to six feet, existed in the U.S.

Through the efforts of various groups, later organized as the Association of American Railroads, gauges were standardized and today any freight car can be sent to any railroad in the United States, Canada, Mexico, and Cuba. All cars couple, brake, and run together; even the ladders, steps, and hand brakes are always in the same places.

Knowing the location of every freight car proves to be of immeasurable value. Recently the AAR related how the Army asked the association to find — and fast — a super freight car capable of transporting a 525,000-pound steel tower to a remote spot few people had ever heard of — Alamagordo, New Mexico. The AAR knew that one such giant car did exist, and where it was at the moment. The car was turned over to the Army with no questions asked. They later learned that the huge tower was used in the detonation of the first atomic bomb.

These are only a few examples of requests concerning freight cars — they run into the thousands each month. So if you happen to have a favorite freight car or cargo missing, don't be like the old woman who lived in a shoe — just call the railroad. They'll find it for you in a jiffy.

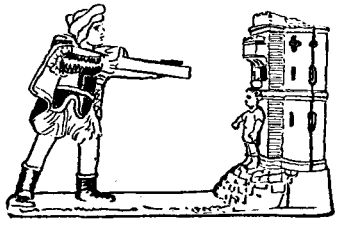
SAVING MONEY USED TO BE FUN

By RAYMOND B. BROWN

THE NEW secretary of a millionaire industrialist, going over his boss' incoming mail, took up a postal card that read: "Shipping speaking dog today." Another communication in the same mail read: "Fat man accompanies frog and serpent this week."

The secretary was reasonably sure the old man was not starting a carnival, but apparently quick preparations had to be made for receiving a dog, a frog, a serpent, and a fat man, so he hastened to his boss for instructions.

"Ah, good, I've been waiting for them for some time," said the boss. "Put them on my desk when they arrive." Then at the look of amazement on his secretary's face, he explained he was an avid collector of old mechanical banks, and the "Speaking Dog," the "Fat Man," and "The Frog and Serpent," were merely the trade names for three banks he had wanted to add to his collection.



As his secretary was still looking at him in an incredulous fashion, he added defensively, "You've heard of Walter Chrysler, haven't you?"

The secretary nodded.

"Well, he had one of the biggest and best collections in the country." And he added gleefully, "Some of the biggest and smartest business and professional men collect them."

There are about 250 different old mechanical banks, but because some are extremely rare, no collector owns anywhere near a complete collection.

The first known mechanical bank is called a "Mechanical Alms Box" and is believed to have been made between the years 206 B.C. and 220 A.D. This bank is of glazed pottery, green in color, and is still in excellent condition with the exception of the little figure of a bear on top which is