

Restoration Planning for
Merci Boxcar #J58220 ⁽¹⁾



Photo by Glen Houlton

Purpose:

This document is a planning guide for the restoration of the Merci Boxcar J58220, (P.L.M s/n K-128220) for public display. It includes mechanical and structural restoration. This plan is incomplete in that the exact condition of the boxcar is as yet unknown. This plan is a “living” document and will be revised as required to reflect new information as it is obtained.

Background:

Built by “CHANTERS de la BUIRE Lyon” France between 1872 and 1885⁽²⁾, the 12 ton, 29 feet long and 9 feet wide, four-wheeled carriages were first used as general-purpose freight haulers, then later converted to troop and animal transports for wartime service in WWI carrying American Dough Boys among other troops. The train was an expression of thanks from the citizens of France to the people of America for aid rendered during and after World War I, which had been delivered in a particularly compelling way in 1947 when American Friendship Train carried some \$40,000,000 in relief supplies to France and Italy. Initiated by the Washington newspaper columnist Drew Pearson, this project, which resulted in the

distribution of over seven hundred carloads of food, fuel, and clothing, was not an official government program; it was a grass-roots effort that carried personal contributions from individuals in every part of America.

The American Friendship Train inspired a rail worker and war veteran named Andre Picard to suggest that France reciprocate. His original idea was to present the United States with a decorated Forty and Eight Boxcar loaded with gifts representative of his country - wines from Alsace, Bordeaux, Burgandy, Champagne and the Loire Valley; white lace headdresses from Paris; clay figures from Provence. A local veterans organization adopted the proposal, and a small committee was established to solicit gifts.

As press and radio spread the story, however, the project gained national momentum. The government announced its official approval; the French Academy issued an endorsement; and hundreds of professional, social, and fraternal organizations asked to participate. Clearly a single boxcar would not be enough. Superseding the local committee, the National Headquarters of the French War Veterans Association took control and decided to fill forty-nine cars with gifts. One would go to each of the forty-eight states, and the forty-ninth would be shared by the District of Columbia and the Territory of Hawaii. During the summer of 1948, trainmen scoured rail yards, sidings, and depots for Forty and Eights.⁽²⁾

Merci Boxcar J53220 was given to the territory of Hawaii and Washington DC. Washington DC unloaded the car and divided the gifts sending half the gifts to Hawaii and the boxcar. The gifts arrived in Hawaii in March 1949 aboard the APL freighter President Cleveland. The boxcar arrived in Hawaii on November 9, 1949 aboard the APL freighter President Monroe. The boxcar was originally given to the American Legion at 612 McCully St. When McCully St. was widened the boxcar was brought to the Hawaiian Railway Society for storage. After a number of years the American Legion donated the car to the HRS.

Significance:

This car was given to the people of Hawaii in gratitude for their contributions during WWII and to the Friendship Train of 1947 in which Hawaii provided two boxcars of sugar in a whirl-wind fund raising campaign⁽³⁾.

More information can be found at the following websites:

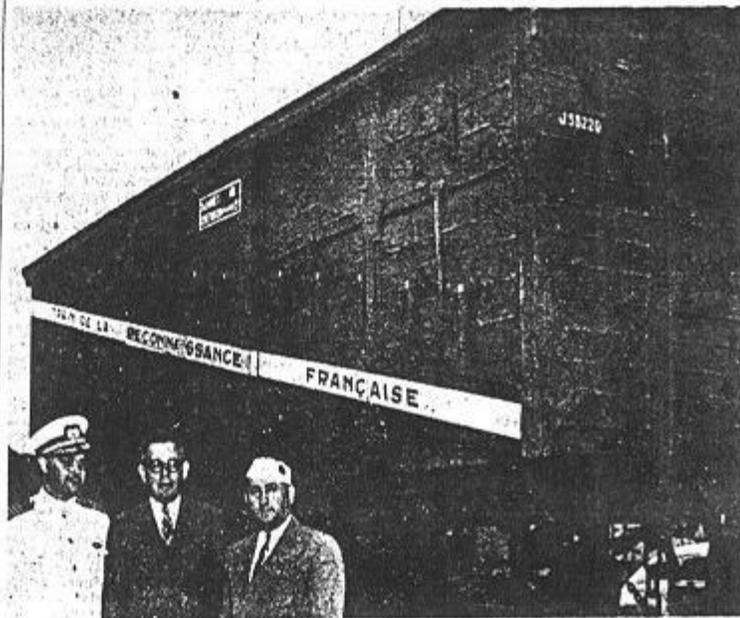
http://www.ameshistoricalsociety.org/exhibits/events/friendship_train.htm

<http://www.thefriendshiptrain1947.org/>

<http://www.mercitrain.org/>

Assessment:

As of this date, July 16, 2011 Merci Boxcar J58220 is in very poor condition and needs a lot of work. This car can be restored to a very good condition. It would not be a complex restoration, but many hours of scrapping paint and making replacement wood parts are needed.



GRATITUDE BOXCAR HERE—The 40-and-8 boxcar that brought French gifts for Hawaii arrived here Wednesday aboard the APL liner President Monroe, and was unloaded by a giant floating crane alongside. Then it was hoisted onto a waiting flat truck, above, to be taken to American Legion headquarters. Supervising were Capt. J. M. Windas, master of the Monroe, Irving O. Pecker, French consul here, and Richard J. York, acting Hawaii department commander of the American Legion. (Advertiser photo.)

Hawaii Car of French Gratitude Train Here

A dark grey 40-and-8 boxcar was swung over the side of the APL freighter President Monroe at 4 o'clock Wednesday, and then transferred to a flat truck by a floating 60-ton derrick.

