

**"A PIAZZA FROM WHICH THE VIEW IS
CONSTANTLY CHANGING":
THE PROMISE OF CLASS AND GENDER
MOBILITY ON THE PENNSYLVANIA
RAILROAD'S CROSS-COUNTRY TOURS**

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Beginning in 1891, the Pennsylvania Railroad (PRR) launched a pioneering marketing campaign that positioned the company as a central player in the emerging phenomenon of national tourism.¹ The railroad described the programs of its new Tourist Department as "a system of pleasure tours that have been entirely unique in the history of such undertakings"² and explained: "The plan embodie[s] the provision of special trains of the most perfect equipment, in which the tourists [live] en route as comfortably as in their own homes; the appointment of Tourist Agents of experience and ability; and the novel and original feature of a Chaperon, introduced out of special regard for the welfare and comfort of the ladies."³

Drawing on dozens of passenger guidebooks published by the PRR from the 1870s to the 1910s and now archived in the Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania, this article details the company's presentation and promotion of its "personally-conducted tours" from Philadelphia and New York to locations including California, the

Grand Canyon, the Colorado and Canadian Rockies, and Mexico. Specifically, this study focuses on the railroad's efforts to attract female travelers, assuring them that such adventures were socially desirable and perfectly safe, and to attract middle-class passengers desirous of acquiring taste and status through the experience of "luxury" travel—appeals that were made, in most cases, to the women of the family.

This was the new kind of traveler to which the Pennsylvania Railroad marketed its services in an era when passenger traffic became key to many railroads' financial survival; when improved public image became important amid allegations of trust-building and rate-fixing; when more and more Americans had the money and inclination to travel for leisure; and when the nascent tourism industry urged those non-elite travelers to "see America first." Trains had caught the public imagination, note Michael Zega and John Gruber: "Images of speeding locomotives and express trains were pervasive; *McClure's*, *Harper's*, and other monthlies regularly profiled the latest railroad speed run."⁴ During 1894, *McClure's* published articles with titles such as "Flying through Flames" (an account of a train forced to speed through a forest fire) and "A Thousand-Mile Ride on the Engine of the Swiftest Train in the World."⁵

Railroad journeys were described in 1890s popular culture as not just thrilling but also luxurious, a combination of attributes that made it a symbolic nexus of the new and the old, of traditional propriety combined with sleek modernity. Through train travel, Americans could figuratively and literally cross boundaries, transcending not only geography but, possibly, identity as well. Certainly the experience afforded new freedoms to female travelers, who rose in number after the Civil War and whose business the railroads openly solicited by the end of the century. In the changing economic climate of this era, companies also began to market ostensibly upper-class "lifestyle" experiences to the growing American population, promoting what Miles Orvell calls an "aesthetic of imitation" that "became the foundation of middle-class culture."⁶

This article examines the Pennsylvania Railroad's promotion of its cross-country tours as emblematic of shifts in public notions about travel and more broadly about consumption, which was overtly gendered and central to popular-culture definitions of social status in an increasingly commercial America. The study builds on two bodies of existing historical scholarship concerning the turn of the twentieth century, one about travel and the beginnings of national tourism, and the other about the emergence of modern consumer culture based on aspirations of upward mobility.

The former literature charts how advances in transportation changed perceptions of social relations and national identity, while also exploring how the American "wilderness" was both exoticized and commodified by the transportation and hospitality businesses.⁷ Some scholars in this field have considered the very real freedoms travel afforded women in comparison to Victorian-era home life, and the role of modern transportation in blurring the boundaries between nineteenth-century public and private spheres.⁸ This writing assesses, in the words of Stephen Kern, "the unique spatialities created by technology," the social meanings of inventions (telephones and motion pictures as well as the railroad) that enabled Americans to transcend the limitations of space and time in ways that fostered a new sense of public intimacy.⁹

With specific regard to the notion of public space on the railroad, Amy Richter calls the well-appointed cars of late-nineteenth-century luxury-train travel a "hybrid sphere" in which women encountered and enacted a new kind of "public domesticity," a social space in which "deference, privilege, and comfort were determined through commercial rather than personal relationships." In her analysis, women could be "at home" in such modern public space only through an assertion of class status, through "the articulation of social difference."¹⁰

Scholarship on the emergence of modern consumer culture in this era has tended to focus on the sale and display of goods that conferred elite status on middle-class households, and on the glorification of the process of purchasing such objects, especially as this process became a distinctly female ritual.¹¹ Little of the consumption literature addresses the selling of the travel experience, and, while much of the travel literature considers tourism a form of consumption, its most common concern is the characterization of the American land. The national tours of the Pennsylvania Railroad existed at the crossroads of these turn-of-the-century phenomena, and their guidebooks offer an especially interesting glimpse into the cultural conditions of their time.

"A New Class of Travel": Transcontinental Trips for the Non-Elite

The cost of long-distance train travel fell significantly during the decades after the Civil War. A one-way fare from New York to Chicago, for instance, dropped from more than \$20 before the war to about \$5 in the 1880s.¹²

Cross-country touring was pioneered by travel agencies including the British company Thomas Cook, which ran its first tour to California in 1876. The excursions offered by Raymond and Whitcomb, a New England-based firm, "were known for their comfort, convenience, and exclusivity," limiting tourists to parties of "select character" who traveled in private cars and stayed at resort hotels.¹³ "Only the wealthiest and most leisured tourists could spend the time and money necessary for a trip across the continent," writes Anne Farrar Hyde. "A guidebook published in 1873 estimated that a trip to California and back, with a few side trips to 'the chief points of interest in California and Colorado,' would cost at least \$1,200, a price far beyond the means of most Americans."¹⁴

Nevertheless, the railroads were instrumental in expanding the idea and the possibility of cross-country travel, "link[ing] tourism with their mission of nation building and the national mythology of Manifest Destiny," writes Marguerite Shaffer.¹⁵ Railroads became, as an 1877 Pennsylvania Railroad "Summer Excursion Routes" brochure put it, "the common highways of our land," a country in which citizens had an increasing "traveling propensity."¹⁶ Hugh DeSantis dates "the democratization of travel" to a period "running from the late 1880s to 1915, which heralds the beginning of mass tourism and the development of an institutionalized travel industry." He reports that "[r]ailroad passenger traffic increased by nearly 70 percent from 1885 to 1900," that "[t]he number of travel ads in newspapers shot up substantially," and that by 1906 *The New York Times* and *The New York Tribune* published Sunday travel sections.¹⁷

