

The Desert valley's original oral history stated that it was built in 1879 by Pullman in Worcester, MA. I was able to verify that date from several sources but not the builder or place of manufacture.

My inquiry involved searching numerous archives throughout the South and even some in the Northeast. I contacted several dozen archivists, authors, historians and local authorities who provided varying pieces of information or non-information (which oddly proved to be of equal value) as part of this puzzle. I was able to access both state and federal government archives, as well as several libraries and private document collections.

I learned a great deal about the Southern Railway, its practices and records, as well as those of its predecessors – particularly the South Carolina Railroad, the successor South Carolina Railway and finally the South Carolina and Georgia Railroad which became part of the Southern Railway system in 1899.

Southern records, particularly those of the Southern Railway Historical Association and the Museum of Civil War and Locomotive History in Kennesaw, GA provided me a valuable starting point for my backward trek. Through them I learned of the Southern's practices regarding the ownership and assignment of "office" cars, their preferred term for business cars. Carrying my search back into the predecessor railroads proved to be much more of a struggle. The further back I went, the more elusive the records became.

I even resorted to the tedious process of examining issues of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century weekly newsletter called the Railroad Gazette which detailed car construction activities by car builders across the nation.

I learned the unsurprising fact that the older the records sought, the less likely they would be found. And 1879 was a long way back. But what I also learned was the basic reason behind this unsurprising conclusion: the lack of duplicate records.

Until the middle 1880s, records were of two types: printed documents or handwritten ledgers or journals. And printing was reserved for only those records important enough to mandate preservation and/or widespread distribution. Think corporate or financial records, for instance. The other kind, which constituted the bulk of railroad records, were subject to destruction by several processes, most notably fire. And in the case of the South Carolina Railroad, a major conflagration took place in January of 1880 destroying a major portion of its Charleston car shop as well as nearly a third of its passenger car fleet.

Office cars being non-revenue equipment and relatively few in number were not featured in many car statistics. However Poor's Annuals did list them in their yearly summaries for each carrier starting in 1878. For the South Carolina Railroad and its two successors, Poor's consistently recorded the presence of two office cars from 1880 through 1899.

The Poor's Reports are drawn from printed annual reports prepared by the railroads for their investors and boards of directors. These records can be found in several library collections. I was able to locate the South Carolina Railroad's annual reports for as far back as 1870. These reports described a steady number of passenger cars being constructed at their Line Street Car Shop in Charleston. With the exception of eight cars contracted out to Jackson & Sharp in 1880 (a car order probably related to the fire of that year), I could find no record of any passenger cars constructed by outside builders for the SCRR.

What was particularly noteworthy was that the SCRR Annual Report for the year 1879 reported that the railroad had "rebuilt" an office car; this gave them a total of three such cars at the end of that year. This I propose was the one we know as the Desert Valley. One office car appears to have been lost in the aforementioned 1880 fire which may have also consumed whatever records existed detailing the construction of the newest addition to the office car fleet.

The term "rebuild" makes me wonder if there might be even more to the car's origins. Other references that I have found which use that term imply a comprehensive reconstruction of a car whereby as much as ninety percent or more of the original car's parts may be replaced thus justifying the use of a new build date for the car. I doubt the complete story will ever be found at this late date.

The other remaining office car which survived until the Southern Railway merger was an even older one which ultimately became the Interstate 101, a car which survives to this day as an off-rail tourist information center in Big Stone Gap, VA. That story was chronicled in an article by Bill Schafer and Ron Flanary in the January-February 1992 issue of Ties Magazine.

In conclusion, I can state with reasonable certainty that the ex-Southern Railway office car identified as #16, and later christened as the Desert Valley, was the one described as having been "rebuilt" in the South Carolina Railroad's Line Street car shops in Charleston, SC.

Tom Klobas  
Arizona Railway Museum  
Chandler, AZ

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