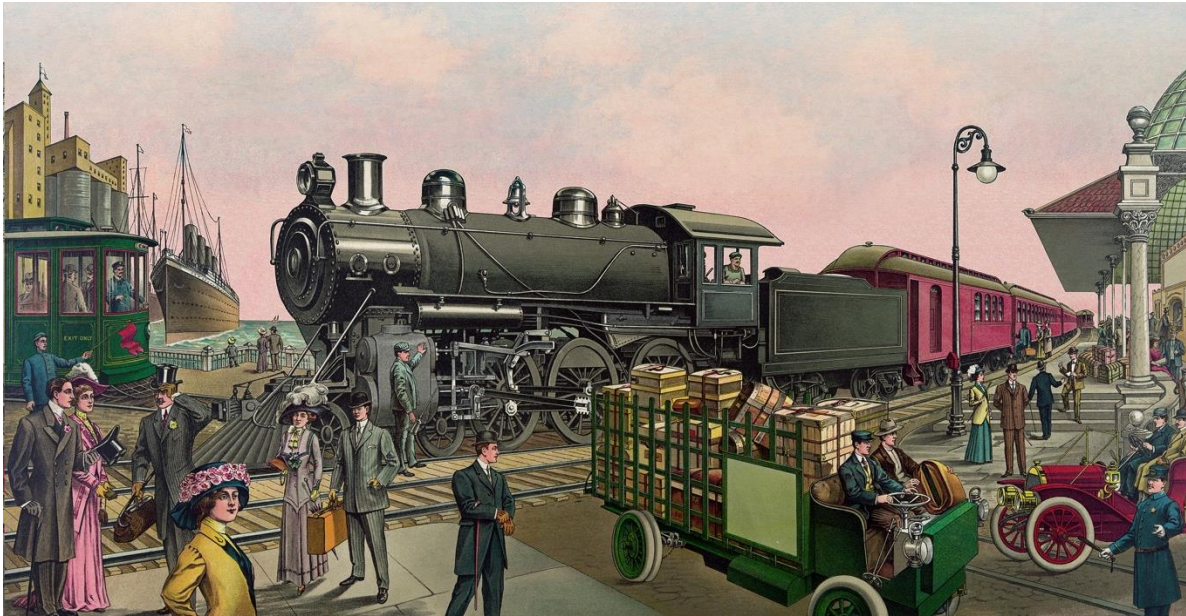


Mom! I'm hungry!

Eating Houses, Station Stops, and Food on Passenger Trains in the West





Hop on for a trip back into early train travel!

Train travel from the 1880s to the early 1900s was often a long and boring trip. You spent long hours rattling and bumping down the tracks in a hard seat.

Have you ever wondered where you would get food if your rail journey lasted for days?