At the same time, railroad travel guidebooks and brochures themselves became mass media that were easily and cheaply available to the public, who could pick them up in train stations and hotels or receive them by mail-order (ordering information was commonly included in railroads' newspaper advertisements). "Their availability, attractiveness, adventurous appeal and price—free for the cost of postage—made them a tremendously successful advertising tool," writes Brad Lomazzi.¹⁸ These publications, the size of soft-cover books, contained maps, detailed illustrations (and later, photographs) of scenery along the route and of the luxurious interiors of the train's various cars, and descriptive, often dramatic travel narratives in which "[e]ntertaining storylines followed characters through travel adventures."¹⁹ The demand for guidebooks confirms that they were popular media among "armchair" as well as literal vacationers. Even the earliest cross-country railroad tourbooks sold more than 300,000 copies in the late 1860s, a time when transcontinental travelers numbered fewer than one-tenth of that figure.²⁰ The Denver &

Rio Grande Railroad printed as many as half a million copies of each of its travel guidebooks, which were collected throughout the United States and Europe.²¹

Americans who "traveled" by reading these guidebooks were not insignificant in an era when, as an executive of the Pennsylvania Railroad put it in 1895, "no railroad can live to-day and do a paying business without a favorable public opinion."²² Yet the company's primary goal was to promote actual travel, especially among new markets such as women and "the rising classes," a growing middle demographic group in the U.S. who were not wealthy but had discretionary income and the very real potential for upward mobility.

As early as 1874, the Pennsylvania Railroad published a "Summer Excursion Route" book offering "recreation, pleasure, and health" to "a class of travelers noted for intelligence and discrimination."²³ While the latter description may have been as much promotional flattery as it was a true description of passengers, soon the company declared clearly that it catered to "all classes of travelers": an 1877 "excursion" book (Figure 1) noted that

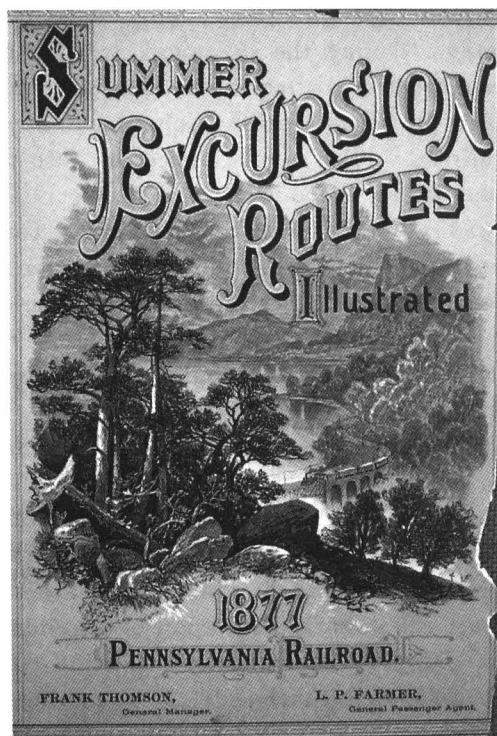


FIGURE 1

while some passengers "join the throngs who make our fashionable resorts the gayest in the world . . . others, who prudently consider the cost, both in dollars and days, 'spy out the land,' like Caleb and Joshua, seeking its shady nooks and rocky fastnesses, its health-giving fountains and natural wonders, and return at the end of their rambles laden with the rich spoils of nature in the shape of strengthened bodies and invigorated minds."²⁴

During the early 1880s, the railroad promoted primarily regional travel, such as "Seaside, Mountain & Lake" areas in the northeastern and southern U.S.,²⁵ but by 1891 it offered "personally-conducted tours" to California and the Pacific Northwest, the following year adding Mexico to its growing list of destinations. From the 1890s to 1910s, the destinations of these package journeys (which originated in either New York or Philadelphia) included Vancouver and Victoria, Canada; Portland, Ore.; Mt. Rainier National Park; Yellowstone National Park; the Canadian Rockies; the Colorado Rockies; the Grand Canyon; the Great Lakes; Niagara Falls; Jacksonville, Florida; the Thousand Islands region of upstate New York; New Orleans, for Mardi Gras; points in Virginia; Washington, DC; Gettysburg, including a tour of the battlefield; and Chicago. During the six-month period between April and October 1893, more than a quarter of a million passengers traveled from Pennsylvania cities to the World's Columbian Exposition on the Pennsylvania Railroad.²⁶ The tours ranged in cost-per-person (from Philadelphia) from \$24 for a one-week combined tour of Gettysburg and Washington DC to \$450 for a six week tour to Mexico.²⁷ For longer trips, the company offered a series of options varying in terms of route and time spent touring sights, one trip with the return being made by the passenger on his or her own "on regular trains." Such choices could reduce the total price by half and, one booklet explained, "commend[ed] themselves especially to all classes of travelers."²⁸

These kinds of itineraries were typical of what would become known as the "See America First" campaign, embracing longer distances and more ambitious sightseeing by rail, while focusing thematically on distinctly American landscapes, history, or industry.²⁹ One brochure claimed: "The American people are awakening to the realization that there is something to be seen on this continent and it is the purpose of these tours to provide the ways and means of gratifying their patriotic inclination in the most satisfactory, comfortable, and profitable manner. . . ."³⁰ In addition to offering tours of the country, the company published city and regional guides that "explained" parts of the nation in hyperbolic prose. Its 1890 "Handbook of

the South" is an example of both regional characterization and an early use of nostalgia in tourism:

The glamour of the past, the beauty of the present and the promise of the future give to that portion of the United States which lies south of the Ohio and east of the Mississippi Rivers a triple charm. From the time of Ponce De Leon and Hernando De Soto it has been the land of romance as well as the scene of tragedy. Linked in history is the fountain of perpetual youth that never was found, with the fountain of blood from which has sprung the New South that . . . will surpass the glory of even that olden time, whose memories linger in the great country houses with wide porticoes, and in the city by-ways where lightly stepped the Southern belles.³¹

