

*Like any trade, the Railroad workers had their own language and “slang” terms for people places and things. Many of these “terms” came about during the steam era, and are seldom used today.*

**Bend the Iron**

To throw a switch.

**Bradley Bar**

A device shaped like a hockey stick used to straighten hand- holds on freight cars.

**Brass Hat**

A railroad executive, usually a division manager or higher, a.k.a. *suits*.

**Brotherhood Notch**

A notch high on the reverse lever quadrant which admitted a very limited amount of steam to the cylinder making it easier on fireman, but taking longer to get over the road.

**Camel back**

Slang: an older rerailling device, also called a rerailling "frog". Used in pairs, one on each side to lift the wheel flanges of a derailed car and allow them to slide back onto the rail.

**Company Notch**

Denotes reverse lever in lower quadrant using lots of steam to pull a heavy, i.e. revenue train making money for the company.

**Coon It**

To walk across the tops of freight cars.

**Date Nail**

A small nail used by railroads from late 1800's up thru the 1970's to mark the year a tie was placed in roadbed. Date nails had the last two numbers of the year on the head of the nail. Usually found within six inches of tie end, but some are located mid tie to allow easier inspection.

**Dinger**

A yardmaster.

**Dollyflopper**

A brakeman or switch-tender - someone who throws switches.

**Dump the air**

Emergency application of the air brakes causing a train to stop abruptly, usually causing damage to the merchandise being carried or to the train equipment, itself.

**Elephant Ears**

Metal side plates used on some large steam locomotives to lift the smoke above the train at speed.

**"Flat"**

A slang term use by graffiti writers for a boxcar without ridges on the sides. Perfect for applying illegal graffiti using spray paint.

**Foamers**

The name used by train crews to identify the people who gather along the railroad tracks to watch or take pictures of trains.

**FRED**

Flashing **Rear End Device** -- end of train telemetry device that replaced the caboose, which was a non-revenue car.

**Frog**

The intersection, of two rails of a switch.

**Gandy Dancer**

A railroad track worker. Name came from the Gandy Mfg Co. in the 19th century that made a lot of track tools.

**Goat**

A yard engine.

**Grip**

Trainman's suitcase.

**Head End**

The front of the train. Use of this term is declining with the demise of the caboose.

**Highball**

A signal given to proceed at maximum permissible speed.

**Hog**

A locomotive.

**Hoghead, Hogger**

A railroad engineer.

**Holy Roller**

A graffiti slang term for a car transport car, for their great length, perfect for doing an end to end and other large "productions" with the illegal spray-paint techniques.

**Hospital Train**

A train consisting of damaged or wrecked rail cars being transported to a repair point on their wheels. Some cars have no operating brakes or intact train line. Many times a long flexible hose is used to transmit brake pipe pressure around cars with damaged train lines. Such a train must have a car on the rear with an operating brake controlled via the hose. "Hospital Trains" are also restricted to speed as well.

**House Track**

A track entering, or along side a freight house. Cars are spotted here for loading or unloading.

**Hump**

A rail yard with a hill. Cars are uncoupled while in motion at the top of the "hump" and gravity pulls the cars to the classification tracks where the trains are made up.

**Iron Bender**

A switchman.

**Jerkwater Town**

A small town with few facilities, identified on the railroad by the existence of a water plug (tower)

only, for filling the locomotive.

### **Jew Bar**

A device that holds a track in gauge. Used on sidings or industrial track.

### **Join the Birdies**

To jump from a locomotive cab before a collision.

### **Journal Box**

Metal box around axle bearing for holding a lubricant saturated pad next to the wheel bearing.

### **Lightning Slinger**

Slang: railroad telegrapher.

### **Monkey's Tail**

Slang for the handle of a switch stand, as in *twisting the monkey's tail*.

### **OTM**

**Other Track Material** -- materials other than ties and rails, generally refers to spikes, tie plates and rail anchors.

### **Out of Station (O. S.)**

Report the telegrapher would give the dispatcher on the Rock Island and presumably other railroads when the train would be past their station.

### **Piglet**

A locomotive engineer trainee.

### **Pussyfoot**

Railroad detective, police, or security personnel, often found in plain clothes in rail yards or piggy-back lifts where high-dollar freight is being moved.

### **Rail Weight**

The number of pounds per yard that rail weighs. Currently, modern rail is being rolled at 112 to 145 pounds per yard. Much heavier than the 90-100 pound rail prior to World War II.

### **Ribbon Rail**

Continuous welded rail, laid in 1/4 mile lengths then welded end to end to make a continuous length.

### **Rotary Dump Car**

A car that is unloaded by turning it completely upside-down. Most coal trains are made up of rotary dump cars.

### **Saw-by, Double Saw-by**

Maneuver used by two trains at meeting point, when train on siding is too long for the siding. Double saw-by is complicated maneuver allowing two trains that are both longer than the siding at meeting point to pass one another at that siding.

### **Shaker Bar**

A tool carried in steam locomotive cabs that would be placed on the grate levers mounted in the cab deck to allow the fireman to shake the grates in the firebox, dumping ashes into the ash pan below the firebox.

**Slippery Track**

A highly greased track near the roundhouse or back shop where a newly rebuilt locomotive could be run in without going anywhere, and without calling an engine crew or pilot.

**Slack**

The motion, forward or back, that one or more cars, locomotives, or parts of a train has without moving other coupled cars, locomotives, or parts of the train. Loose slack is the free movement or lost motion between parts of a train.

Spring slack is the movement beyond the free or lost motion brought about through compressing the draft gear springs. Slack is necessary so as to start one car at a time and so that the train may be operated around curves and over high and low places.

**Smoking to a Meet**

In steam service, pre-radio, making smoke to alert awaiting opposing train that you were approaching meeting point.

**Snipe**

The title of a track laborer or Gandy dancer. One who builds or repairs railroad track.

**Sun Kink**

A section of rail that elongates and bends out of alignment due to heat expansion.

**Torpedo**

An explosive cap fastened to the top of the rail and exploded by the pressure of a rolling wheel to give an audible indication of conditions on the track ahead.

**Track Pan**

A water filled trough placed between the rails at certain locations on a railroad's main line, each trough having a length of up to 2500 feet, for the purpose of adding water to the tender of a steam locomotive via an air activated scoop which was located on the underside of a locomotive tender. The use of a track pan arrangement prevented a need to stop to obtain water. Users of track pans included the New York Central, the Pennsylvania, and the Baltimore and Ohio Railroads in the US.

**Water Plug**

The standpipe where a steam locomotive would stop to fill the tender with water.

**Whistle Post**

A specially marked post on the engineer's side of the train that tells him when to start whistling for a grade crossing. Slower trains may delay whistling until closer to the crossing.

**Windy**

A slang term for a car going down a track with no air or hand brake applied.

**Wye**

A track shaped like the letter "Y", but with a connector between the two arms of the "Y". A wye is used to reverse the direction of trains or cars. A train pulls completely through one leg of wye, the switch is thrown and reverses the direction, allowing the movement across the semi-loop track of the wye, and the train is then headed in the opposite direction.

**Wide Vision Caboose**

Caboose with center areas extended out past normal sides of caboose allowing for unobstructed forward viewing.

**Peanut Whistle**

A small, loud, brass peanut sized whistle that was mounted on the rear of the caboose. It was used as a warning device when a train had to back up thru a controlled intersection.

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