(2019 re-type of article: May 28-June 5, 2019)

CAPITOL LIMITED (B&O) Trip date: September 8, 1969

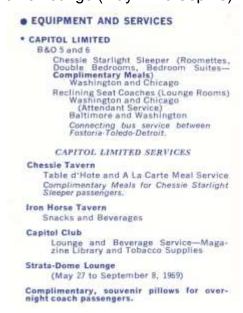
This article originally written: Jan. 2, 1972

"C&O / B&O Want Passengers? You Bet!!" cried the sign adorning the upper level of the building. We were approaching the entry to Grand Central Station in Chicago. I glanced up the extra-high clock tower of the soon-to-be-closed station. The clock still worked. A jet plane moved into view high above, in the distant background ... like a raven circling the doomed.

We had selected the CAPITOL LIMITED for our trip from Chicago to Washington (D.C.) for one overriding reason: the timetable indicated a "Strata-Dome Lounge (May 27 to Sept. 8)."

Reasoning that domes were a *rara avis* in the eastern part of the country, our decision was simple.

[Also we considered the relative fares: similar accommodations via Penn Central to Washington would have been \$4.30 less expensive, but would have included a change of trains -- at 6AM -- in Harrisburg (PA), and would *not* have included a dome car nor the meals (dinner & breakfast) which were complimentary on B&O tickets for 1st class passengers in the sleeper.]



In fact, judging by the equipment list, the CAPITOL sounded like a totally civilized train, and we couldn't wait for evening and a quiet chat in the Capitol Club lounge, with its magazine library and all.

Our trip on the CAPITOL had actually started two weeks previously, with a phone call from Los Angeles to Chicago to set up up our travel plans. It would have taken days (they claimed) for the C&O / B&O offices in Los Angeles to make the arrangements, days we didn't have. Thus, to make our plans we had to "spend our nickel" to make long distance phone calls. There were to be three in our party. "You're in luck!" came the voice from Chicago, "I have just three roomettes left!" I asked to be put on the waiting list for a bedroom. Additionally, they would not hold the space without my money up front, so I had to write a confirming letter, with payment enclosed. (Was I a devoted traveler, or what?!?)

Now inside the Chicago station we checked in with the ticket counter and I enquired about the prospects of being assigned one of those bedrooms. Our name was there, still on the waiting



list - behind three other names. No Bedroom for us. And how many others had sought Bedrooms this day but not wanted to bother with the insecurities of the waiting list?

With extra time before boarding the train, we looked around the dark, cavernous station. There was a gift shop (of sorts), all closed up. Its stock still hung inside the

iron-grilled windows. I saw some large shopping bag-like thing proclaiming the thrill of the onboard movies, offered in bygone days on the B&O.

About 20 people were already at the entry gates, milling about outside of a big sign that said, "CAPITOL Akron-Youngstown-Pittsburgh-Washington-Baltimore; Leaves 3:40pm." About 20 minutes prior to departure, the gates were opened for boarding.



The sign had also indicated 4 coaches, 2 sleeping cars, and a diner. We actually only found 3 coaches and 1 sleeper, plus the dining car. The summer travel season was done, it seems.

B&O "Capitol Limited" at Chicago GCT, late 1969 (internet photo)

The boarding tracks of Grand Central Station were under a huge domed rain shed, like an overgrown Quonset Hut. One of the drawbacks of this design was its inherent attractiveness (not to mention accessibility) to the local pigeon population. One of the "residents" took the opportunity, as we walked toward our car, to vent his frustration on our traveling companion, providing a singularly inauspicious beginning to our trip.

As we boarded our ["Chessie Starlight"*] sleeper, I noted words painted on the trucks of the car, "Lub. Chi. 8-29-69." This sleeping car was recently serviced, it appeared, and seemed to promise a pleasant comfortable ride, at least.

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My wife & I had Roomettes #1 and #2, directly over the wheels. Our companion had Roomette #9, at the extreme opposite end of the car. (The bedrooms of this sleeper occupied the central part of the car, with the 10 Roomettes divided between the two ends of the car.)

The sleeper had a most inviting interior appearance. There was a bright red rug along the corridor floor, and a light paint scheme to the interior walls, livening the often-drab sleeper visage. It gave the impression of a luxury hotel.