Corporate literature promoting Western trips promised that travelers would sample the new and exotic, "the wild landscape and the native heritage that had helped create a national culture," but "from the safety of the train," notes Anne Farrar Hyde, a circumstance that reassured passengers while "remind[ing] [them] of the power of civilization" inscribed in the luxury and speed of the train itself.³² (Indeed, the speed and comfort of cross-country trains paradoxically made the railroad's landscape picture-guidebooks all the more necessary, since "vast stretches of the American landscape became increasingly less visible to the well-fed, drowsy passengers whizzing through them," as John Stilgoe notes.³³)

To expand on this concept while also featuring ordinary (working) Americans as the leading actors in its touring narratives, in 1898 the Pennsylvania Railroad sent a group of its own conductors and their wives on a trip to California, with a side tour of the Grand Canyon, and subsequently published one conductor's account of the journey (Figure 2). Identifying his own family as "tourists," he described the western mountains in the typically gushing language of railroad guidebooks: "this evening the setting sun has transformed their crown of glistening snow into dazzling diamonds, and the veil of fleecy clouds that hang about their summits into a gorgeous canopy of purple, silver, and gold. It is a scene of transcendental loveliness and grandeur."³⁴

The organization and promotion of the cross-country trips was done primarily by two career Pennsylvania employees, James R. Wood and George Washington Boyd, who worked as a team for more than 30 years from 1881

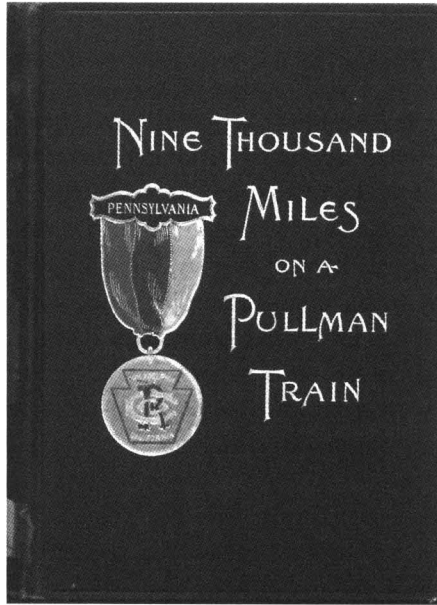


FIGURE 2

to 1913.³⁵ This was the final period before American businesses hired professionals from the new fields of advertising and public relations, the last era in which a railroad's publicity remained the domain of its Passenger Department.³⁶ Writing in a history of the company, completed in 1896 but never published, Boyd explained: "The Tourist Bureau, inaugurated several years ago for the promotion of pleasure travel, is a decided innovation. . . . It has achieved a marked success and opened up new sources of revenue. . . . The careful arrangement of the minutest details of these long-distance tours, eliminating every possible element of discomfort or annoyance to participants, has been keenly appreciated by those who have patronized them. They have, in fact, created a new class of travel. . . ."³⁷

"Undertaking a Journey Alone": The New Woman in Motion

An 1892 article in the advertising-industry trade magazine *Printer's Ink* surveyed the various railroads' travel promotions, their use of brochures and advertisements featuring detailed descriptions of the luxury inside the cars as well as the exquisite scenery outside. Noting that many companies offered

similar services and trips, the writer maintained that the key factor in competition was "the impression which people receive of a road by which they are influenced to patronize it" and claimed "that advertising plays a powerful part in the drama of the railway; that the railway uses advertising as a sword's point with which to best its rivals."³⁸

By the beginning of the twentieth century, American advertisers had discovered that women, even though they themselves typically did not earn money, made some 80 percent of family spending decisions.³⁹ The result was what Helen Damon-Moore characterizes as "the creation and development of a gendered commercial discourse and a commercial gender discourse" in which women were the primary objects of corporate persuasion.⁴⁰ Consumption, women were told, was not merely a matter of survival; it was the key to a better and higher life. In 1902, a retail-trade publication declared: "The woman of today desires magnificence—desires it more than ever before."⁴¹

Railroad advertisements were full of the same descriptive language as the travel brochures, promising excitement experienced amid luxury, comfort, and safety, qualities that were feminized in text and imagery. Pretty young women were shown alone or among female friends on the back of the viewing car, by the side of train tracks, and actually in the wilderness, even atop cliffs in the Grand Canyon and the Rockies.⁴² Pennsylvania Railroad advertisements featured a "Poster Girl of 1896" (Figure 3) who "graced billboards and booklets, holding the line's route map across her bosom, suggesting, 'Look at the map,'" note Zega and Gruber, while the Chicago, Milwaukee &

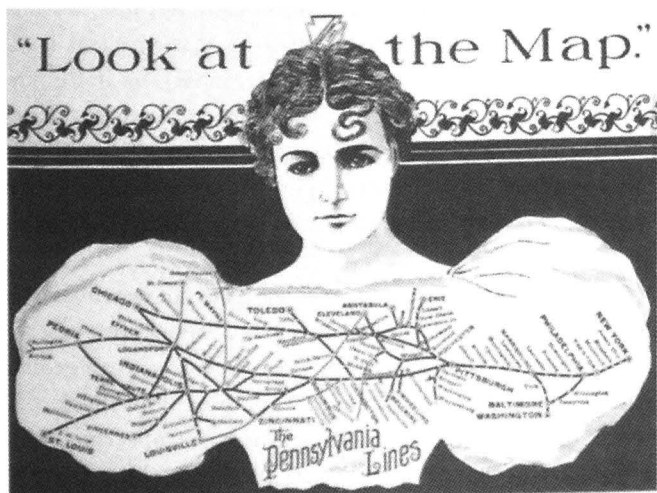


FIGURE 3

St. Paul Railroad “sold the carrier’s claim of comfort and exclusivity by employing the device of two contrasting scenes. To one side, before a bright red background . . . [is] a solitary, elegantly dressed young woman whose purse carries the St. Paul logo. On the opposite side, colored in monotone gray, a crowd waits amid its piled luggage.”⁴³ A multi-year series for the Delaware, Lackawanna, and Western Railroad told the travel saga of “Phoebe Snow,” a beautiful maiden whose all-white outfit remained sparkingly clean despite her frequent solo train trips.⁴⁴