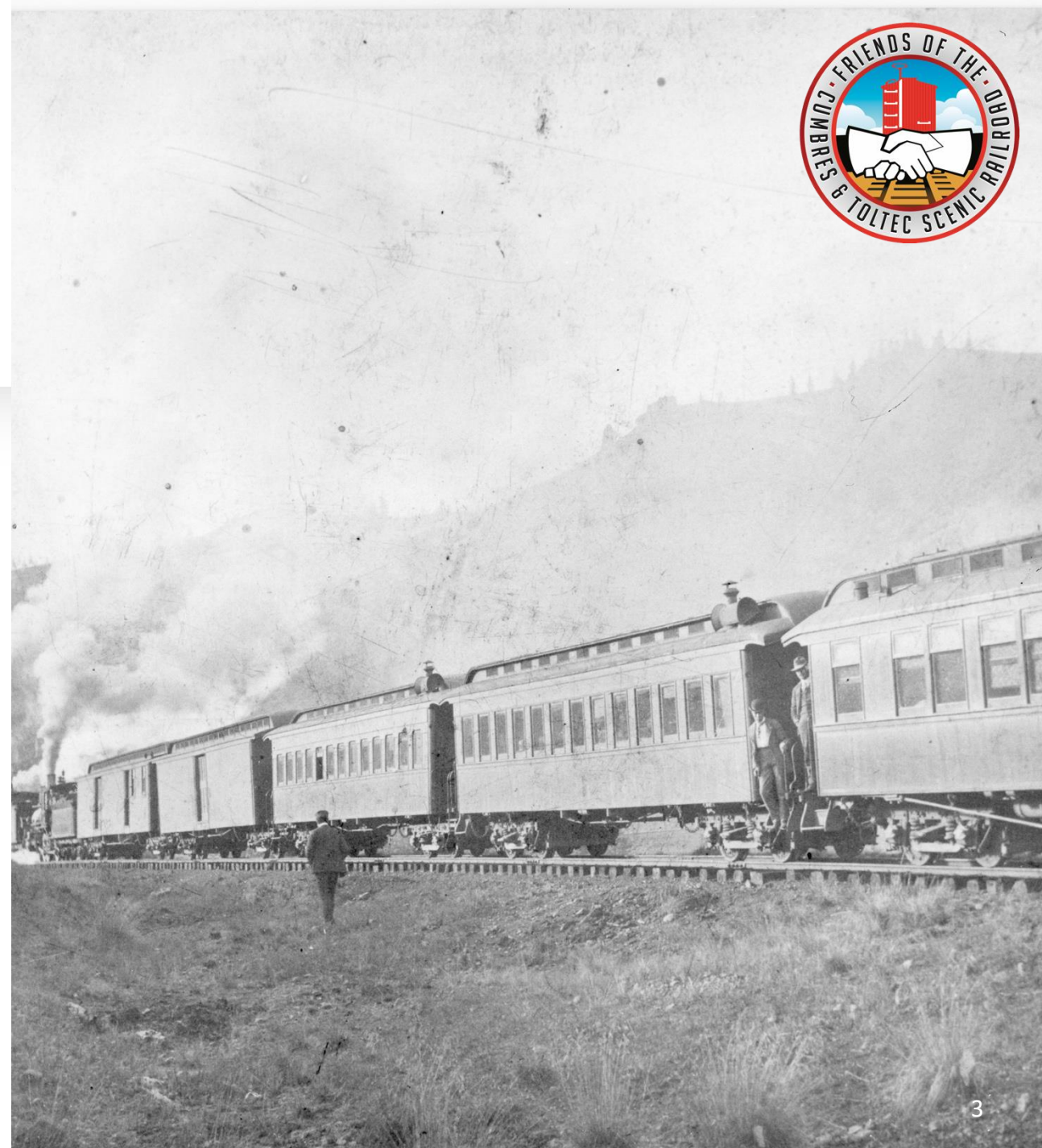


The Joyce Family poses for a photo in Antonito, Colorado. There is a restaurant in the background to the right.

Mom, I'm hungry! What's to eat?

You and your family are traveling to a new home in the west on the train. You've got a small bag with clothes, maybe a toy or book, and other essentials. The days are long, and most days the stops are few and far between. **Passengers** are waiting to get on and off the train, but often, the stops are only for a few minutes. It's time to eat, and the train keeps on rolling. What do we do?

A D&RG Passenger Train stops in an unknown location circa 1880-1903.