Departure was on time, and we set out for the dome car to watch the cityscape meld into farmlands. There was an iron gate across the access to the dome itself, and the Conductor promptly told us that we couldn't go up there until he had all the tickets. "Where are you sitting, anyway?" he demanded. I explained that we were from the sleeping car; now he relented slightly, but still insisted that we wait at the base of the stairs until he had <u>all</u> the tickets.

So we waited, missing any views of the Chicago skyline. Eventually, a Brakeman came and allowed us to go on up.

The "dome" car was one of the major disappointments of this trip: it was a low-profile thing, with a maximum super-elevation of only about 1 foot over an average coach roofline. It was a real curiosity piece to me, having only experienced Budd-built "Vista Domes" on western railroads, and was clearly designed to meet height restrictions of tunnels, bridges and/or eastern electric catenary.



Unfortunately, I couldn't stand full upright even when standing in the center aisle.



Interior of B&O "Strata-Dome" observation car, circa 1969 (internet photo)

The large flat windows were dirty, too. They hadn't been washed in three or four days. Because of the design, we were obliged to sit hunched over in the seats in order to see out the tiny side windows of the dome. The dome was uncrowded.

We couldn't quarrel too much, though, for where else would one find *any* dome through Indiana, Ohio, and Pennsylvania?

We ate dinner at a fashionably late hour. The menu was limited to four entrées, but of adequate variety to please most appetites. Roast Sirloin of Beef, au jus, listed at \$3.95, inclusive. Also available were Deluxe Maryland Crab Cakes, tartar sauce (\$3.75) and Roast Young Turkey, cranberry sauce (\$2.75). A combination Ham and Turkey sandwich, classified also as a dinner (with appetizer, dessert, and beverage) was \$2.35. I didn't see anything listed for lesser *a la carte* service.

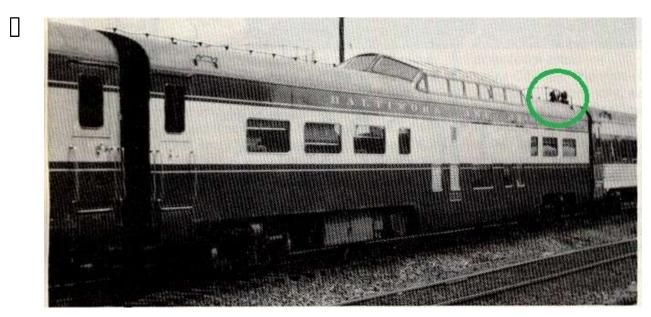
The dinner was served "in the C&O / B&O tradition." Whatever that was, we found our Roast Beef to be tender, succulent, subtly spiced. It tasted fine but was not very hot, worse luck. There was no choice of vegetables; the "snowflake potatoes" tasted like instant, and neither they nor the green beans were hot, either.



The B&O dining cars were sometimes known by a nickname "Iron Horse Taverns" and their most distinctive mark was their china serving ware. A motif of "progressive motive power" around the rim of the plate depicted in blue on white drawings various engines from the history of the B&O, including (among others) the Tom Thumb (1830), the Mogul (1875), and their first real diesel-electric (1937).

The central areas of the plates were also illustrated, as well, with various scenes from the B&O system. The design made the plates reminiscent of, perhaps, Delft china, or maybe "Blue Willow" patterns, with a railroad motif. It was quite an experience to have a meal served from this place setting. (These plates may be purchased even today [1970 - ed.] by writing the B&O Transportation Museum, Baltimore, MD, 21223.)

After dinner we returned to the dome for more viewing. It was dark by this time and I was surprised to see that the several "lumps" I had observer earlier on the roof toward the forward portion of the dome car, and which resembled lights, actually *were* lights — and they worked! They were turned on, facing outwards from the car, making an effort to light up the outside night. It was mostly a feeble effort, but it was the thought that counted.



B&O "Strata-Dome" lounge car with the electric "illumination lights" (note green circle) (internet photo)

Another disappointment of the CAPITOL LIMITED was the sort of overstatement of the services. The timetable promised a "Chessie Tavern", and the "Iron Horse Tavern", and the "Capitol Club." In reality, these were all integrated into the one dining car. I never did see any

magazines, and the drinks were served from the kitchen, based on a listing inside the dinner menu.