As such images suggest, the figure of the attractive young woman—the “New Woman” who, though respectful of social proprieties, had an unprecedented opportunity for a brief life of her own between adolescence and matrimony, who perhaps went to college and who summered with her similarly inclined friends—was common in popular culture of this era. While her fine dress and plentiful leisure time marked her as class-specific, she represented the potential for real changes for women in American society. Appearing in popular fiction and illustration (most notably in the drawings of Charles Dana Gibson), she was embraced by advertising imagery as well, a character meant to appeal to men with her beauty and to women with her sense of adventure and her enviable grace and style. As a cultural symbol, she stood for transition during an American era characterized by promises of fluidity in gender roles and in economic and social class status. Indeed, she stood for modernity itself, as fresh and sleek and exciting as the trains on which she rode.⁴⁵

It was important that this transition was enacted on a public stage. For women as well as men, train travel was an occasion not just to see new places, but to occupy a new kind of space in which they themselves could be seen. “Travel was drama; the travelers were the actors emerging in full view,” writes Birgitta Maria Ingemanson.⁴⁶ And, as railroad historian Lucius Beebe explained, “[f]ew properties of nineteenth-century travel assumed the dimensions as status symbols of the railroad parlor car for well-placed persons on daylight journeys . . . every fringe and tassel bespoke travel à la mode and genteel elegance.”⁴⁷

Yet as Michael Schudson notes, train travel placed women “in the company of strangers where intimacy is a possibility—an opportunity or a danger.”⁴⁸ A short story in the September 1894 of *McClure’s* began with an explanation that “[t]he acquaintance had begun on board a train bound for California, and they had become very good friends” and with the hero’s recollection of the moment he first saw the heroine standing on the car platform: “I heard you laugh, and looked up, and saw you standing there with your head a little thrown back,

and your white teeth and dimples showing. . . . [I] didn't rest until I had met you."⁴⁹ In *Cosmopolitan*, however, danger lurked for "The Girl Who Travels Alone." The article with this title, a moral tale presented as nonfiction, told of an attractive young woman from the east who rode by herself by train throughout the Midwest and West. She repeatedly suffered the insults of men and the disdain of women accompanying their husbands; at one point, she wailed, "Oh, my! If I'd thought it'd be like this I'd never left!"⁵⁰

Many young women of this era were indeed traveling on trains, with or without male escort. J. Valerie Fifer contends that in this era "[r]ailroads gave women . . . a new sense of adventure and a new freedom of movement, as well as a new means of security" and that "more and more women traveled on their own—mothers and daughters, sisters, friends, schoolteachers, women joining special parties, women alone."⁵¹ Bonnie Frederick and Virginia Hyde write that "the sudden increase in women's travels in the Victorian period coincided not only with the era's great prosperity, but also with some restrictive concepts of home life and women's domestic duty. . . . The cluttered, airless sitting room in England or America is the point of comparison when nineteenth-century women travelers write of the expanse of the American plains. . . ."⁵²

Evidence of women's increasing presence on the railroads could be seen beginning in the 1880s, when many stations added "specially designed 'Ladies' Waiting Rooms' with female attendants."⁵³ By 1913, a Pennsylvania Railroad customer booklet included illustrations of lone women sipping tea in the ticket office (Figure 4), being seated courteously by Pullman Porters, and gazing with enjoyment from the platform of the train's observation car.⁵⁴ Women's ability to move into public in a respectable manner during these pivotal decades depended on gestures toward class status. In this scenario, Victorian formality and ritual were not restrictive, but helpful: Ingemanson notes that women's formal dress and "props," such as the upscale decorations of train cars, served as a deterrent against improper advances.⁵⁵ Indeed, writes Amy Richter, female travelers choosing upscale train travel "shaped public life to their will, reimagining it as a realm of moral and physical comfort, transplanting the values and expectations of the private/feminine home onto the public/manly word on rails."⁵⁶ She adds: "In railway cars, the trappings of the comfortable home—the sideboards, upholstery, and paneling—imparted a sense of stability to American technological progress and communicated the values of the moral home. They offered social cues for passengers' behavior and reassurances concerning the conduct of those around them."⁵⁷



FIGURE 4

Even so, the figure (imagined or real) of the female traveler presented an interesting dilemma to American commercial institutions. Richard Ohmann notes that Edward Bok, the conservative editor of the era's top-circulation magazine, *The Ladies' Home Journal*, was torn between his belief that respectable women should stay at home and his magazine's advertisers need for his readers to leave the house to go shopping.⁵⁸ For its own purposes, the Pennsylvania Railroad came up with the solution of the "Chaperon" (as the company spelled this word), described at length in an 1891 brochure:

The Chaperon, a lady of culture and refinement, is charged with special care of the ladies. She not only ministers to their comfort in countless ways that suggest themselves to an experienced traveler, but has a watchful eye for those delicate attentions which might escape the observation of the sterner sex. Ladies who would shrink from the idea of traveling alone may intrust themselves to her care with implicit confidence, as she will not only prove a companion, but will stand to them in that relation of protectorship which conventionality requires. While all the ladies will be the objects of her care, her especial charge will be those who are not accompanied by male escorts. No lady or party of ladies need hesitate for a moment to join one of these tours on account of the inability of husband or brother to act as escort. The

presence of the Chaperon removes every impediment that would deter a timid woman from undertaking a journey alone, and places them on a footing as independent as that enjoyed by the men."⁵⁹

One 1903 booklet promoting a summer tour to upstate New York and Canada actually listed the names of the three chaperones, all of whom had the title "Miss" ("Miss E. C. Bingham, Miss Z. W. Beaty, Miss A. E. Brady").⁶⁰ The railroad's 1907 *Tour to the New Orleans Mardi Gras* guidebook noted that the Chaperon was not simply a barrier between her charges and forward men; she was useful, being herself (interestingly) an "experienced" traveler "ministering to their necessities in a most intelligent manner" and "furnishing all information that one could wish." The booklet noted: "In the Chaperon the ladies find both a companion and guide."⁶¹ This sort of language promised enjoyment wrapped in a cloak of propriety, an appealing opportunity not just for young women but also, perhaps, for their mothers who may have wished for some adventure of their own. At a time when the forces of urban commerce (and, increasingly, club activities and social work) were creating a path into the public sphere for turn-of-the-century middle-class women, this new scheme of "personally-conducted" travel extended that path across the American land as well.

