

## Railroad Passes

### What is a Rail-pass?

- ◆ A means for railroads to provide free transportation on their line to various individuals.

From the very beginning of the industry, railroads occasionally needed to provide free transportation to individuals. The mechanism for regulating such free transportation was the **pass**.

### Who Received Passes?

- ◆ Officials of other railroads.
- ◆ Prospective shippers invited to examine facilities.
- ◆ Employees of the railroad.

For example, officials of other roads were sometimes given a tour of the lines, prospective shippers were invited to examine facilities before agreeing to contracts; employees needed to be transported to a work site, and so forth.

## The Pass Itself

- ◆ A small piece of cardstock. About the size of a modern credit card that could fit in a wallet.
- ◆ Some rail-passes weren't cardstock but were issued as gold or silver.



(Obtained from <http://www.railroadiana.org/paper/pgPasses.php>)



Typically a pass took the form of a small piece of cardstock, about the size of a modern credit card with dimensions that allowed them to fit in a wallet. In rare instances, passes were made of some other material. For example, Otto Mears, legendary builder of Colorado narrow gauge railroads, issued a small number of pure silver passes encased in leather pouches. There are also instances of gold passes being issued for board members or wealthy individuals. However, for the most part, passes were simple pieces of heavy paper issued for a specific period of time and circumstances with the intention that they would be discarded after use.

## Variety of Rail-passes

- ◆ Most railroads issued rail-passes on various occasions.
- ◆ Railroads that were small and couldn't afford marked lanterns or dining care service could issue rail-passes.
- ◆ Often this was seen as a cost of doing business.

(Obtained from <http://www.railroadiana.org/paper/pgPasses.php>)

**Variety.** Since almost all railroads, large and small, had occasion to issue passes, the variety of different railroad markings that can be found comes close to reflecting the immense number of railroad companies that ever existed. Many small, obscure lines could not afford marked lanterns or did not have a dining care service that warranted a proprietary china pattern, but they could afford to print passes. Indeed, they had to do so as a cost of doing business. Thus passes are often one of the few surviving artifacts of long-gone but historical companies, and collectors naturally take special interest in finding these rarities.

## Design

- ◆ Many passes had ornate designs.
- ◆ Were representative of a railroad.



The Green Bay & Lake Pepin RR pass from 1873



This ornate pass was issued by the Green Bay, Winona, & Saint Paul RR in 1889.

Obtained from: <http://www.greenbayroute.com/passes.htm>

**Design.** In addition to having functional value, passes also served as a kind of business card, so many if not most railroads took some care in their design. In particular, passes from the late 1800's tend to have ornate designs with elaborate lettering and occasionally beautiful engravings of company logo's or other images.

## History

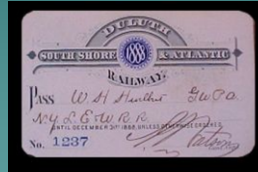
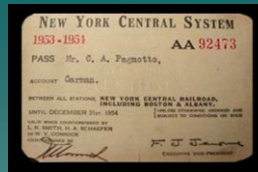
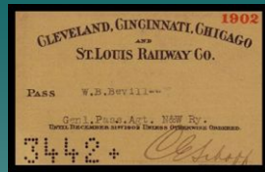
- ◆ Passes often reflected a railroad's corporate structure or affiliations.



Obtained from: Michigan's Internet Railroad History Museum  
<http://www.michiganrailroads.com/RRHX/Passes/PassesMenu.htm>

**History.** Passes often reflected a railroad's corporate structure or affiliations at that particular point in time, so it is possible to see ownership or subsidiary relationships among companies just by examining the titles and wording. Also, since railroads frequently issued passes to major officials of other railroads (expecting the same in return), passes sometimes are found with historically famous names or signatures on them -- names like Gould, Vanderbilt, Harriman, etc.

## More Examples:



Obtained from: Michigan's Internet Railroad History Museum  
<http://www.michiganrailroads.com/RRHX/Passes/PassesMenu.htm>

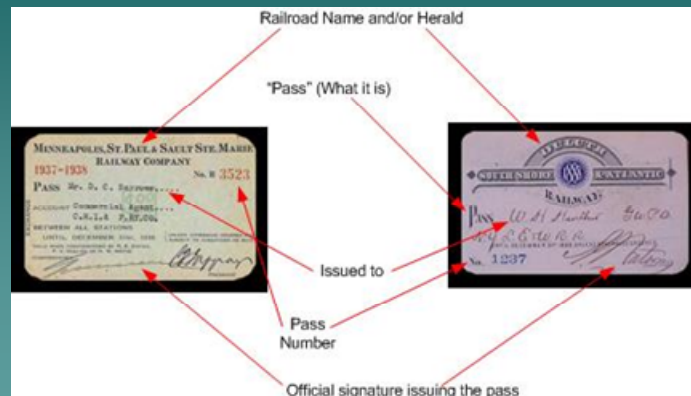
## Railroad Passes and Model Railroading

## NMRA Pass Exchange

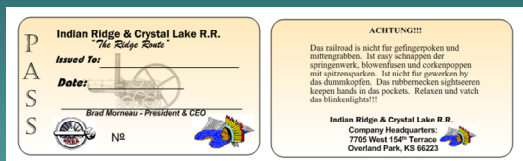
- ◆ The Pass Exchange program was a means by which model railroaders could create and exchange passes with other modelers. Often this would be with modelers all over the world. It was very popular for a long time.

Among the many member programs the NMRA had instituted over the years, the Pass program was, at one time, one of the more popular. Those of you with a little “snow on the roof ” probably know what Rail Passes are, but for those who don't: Rail Passes were cards issued to employees and customers of the railroads that allowed for free travel and/or access to railroad property. It entitled the bearer to ride trains, often with limitations stated on the back of the pass itself. And because we modelers tend to emulate “all things railroad,” we, too, developed our own Passes, lettered for our miniature transportation systems, and began exchanging them with other modelers.

## Pass Design



## Model Railroad Passes



Pass designed by Brad Morneau for his Indian Ridge & Crystal Lake R.R.

## Create Your Own Pass

- ◆ Use MS Word or other application to create a pass.
- ◆ Design a R.R. logo for your railroad and scan into your computer.
- ◆ Have then professionally designed.

Professional Design

Railroad Printing Catalog

Railroad Printers  
Post Office Box 320174  
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