

Chicago, South Shore and South Bend Railroad Car #37

Builder: Standard Steel Car Company, Hammond, Indiana

Date: May 1929

Lot #: H333

Group #: 9

Type: Coach with Hale & Kilburn #99 Bucket Seats and Box Smoker

Interior Modifications: Heywood Wakefield #981 Type S Reclining Seats

Exterior Modifications: Roof Reconfigured 8 September 1961

Condition: Missing Traction Motors, Motor-Generator Set, and Air Compressor

Out-of-Service: 31 December 1982

Provenance: Chicago, South Shore and South Bend Railroad; then to Michigan City Sesquicentennial Commission, then to Illinois Railway Museum, Union, by clerical error

Purchased: 5 July 2018

Price: \$8,000

Removal: to 515 Sheridan: 8 December 2018

Status: On Hand

Intended Use: Restore as Car #37, circa March 1931. Car #37 is to be used in the “special” parlor/dining car fleet interpreting segregated train service and racial divisions in Indiana. See cars #351 and 706.

Justification: Car #37 is needed to interpret the “Northern Jim Crow” segregated train service operated by the South Shore Line through the use of “special” parlor and dining car service. To interpret a “special” parlor car train will require two coaches showing the differences in car accommodations that were “Whites only” and those cars where all races would be accommodated. These coaches should be box smokers of the type exemplified by car #37 as a typical parlor car train was made up of a parlor car and two box smokers.

Cars in group #9 with bucket seats and box smokers were the most common passenger accommodations on the South Shore Line. While this arrangement was not common on the interurban railroads generally, there were other interurbans in the Insull Group that operated cars with box smokers including the Interstate Public Service Company and the Chicago, North Shore and Milwaukee Railroad.

Car #37 is the only car from group #9 that retained its box smoker; the other four cars in group #9 had their box smokers eliminated and straight-aisle seating installed. Because car #37 is the only box smoker remaining from group #9, car #37 should be restored to its condition circa March 1931.

Conclusion

The interpretation of the history of the South Shore Line is incomplete without a discussion of the systemic racism in the north, how Jim Crow worked when there were no signs that said “Whites Only,” and how Jim Crow played out on the South Shore Line. The preservation of car #37, in its role in the interpretation of “special” train service on the South Shore Line, is a critical tool for interpreting the history of racial divisions in Indiana.



Car #37 at Tremont, Indiana, circa 1947.



Interior of car #37, circa 1935. The box smokers had poor productivity as they only seated 48 passengers. Union crew requirements were based on the number of cars a crewman could handle, not the number seats. By eliminating the box smoker, seating capacity was increased by eight per car and the number of passengers per crew member increased.



Seating in the box smokers was two facing benches; not great for comfort, but great for privacy. Because the South Shore Line removed the box smokers from all but one of the cars in group #9, there were only six cars with their smoking sections intact when the short cars came out-of-service on 31 December 1982. These few cars were prized by commuters. Typical office procedure in Chicago's Loop was to send a person to the train before quitting time so that they could "hold" a box smoker for the rest of the staff for the ride home.



Interior of car #37, 26 April 1983. Car #37 had a complex history after the end of service. First auctioned to the Illinois Railway Museum (IRM), at Union, car #37 was traded to the Michigan City Sesquicentennial Commission (MCSC) for car #34. Car #34 had a complete set of electrical equipment not needed for the static display contemplated by MCSC. IRM contended that car #37 had the better interior but was missing electrical equipment so IRM proposed a trade. MCSC chair Bob Jackson had no idea whether getting a better interior made that a good trade or not; Jackson took the trade anyway, and then did nothing to get car #37 off the South Shore Line.

Meanwhile, the Venango River Corporation (VRC) had bought the South Shore Line after the car auction in 1984. Just prior to the VRC bankruptcy in 1989, VRC attempted to scrap or remove any assets of consequence. Looking through old paperwork on car #37, a South Shore Line clerk found documents from the auction that showed that car #37 was sold to IRM, but never shipped. With that, car #37 was sent on its way to Union, Illinois, where it arrived unexpectedly in 1989.

IRM seemed none too happy to have car #37. The car was offered to me on several occasions, usually as part of a trade for Chicago Rapid Transit locomotive #S-104. When the assets at the Indiana Transportation Museum (ITM) were threatened in 2018, IRM moved to acquire Chicago, North Shore and Milwaukee car #172 from the private owner who had stored that car at ITM. Because the space in the barn where car #172 was to be stored was tight, IRM moved to scrap car #37, but a concerned IRM member proposed a sale that both I and the IRM board were amenable to. Car #37 returned to Michigan City on 8 December 2018.