With the amenity of the chaperone, the Pennsylvania Railroad simultaneously prevented women from traveling alone and allowed them to do so, even over great distances. This compromise—which negotiated tensions between Victorian-era social conventions still limiting women's mobility and the increasing imperative of selling to "the New Woman" in a changing commercial world—also characterized the railroad's promises of luxury and "class" aboard its trains, rich descriptions written in ways that emphasized tradition in order to convince socially-ambitious middle-class women to embrace the new.

"Special Accommodations of a Strictly Exclusive Character": The Aspirational Passenger

As their real means increased (as incomes stabilized and as buying power and leisure time increased), the imagined status of many middle-class Americans soared in the years around the turn of the twentieth century. "Millions of people were taking up new standards of domestic culture previously restricted to the upper class," notes Richard Ohmann. Their behavior was "drawn from the

historical repertory of the class above them. Advertisers both fed and fed upon this aspiration, in an upscale movement characteristic of mass culture from its earliest phase."⁶² Aboard the premier cross-country trains, "luxury created its own fantasy world," writes John Stilgoe. "Anyone who could afford a ticket stepped into a world filled with servants intent on pampering," as well as "a world of fine wood, excellent upholstery, and polished metal."⁶³

Calling its guided tours "the ultimate ideal in travel," one Pennsylvania Railroad brochure offered this sweeping description that is nevertheless specific in its appeal: "The elimination of all cares and perplexities by the running of special trains on special schedules for special parties at special times."⁶⁴ This was not merely a trip; it was an exclusive opportunity for the non-elite, a first-class experience meant for second-class people hoping to transcend the usual limitations of their incomes. That experience came complete with "Tourist Agents, Chaperons, and Baggage masters, who relieve the parties under their charge of every care and anxiety about the trip."⁶⁵ In the promotional travel narrative, these characters were not railroad employees; they were servants, "carefully drilled attendants whose duty is to respond promptly to the requirements of passengers and look out for the comfort and welfare of all."⁶⁶

The role of railroad personnel in this drama was summarized in an 1895 corporate profile (but certainly not reprinted in promotional booklets or travel guides!) from the employees' perspective, suggesting a different definition of passengers' "specialness": "Those officials have to deal with the personality of humanity, which is always selfish—rarely generous. To cater to the comforts, pleasures, necessities and whims of an individual is a duty to perform, not to be sought, and demands a superior order of ability, tact and diplomacy upon the part of those chosen for its performance. When the individuals consolidate into communities . . . the task of the General Passenger Department becomes one of great perplexity and arduousness, to be performed with the utmost delicacy of touch."⁶⁷

Catering to this "personality of humanity," a 1903 Pennsylvania Railroad *Tour to the North* guidebook addressed travelers in a knowing, world-weary way, as though they were perfectly capable of arranging their own journeys but should not have to be bothered (though this passage also emphasized cost savings): "It is tedious and unsatisfactory to map out a tour for one's self, for expense invariably doubles, and some petty traveling annoyance, the result of an oversight, mars what should have been a pleasant trip. It is a pleasure to have everything arranged systematically before departing, thus obviating unnecessary expenses as well as inconveniences."⁶⁸

While such "delicacy" and "pleasure" presumably could be appreciated by anyone, the language of both the unctuous promotional brochures and the frank corporate account suggests that the railroad was targeting women. Amy Richter confirms that the existence of "working-class gentlemen" on the railroads assured women "that good manners—and the Victorian gender roles they defined—would not be sacrificed as travelers sought to get their money's worth," and points out that the attentions of porters, baggage men, and other employees replaced "much of the work that male passengers had previously done, but without complaint."⁶⁹

In travel guides, the PRR's own descriptions of its relation to customers began generally but offered gendered examples, as in this passage from the booklet titled *Pennsylvania Service: The Standard of Excellence*: "A vast army of employes (*sic*) is constantly and tirelessly laboring to satisfactorily serve its patrons. . . . Travelers are still further relieved of minor details which frequently give annoyance, particularly to women traveling alone, or with children, by uniformed attendants who meet them at terminal stations, take care of hand baggage and assist in all preliminaries incident to the departure or arrival."⁷⁰ That publication continued:

Many of the through trains have special accommodations of a strictly exclusive character, a service in all respects equal to that of the most refined and elegant homes. These trains . . . are made up of Compartment Drawing-Room Sleeping Cars, Dining Cars, Buffet-Smoking, Library and Observation Cars. The finishing touches to the aggregate of real home comforts provided on these trains are a perfectly appointed bathroom, valet and barber service; a manicure and a ladies' maid whose especial function is the care and comfort of women passengers . . . the Library-Observation room at the end of the train [is] free for ladies and those who prefer the beauties of scenery, a book, a chat, or the opportunity to "write a letter home."⁷¹

After the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, American women could read the travel accounts of Miriam Leslie, a magazine editor and the wife of publisher Frank Leslie, whose journey from New York to California was made partly on a Pullman Hotel Car that had been "exhibited at the Centennial Exposition, and built at a cost of \$35,000." Here is part of her chronicle: "At six the tables are laid for two each, with dainty linen, and the finest of glass and china, and we presently sit down to dinner. Our repast is

Delmonican in its nature and style, consisting of soup, fish, *entrees*, roast meat and vegetables, followed by the conventional dessert. . . .”⁷²

By the time of the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago, the middle-class women who read Mrs. Leslie’s magazines could claim this experience (or a version of it) as their own. Promoting its tour to the Exposition (Figure 5), the Pennsylvania Railroad promised that passengers would be “amazed at the delicious luxury of the car which is designed primarily for the women passengers . . . The rattan furniture, upholstered in rich velvets, the soft carpets, the wide and high windows, slightly bowed, with their sumptuous draperies, the writing-desks, . . . The chief feature of the car lies beyond these in the extreme rear. At first glance it reminds you of a piazza upon which this beautiful room opens out, and a piazza from which the view is constantly changing.”⁷³

On the tour to Mexico, Pennsylvania guidebooks promised, passengers would take their meals in a dining car in which “[g]listening silver and glass-ware vie

