

LA REINE TO LIVE AGAIN

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Another former PRR passenger car will soon be on its way to restoration. The ex Pullman/PRR sleeper "La Reine", has been purchased from Jeff & Sheryl Du Pilka by the **Western Michigan Society for Industrial Heritage**. Jeff is the current president of the Coopersville and Marne Railroad (C&M), a tourist line headquartered at Coopersville, Michigan, about 20 miles West of Grand Rapids, Michigan just off I-96. It operates over a seven mile portion of the former Grand Trunk Western Detroit Division, though it also operates an additional "freight only" segment over ex GTW track into northwest Grand Rapids where it connects with the Grand Rapids & Eastern Railroad, an industrial line. The non-profit Industrial Heritage Society has tapped the car to be restored for use by handicapped persons as well as regular passengers. The car was purchased in October 2005 from the Du Pilkas and when renovations are complete will be operated on the C&M line. Once renovated, the former Pullman 10 section, one drawing room, one compartment car will carry wheelchair bound persons in the area where berths were removed for work train purposes. Its six remaining berths will be restored for historical display, and the balance of the car will carry ambulatory passengers. The car came to the Du Pilkas from the Middletown & Hubblestown at the time of the C&M's creation in July of 1989, and was used for storage purposes only with the intent to someday restore it. Greater needs however kept the car restoration a low priority item for the railroad for the next 16 years.

The car's history is a long and noble one. It was one of lot #630, which totaled 14 cars built by Pullman between October and December 1929. The sleeper was built to Plan 3973A, with 24-11 trucks. On 10/28/1929 it rolled out the door, headed to the Louisville & Nashville Railroad as one of six cars for the handling of the L&N's crack "Panamerican" Line. The others were: La Boheme, La Fontaine, La Gioconda, Le Grand, and Le Roi. On 6/19/1935 conversion of the car to electromechanical air conditioning was completed at Pullman's Calumet shops. By World War II days the car had been dropped from its star status. In December 1948, as part of the antitrust suit solution with Pullman, the car was sold to the PRR, becoming the only car of that configuration on the PRR roster. It was renumbered PRR #8651 and in turn, leased back to Pullman. On 12/9/1953 the car was finally repainted into PRR colors and re-lettered at Buffalo, NY.

As part of a national defense plan, it was put into government storage on 1/25/1957, continuing its slide from the limelight. On 6/14/1960 Pullman was released from the leaseback. The car was white-lined by the PRR on 10/7/1960. It continued to serve however in work train service as PRR #493827 (Track RS12) for a period. Then it was sold to a private individual, and moved to a siding on the Middletown and Hubblestown RR. The new owner used it to house an HO gauge model layout and also serve as a personal retreat. When the M & H decided to remove the siding, the owner put it up for sale and subsequently C & M President Jeff Du Pilka found and purchased it. Not many PRR passenger cars have had such a challenging, changing existence and yet managed to survive 'till today.

At this writing, though a specific timeline hasn't been developed, preliminary work has started on the car. Debris has been removed and a thorough inspection completed. The trucks, frame, and under rigging are in good shape. A number of windows damaged by vandals must be replaced. This will be accomplished in the spring of 2007. A new cement floor will also be necessary as will some roof work. Some donations of materials and personal labor have been offered. Clock Conversions of Grand Rapids, Michigan will provide the necessary special rigging for the handicapped area. West Shore Services of Allendale, MI will provide much of the exterior sanding and repairs. Some highly qualified craftsmen who are associated with the Henry Ford Museum at Dearborn, MI have also volunteered their services. An initial budget of \$125,000 has been established and the group welcomes donations. For membership in the WMSIH, donations or requests for further information, write to the WMSIH, PO Box 273, Coopersville, MI 49404 or visit their website at www.coopersville.com/industrialheritage.

James B. Winslow is a member of the Pennsylvania Technical & Historical Society and wrote this article for their newsletter, *The Keystone*. Jim & his wife, Carol, have retired from the Western Michigan Society for Industrial Heritage, to pursue traveling adventures during their retirement years. The WMSIH wishes to thank Jim for this historical perspective of our project car and procurement of the original floorplan drawing.

Veenstra Reproductions of Grand Rapids, Michigan supplied the drawing reproductions as well as a digital file of the same.