My final disappointment of the trip was our sleeping car. Despite that recent lubrication job I'd previously noted, it was noisy as all getout. Every time the train would venture around a curve, a long, slow *s-c-r-r-e-e-e-a-k* would emanate from directly beneath our beds as the wheels shifted, maintaining alignment with the tracks. I had noticed the noise from the first, when leaving Chicago, but reassured myself that use would warm it up while traveling and it would correct itself. It did not, and the noise effectively dispatched any vestigial chances of sleep that night. Over the wheels is bumpy to begin with, and that noise was the last straw.

In the wee hours, I sat in my roomette and watched as we sped along the Beaver, and then the Ohio Rivers. Tiny lights across the river marked homes, factories, Sleep like a kitten

A New Service!

CHESSIE STARLIGHT SLEEPER

Climb aboard and relax. C&O/B&O's new Chessie Starlight Sleeper service offers the ultimate in travel comfort. A variety of norm accommodations, all providing complete privacy. Full-size, sleep inviting beds. Attentive porter service. Complimentary meals served in the C&O/B&O tradition.

Chessie Starlight Sleeper Service is available on The Capital Limited between Washington-Pittsburgh, and Chicago and on The George Washington serving Washington-Newport News-Richmond and Cincinnati-Louisville.

The Cost: C&O/B&O's economical Blue Day Coach fares, plus room charge, Sample fares are shown on the inside back cover.

towns. I kept wondering where we were, and when would we get to Pittsburgh? And around Pittsburgh, I watched for flames shooting skyward from steel manufacturing plants, but it was a quiet night for pyrotechnics.

I must have rested *some* during the night, but when morning arrived I felt a bit droopy.

While preparing for the new day we were passing through the deep backwoods of western Maryland nor northern West Virginal. Tall trees chopped the early morning sun into a golden strobe light, and we twisted and turned along a stream passing sleepy hamlet and tiny town in our rush to the big city. It was hard to believe that in under two hours the landscape would make a transition from these mountain country shacks to the buildings of our nation's Capitol.

GOOD MORNING

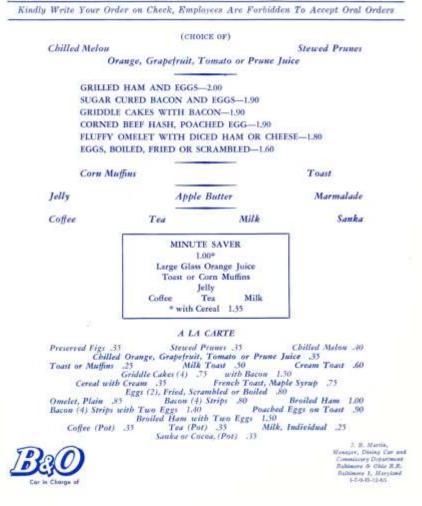
BREAKFAST







We were impressed with the scenic beauty outside, but our breakfast(s) would be a more substantial way to get set for arrival in Washington. The food was ample and hot - and served on that blue china again. Prices (for those in coach) ran from \$1.60 (two eggs) to \$2.00 (two eggs with ham.) Prices included juice, toast, and beverage. Hot or cold cereal was available *a la carte*.



The diner was somewhat more crowded this morning, commuter coffee-drinking types riding in from Martinsburg and Harpers Ferry. There had been about 50 "long haul" passengers.

Approaching Washington was quite impressive: looking forward from out the side of the vestibule door [we had given up on the dome!] you could see that we were headed directly toward the Capitol Building. We arrived right on time at 9:15am.

I would grade the track "C-", and the general attitude of the crew as "fair".

Interestingly, we apparently rode the final regular fun of a dome car on the CAPITOL LIMITED. It was the last run for the summer season (as per the timetable), but we assumed it would reappear in the summer consists of 1970. It never did.

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*The distinction between C&O trademarks and B&O trademarks had become somewhat blurred with their latter-day joint operations.

Children's Menu from the B&O dining car



C&O B&O FARES	One-Way Railroad Fares		CHESSIE STARLIGHT SLEEPER Room Charges to be added to regular one-way fline Day Coach Fare for occupancy of Chessie Starlight Sieeper. Complimentary meals en- route where applicable (Gratuities not included).		C&O B&O FARES	One-Way Railroad Fares		CHESSIE STARLIGHT SLEEPER Room Charges to be added to regular one way Blue Day Coach Fare for occupancy of Chessie Starlight Sleeper Complimentary meals en- route where applicable (Gratuities not included).		
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Additional relevant graphics that I didn't insert into the article, wanting to avoid overloading the article with too many images in the text portion... (from Author's collection)