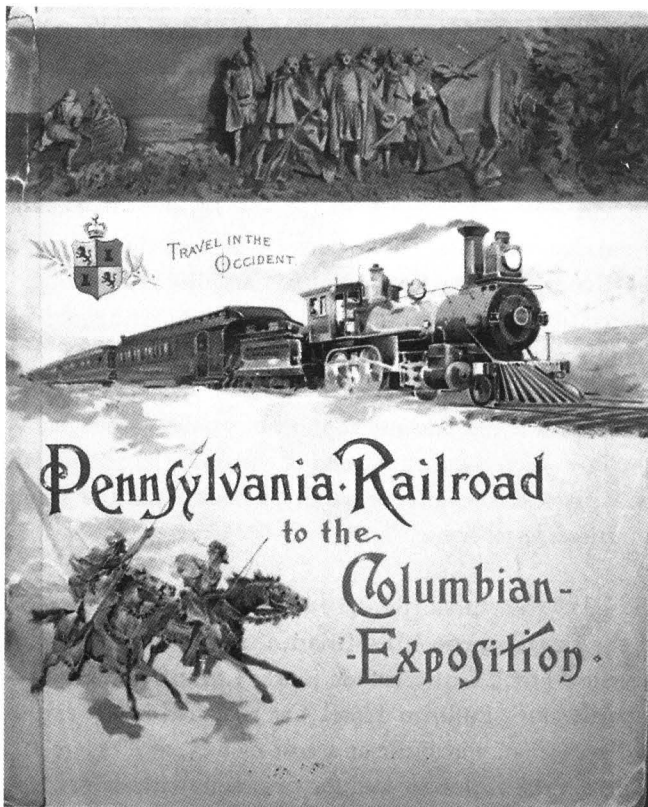


FIGURE 5

in brilliancy with the spotless linen" and "between fixed hours the meals are ready, regardless of where the train may be, and one may tempt a perhaps capricious appetite as free and untrammelled as to time as if he were seated in Young's, Delmonico's, or the Bellevue."⁷⁴ Off the train, at stops along the route, the railroad's customers would encounter nothing but the best: "The choicest rooms in the leading hotels are always reserved for their use, for which regular rates are paid, so that the guests, although members of a large party, enjoy all the privileges of individuals who may have made their own selections."⁷⁵

Conclusion

Even if the realities of cross-country travel lived up to the railroad's promotional descriptions, its passengers' "privileges" were limited to an episode that was, for most of them, outside their true realities. Their travel experience was, in the words of William Leach, a "democratization of desire" more so than of wealth itself, merely an illusion that the social ladder had been climbed.⁷⁶ Yet, as Miles Orvell notes, desire and illusion characterized "the spirit of the age," a "terrific drive upward, with the *appearance* of elevated status serving just as well, almost, as the real thing."⁷⁷ For Pennsylvanians (and even New Yorkers) who normally did not dine at Delmonico's or never had stood in an Italian piazza, their trip aboard Pullman cars was an indulgence and most likely an enjoyable experience. And their temporary rise in class status, even if only an illusion, occurred aboard a real technological marvel, a vehicle that sped across land that, once, could only be imagined. "To ride a first class train" in this era, notes John Stilgoe, "was to experience not only the fantasy of luxury, but the fantasy of futurism too."⁷⁸

The Pennsylvania Railroad tours, then, did provide something real for a new kind of consumer, one who would continue to occupy a central role in playing out fantasies of consumption throughout the following century. Although a train trip did not actually accomplish upward mobility—a change in economic and social place—for these travelers, it did accomplish literal mobility, a transcendence of geographic place that opened new vistas for middle-class Americans. On trains, "freedom" was accomplished through the purchase of a trip and its enactment (the "drama") in which an idealized travel experience played out, complete with servants and luxury accommodations. Moreover, railroad travel gave middle-class and wealthy women a literal freedom of movement and a sense that a wider world was, at least on a leisure basis, open to them.

In the twentieth century, public debates about—and marketing to—female travelers would shift their focus from the train to the automobile, the technological development that, by the mid-1910s, began to replace trains as the middle-class transportation of choice for long leisure trips. Historians note the same concerns and possibilities regarding women and cars. In an era characterized by “fear that women might stray too far from home,” notes Virginia Scharff, “female cross-country drivers, literally revealing themselves to the public eye in their open vehicles, challenged the notion that women ought to remain sequestered in the home.”⁷⁹ Described (and experienced) at first as a privilege of the wealthy, car travel was soon enthusiastically embraced by middle-class women who could afford Henry Ford’s mass-produced vehicles and who could read popular accounts such as *By Motor to the Golden Gate*, Emily Post’s book about her own 1916 cross-country trip.⁸⁰

Yet it was on the railroad that American women had first become the stars of travel stories in the popular imagination. These narratives, told within the pages of the richly descriptive and lavishly illustrated guidebooks published by the Pennsylvania Railroad, signaled the commercial power of women in the coming century. In courting women through promotional descriptions of scenic adventure, luxurious accommodation, and patriotic exploration, the railroad was not only soliciting essential new business. It was selling class, marketing a dream-space of high culture and modernity in which Americans might re-envision their own lives, “a piazza from which the view is constantly changing.”

NOTES

1. This research was conducted under a grant from the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission that allowed me to spend a month as a Scholar in Residence at the Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania in Strasburg, PA during June 2004. In particular, Linda Shopes, Historian and Residency Program Manager of the PHMC, gave me invaluable encouragement, and at the Railroad Museum, director David Dunn welcomed me and archivists Kurt Bell and Bill Baker were generous with their time in helping me to find the travel brochures and corporate archival material that inspired this article. The project was further enriched by the findings of Temple University doctoral student Melissa Lenos, who enthusiastically searched nineteenth-century magazines for stories about train travel.
2. *Pennsylvania Tour to Mexico* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Railroad, 1891), 9, in Pennsylvania Railroad curatorial file, MG-199, no file or box number, Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania

Historical and Museum Commission. In subsequent notes, the Pennsylvania Railroad will be abbreviated as the PRR, and all PRR promotional and corporate documents should be attributed to the Railroad Museum's multi-box curatorial file and library files. Photographs accompanying this article are of materials held in the Railroad Museum curatorial files and library, and were taken by the author.