The car is the one that carried French gifts to Hawaii as part of the Gratitude train. The actual gifts arrived here last March aboard the President Cleveland, but arrival of the boxcar was held up by the strike.

THE 40-AND-8 CAR will be turned over Friday, Armistice Day, to the American Legion at department headquarters, 612 McCully St. It will be on display there indefinitely.

On one side of the train is a red-white-blue painted streamer, "Train de la Reconnaissance Française," while on the other side are the words, "Gratitude Train."

And the legend that so many Hawaii veterans of World War I remember is also inscribed: "40 Hommes—Chevaux (En Long)." That's to remind one that the cars carries 40 men or eight horses, the long way.

RICHARD J. YORK, acting Hawaii department commander of the American Legion and a vet-

eran of French in the 1st war, took one look at the car and sighed. "It's the real McCoy," he muttered.

Also on hand to watch the unloading of the train were Irving O. Pecker, French consul; Capt. J. M. Windas, skipper of the SS Monroe; Mrs. Walter Wix, secretary of the governor's Gratitude train committee, and a group of American Legion members wearing their uniform caps.

THE WEATHER

(U. S. Weather Bureau forecast issued at 8 p. m.)
Thursday afternoon and night. Partly cloudy with a few light showers. Moderate to fresh trade winds.
24-hour data up to 8 p. m.: Temperatures, max. 82, min. 74; precipitation, trace; wind, east, 14 mph. (Details on Page 11.)

Restoration Philosophy:

Merci Boxcar J58220 will be restored to its ca. 1949 configuration. During the restoration, every effort will be made to replace missing or broken parts with original parts. In the event that original parts cannot be located suitable substitutes may be used following as close as possible the original form fit and function. Under no circumstances will changes be made that make it impossible to install an original part should one become available in the future. All substitutions must be approved by the restoration committee and the Director of Restoration.

Restoration Plan:

There are three main areas for restoration, mechanical structural and decoration. Structural restoration is mostly cosmetic but there are some immediate concerns which must be addressed. Restoration efforts will be accomplished in parallel.

Mechanical – Mechanical restoration addresses brake system and running gear.

Brake System – The brake system is a simple hand brake, no automatic air brakes on this car. However there is a train brake pipe to pass the air to other cars in the train. The brake handle is pinned in place by the guard bar that was bent in. All parts need to be stripped of paint and repainted. Guard bar needs to be straightened and the brakes made operational.

Running Gear – All running gear is in good condition except for one spring set. Rust has bent at least two leaves of the spring pack on one axle end. All of the running gear needs the paint stripped and repainted.

Structural – Structural restoration address the two main structural components comprised of the metal fame and the wood fill in parts.

Metal Frame – The metal frame appears to be in very good condition for its age and only minor repairs need to be made.

Wood fill – The wooden portion of the car is in poor condition, but many pieces are in useable condition and can provide precise patterns for the replacement pieces.

Decoration – decoration addresses the heraldic shields from the forty provinces of France, the banners on each side of the car and the French and American flags and other decorative items.

No original decorations are available. A few shields are still attached to the car and can be used as patterns for size of replacements as well as for correct attachment. Pictures from other restored Merci Cars are available to facilitate reproduction.

Action –

1. It is important to document the original components of the boxcar in precise detail.
2. The parts of the car should be put into one of three categories. Category one would be parts that were on the car when it was in service on the French railroads. Category two would be part installed in the 1947 to 1949 time frame by the French as they renovated the car for presentation to the United States. Category three would be the parts placed on the car post 1949 in the process of maintaining the car.
3. Category one and two parts in usable condition should be reconditioned in place and not removed as removal will likely destroy these parts.
4. Once documentation has progressed sufficiently category 3 wood parts should be removed and disposed. Unusable parts should be replaced with exact replicas.
5. All metal parts will be stripped of paint by needle gun, wire brush or any other means as appropriate.
6. The car will be repainted the original dark gray with black under carriage.
7. New decorations will be made as close to the original as possible and mounted in the original style and locations.

Notes:

(1) Number is believed to be correct based on a photo from The Railroad Press magazine article in their issue #43 dated Oct/Nov/Dec 1999.

(2) Merci Box Car Memorial Book Second Edition February 2, 1984 by Merci Boxcar Committee, La Societe Des 40 Hommes Et 8 Chevaux South Carolina. It has been noted that the web site:

http://www.art-et-histoire.com/index4.php?segrae.php?clean=1&prj=Chantiers_de_la_Buire says **<quote>**

L'entreprise se spécialise initialement dans la construction de matériels roulants, pour le chemin de fer. Entre 1857 et 1867, ce sont environ 700 wagons qui sortent chaque année de ses usines. Les Chantiers acquièrent alors une renommée dépassant largement les limites du territoire français. En 1866, Augustin Seguin rejoint la société en tant que directeur. En 1867, les [frères Mangini](#) (Félix et Lucien) s'associent à Augustin Seguin, leur beau-frère, pour fabriquer une partie du matériel roulant nécessaire à leurs projets ferroviaires. Selon nos sources, l'entreprise emploie alors 1650 personnes ! </quote>

<translation by Yahoo Babel fish>

L' company specializes initially in the construction of rolling stocks, for the railroad. Between 1857 and 1867, these are approximately 700 coaches which leave each year its factories. The Building sites acquire a fame then largely exceeding the limits of the French territory. In 1866, Augustin Seguin joined the company as a director. In 1867, the brothers Mangini (Felix and Lucien) s' associate with Augustin Seguin, their brother-in-law, to manufacture part of rolling

stock necessary to their railway projects. According to our sources, l' company employs 1650 people then!

</translation>

This brings up the possibility the Merci cars are older than originally thought.

(3) More information and copies of the newspaper clippings of the time can be found at this web site: <http://hawaiianrailway.org/restoration/40&8/History/>

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