3. *Pennsylvania Railroad Tours to the Golden Gate* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Railroad, 1898), 3, PRR curatorial file MG-199, no file or box number.
4. Michael E. Zega and John E. Gruber, *Travel by Train: The American Railroad Poster, 1870-1950* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 18.
5. Cy Warman, "Flying through Flames," *McClure's*, October 1894, 422-23; Cy Warman, "A Thousand-Mile Ride on the Engine of the Swiftest Train in the World," *McClure's*, January 1894, 164-84. In the latter article, Warman was identified as "formerly Engineer on the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad" (164).
6. Miles Orvell, *The Real Thing: Imitation and Authenticity in American Culture, 1880-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 49-50.
7. See, for instance: J. Valerie Fifer, *American Progress: The Growth of the Transport, Tourist, and Information Industries in the Nineteenth-Century West Seen through the Life and Times of George A. Crofutt, Pioneer and Publicist of the Transcontinental Age* (Chester, CT: The Globe Pequot Press, 1988); Anne Farrar Hyde, *An American Vision: Far Western Landscape and National Culture, 1820-1920* (New York: New York University Press, 1990); John A. Jakle, *The Tourist: Travel in Twentieth-Century America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985); John F. Sears, *Sacred Places: American Tourist Attractions in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Marguerite S. Shaffer, *See America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880-1940* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001); and Marta Weigle and Barbara A. Babcock, eds., *The Great Southwest of the Fred Harvey Company and the Santa Fe Railway* (Phoenix, AZ: The Heard Museum, 1996).
8. In particular, see Bonnie Frederick and Susan H. McLeod, eds., *Women and the Journey: The Female Travel Experience* (Pullman, WA: Washington State University Press, 1993). Most historical scholarship on women's leisure travel in the late nineteenth century focuses on the documented experiences of particular women, especially those who made adventurous or exotic explorations, and especially British women seeing the Empire. See, for instance: Dorothy Middleton, *Victorian Lady Travellers* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965); Jane Robinson, *Wayward Women: A Guide to Women Travellers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Mary Russell, *The Blessings of a Good Thick Skirt: Women Travellers and Their World* (London: Collins 1986); and Marion Tinling, *Women into the Unknown: A Sourcebook on Women Explorers and Travelers* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1989).
9. Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 220.
10. Amy G. Richter, *Home on the Rails: Women, the Railroad, and the Rise of Public Domesticity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 8, 9. For a discussion of the factor of gender in cultural interpretations of the landscape, also see Lorraine Dowler, Josephine Carubia, and Bonj Szczgiel, eds., *Gender and Landscape: Renegotiating Morality and Space* (London and New York: Rutledge, 2005).
11. See, for instance: Helen Damon-Moore, *Magazines for the Millions: Gender and Commerce in the Ladies' Home Journal and the Saturday Evening Post, 1880-1910* (Albany: State University of New York

- Press, 1994); Ellen Gruber Garvey, *The Adman in the Parlor: Magazines and the Gendering of Consumer Culture, 1880s to 1910s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Random House, 1993); and Richard Ohmann, *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets, and Class at the Turn of the Century* (London and New York: Verso, 1996).
12. Hugh DeSantis, "The Democratization of Travel: The Travel Agent in American History," *Journal of American Culture* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1978), 3.
13. Shaffer, *See America First*, 22.
14. Hyde, *An American Vision*, 108.
15. Shaffer, *See America First*, 42.
16. *Summer Excursion Routes 1877* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Railroad, 1877), in PRR curatorial file MG-199, RR75.29.
17. DeSantis, "The Democratization of Travel," 1, 9, 10.
18. Brad S. Lomazzi, *Railroad Timetables, Travel Brochures & Posters: A History and Guide for Collectors* (Spencertown, NY: Golden Hill Press, 1995), 131.
19. Lomazzi, *Railroad Timetables*, 90.
20. Shaffer, *See America First*, 18; Hyde, *An American Vision*, 108. The 300,000 sales figure was claimed by *Croftutt's Overland Tourist*, the leading national railroad travel guide of the late 1860s and the 1870s; it is discussed in Shaffer.
21. Fifer, *American Progress*, 322.
22. William Bender Wilson, *History of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company* (Philadelphia: Henry T. Coates & Co., 1895), 83.
23. *Summer Excursion Routes, Season of 1874* (Philadelphia: Allen, Lane & Scott, 1874), in PRR curatorial file MG-199, RR78.56.
24. *Summer Excursion Routes 1877*, iii.
25. *Summer Excursion Routes 1882* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Railroad, 1882), in PRR curatorial file, MG-199 RR78.56.
26. J. Elfreth Watkins, *History of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company, 1846-1896*, vol. 1, unpublished manuscript (commissioned by the PRR) in the library files of the Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania.
27. Various tour booklets in PRR library file RR72.1 and curatorial file MG-199, RR78.56; *Pennsylvania Tour to Mexico*, 5; *Tour to the Battlefield of Gettysburg, Luray Caverns and Washington* (Philadelphia: Allen, Lane & Scott, 1897), n.p.
28. *Pennsylvania Railroad Tours to the Golden Gate*, 5.
29. Stanley L. Baker and Virginia Brainard Kunz (*The Collector's Book of Railroadiana* [Secaucus, NJ: Castle Books, 1976]) write that this phrase was used in the travel brochures of the Soo Line (the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul & Pacific Railway) around the turn of the century. Shaffer (*See America First*) attributes its origin to a group of Utah-based businessmen who held a "See America First Conference" in 1906 and coined the phrase "See Europe if you will, but See America First" (26). She also writes that the Great Northern Railway began using the phrase in a periodical and billboard advertising campaign beginning in 1910 (40-41). For the PRR and other railroads, "America" meant the continent (i.e., not Europe), including Mexico and Canada.
30. *Pennsylvania Tour to Mexico*, 5.

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31. *A Handbook of the South* (Chicago: Poole Bros., 1890), issued by the "Pennsylvania Lines West of Pittsburgh," in PRR curatorial file MG-199, RR87.53, n.p.
32. Hyde, *An American Vision*, 294, 100.
33. John R. Stilgoe, *Metropolitan Corridor: Railroads and the American Scene* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), 254.
34. M. M. Shaw, *Nine Thousand Miles on a Pullman Train: An Account of a Tour of Railroad Conductors from Philadelphia to the Pacific Coast and Return* (Philadelphia: Allen, Lane & Scott, 1898), 175, in the library of the Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania.
35. The career trajectories of Boyd and Wood, and confirmation of their roles in the PRR publicity operation during this time period, can be found in these biographical and institutional sources, copies of which are in the library of the Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania: "George Washington Boyd," *The Biographical Directory of the Railway Officials of America*, 1913 ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1913), 57; "George Washington Boyd" and "James R. Wood," *The Biographical Directory of the Railway Officials of America*, 1906 ed. (Chicago: Railway Age, 1906), 62, 668; *The Official Guide of the Railways and Steam Navigation Lines of the United States, Porto (sic) Rico, Canada, Mexico and Cuba* (New York: National Railway Publications Company, April 1913), 407; and Wilson, *History of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company*, 86, 87. The book about the conductor's tour (Shaw, *Nine Thousand Miles on a Pullman Train*) specifically mentions Boyd: "Mr. George W. Boyd, Assistant General Passenger Agent, interested himself greatly in our trip, and under his direction the Tourist Department outlined and arranged the itinerary, which was printed in neat form and presented to the party . . ." (5).
36. Media historians may find it notable that the well-coordinated publicity operation of the PRR under Wood and Boyd predates by *two decades* the much better-known (and much more thoroughly studied) publicity work of Ivy Lee, widely considered the father of modern publicity, who established the PRR's first official Publicity Department in 1908.
37. George W. Boyd, writing in Watkins, *History of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company*, 1846–1896, 86, 87.
38. William Hosea Ballou, "Railway Advertising," *Printer's Ink*, February 3, 1892, 147.
39. This figure is mentioned in many advertising histories, including: Stephen Fox, *The Mirror Makers: A History of American Advertising and Its Creators* (New York: William Morrow, 1984); T. J. Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); and Juliann Sivulka, *Soap, Sex, and Cigarettes: A Cultural History of American Advertising* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1998).
40. Damon-Moore, *Magazines for the Millions*, 12.
41. *Dry Goods Economist*, March 8, 1902, 53, 77–86, cited in Leach, *Land of Desire*, 101.
42. Women can be seen standing atop cliffs in, for instance: advertisement for the Santa Fe Railroad reprinted in *The Great Southwest of the Fred Harvey Company and the Santa Fe Railway*, ed. Weigle and Babcock, 22; and the cover of a souvenir-book titled *Over the Rockies to the Top of the World on the Denver & Salt Lake Railroad Moffat Road* (Omaha, NE: Barkalow Bros Co., no year), in the library of the Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania.
43. Zega and Gruber, *Travel by Train*, 13.
44. The Phoebe Snow advertisements, most of which took the form of streetcar-sized posters, or "car cards," are preserved, along with related corporate promotional materials of the Delaware,

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- Lackawanna, and Western Railroad, in the Thomas T. Taber Collection, RR 75.30, in the Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania.
45. For more on the commercial representation of the New Woman as symbol of these transitions, see Carolyn Kitch, *The Girl on the Magazine Cover: The Origins of Visual Stereotypes in American Mass Media* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).
46. Birgitta Maria Ingemanson, "Under Cover: The Paradox of Victorian Women's Travel Costume," in *Women and the Journey*, ed. Frederick and McLeod, 9.
47. Lucius Beebe, *Mr. Pullman's Elegant Palace Car* (New York: Doubleday, 1961), 319.
48. Michael Schudson, *Advertising, The Uneasy Persuasion: Its Dubious Impact on American Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), 149.
49. Florence L. Guertin, "With Madness in His Method," *McClure's*, September 1894, 313-14.
50. Eleanor Gates, "The Girl Who Travels Alone," *Cosmopolitan*, November 1906, 11, 1.
51. Fifer, *American Progress*, 9-10.
52. Bonnie Frederick and Virginia Hyde, "Introduction," in *Women and the Journey*, ed. Frederick and McLeod, xix.
53. H. Roger Grant, Introduction, in *We Took the Train*, ed. H. Roger Grant (Dekalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1990), xxvi.
54. *Pennsylvania Service: The Standard of Excellence* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Railroad Company, 1913), in PRR library file RR72.1, n.p.
55. Ingemanson, "Under Cover," 7, 9.
56. Richter, *Home on the Rails*, 8.
57. Richter, *Homes on the Rails*, 71.
58. Ohmann makes this point about Bok in *Selling Culture*, 271-72.
59. *Pennsylvania Tour to Mexico*, 6-7.
60. *Tour to the North, Summer 1903* (Philadelphia: Allen, Lane & Scott, 1903), 7, in PRR library file RR72.1.
61. *Tour to the New Orleans Mardi Gras, 1907* (Philadelphia: Allen Lane & Scott, 1906), 7, in PRR library file RR72.1.
62. Ohmann, *Selling Culture*, 90.
63. Stilgoe, *Metropolitan Corridor*, 54.
64. *Pennsylvania Railroad Pleasure Tours, Season of 1913* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Railroad Company, 1913), n.p., in PRR library file RR72.1.
65. *Pennsylvania Railroad Pleasure Tours, Season of 1913*.
66. *Pennsylvania Service*, n.p.
67. Wilson, *History of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company*, 83.
68. *Tour to the North, Summer 1903*, 6.
69. Richter, *Home on the Rails*, 113, 114.
70. *Pennsylvania Service*, n.p.
71. *Pennsylvania Service*, n.p.
72. Florence [Miriam] Leslie, "A Pleasure Trip from Gotham to the Golden Gate," reprinted in Grant, ed., *We Took the Train*, 32-33.
73. *Pennsylvania Railroad to the Columbian Exposition* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Railroad, 1893), 23-24, in Pennsylvania Railroad curatorial file MG-199, RR75.29.

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74. *Pennsylvania Tour to Mexico*, 9.
75. *Pennsylvania Tour to Mexico*, 7.
76. Leach, *Land of Desire*, 5.
77. Orwell, *The Real Thing*, 60.
78. Stilgoe, *Metropolitan Corridor*, 57.
79. Virginia Scharff, *Taking the Wheel: Women and the Coming of the Motor Age* (New York: The Free Press, 1991), 77.
80. Jakle, *The Tourist*, 8. Shaffer (*See America First*) also dates the decline of railroad travel to this decade, noting that by the mid-1910s there was an automobile company called Overland Motor Cars, a brand-name echo of the Union Pacific Railroad's famous Overland Route (134).