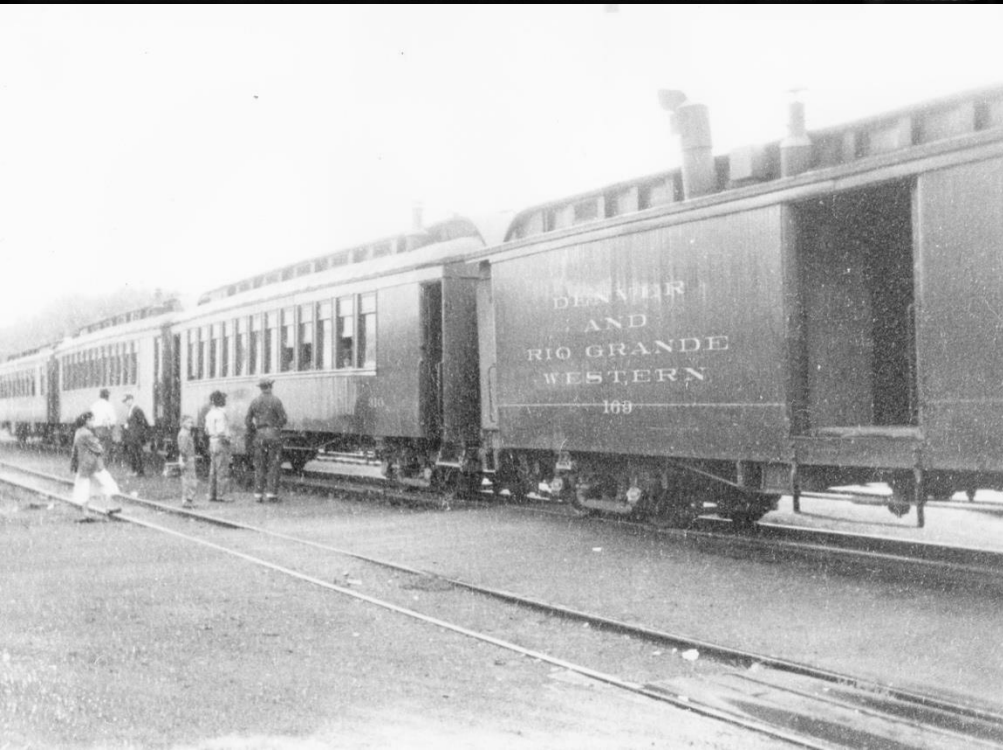


Most passengers tried to bring food on the train with them. The problem was that there was no refrigeration on the train. Meals were limited to fruit, crackers or **hardtack**, bread, and dried meat, like jerky.





In the early days of train travel, the train made stops to add water and fuel, such as wood or coal, to power the train. Sometimes, those stops were in a town or place where food could be purchased. But when you could find an **eating house** or inn, you only had about 20 minutes before the train whistle blew for boarding. You had to eat fast.



The food was generally terrible. Bitter black coffee, stale bread nicknamed sinkers, and dry, tough, salty ham. At some stations, you might have to leave before even receiving the meal you had paid for. An **unscrupulous** innkeeper would return the uneaten meal to the pan for the next train.

Top photo: A train pulls into the Antonito Station.

Bottom photo: A train pulls into the station in Chama, New Mexico in 1938.





The cover of a 1908 pamphlet about Harvey Houses.

By the 1870s and 1880s, some railroad companies had begun trying to accommodate their passengers by setting up station houses with inns and eating houses. These station houses were not run by the railroad. A company was hired to provide food.

In the Southwest, the Santa Fe Railroad was home to the best restaurants. They were run by Fred Harvey. His restaurants were called **Harvey Houses** and had high standards of food and cleanliness. The company hired young ladies to cook and serve. They set high standards for their workers. The Harvey Girls, as they were called, were paid good wages. Young women came from all over the country for the adventure and excitement of traveling West.

Many of the Harvey Girls met their husbands while working at the Harvey House. After marriage, a number of them continued to live in the same area as the Harvey Houses. However, once married, they were no longer eligible to work at Harvey Houses.





In Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona, you can find several **Harvey House** buildings. The buildings are beautiful examples of the architecture of the late 1800s and early 1900s.

In New Mexico, Harvey Houses were in the towns of Albuquerque, Belen, Carlsbad, Clovis, Deming, Gallup, Lamy, Las Vegas, Raton, Rincon, San Marcial, Santa Fe (the La Fonda Hotel), and Vaughn. The Harvey House in Belen, New Mexico is now a museum and cafe.

What was available on the Denver & Rio Grande Western?

There were towns and stations that allowed passengers to get a meal. At the Chama Depot, there was a hotel and restaurant located in the yard not far from the tracks. It was a white two-story hotel and restaurant.

A section house was located at Osier where today's trains stop for meals. Many of the section houses and stations did not have restaurants to serve meals to passengers, but if the train got stuck in the snow the station master's wife or the section foreman's wife would help by supplying food to the trapped passengers and train crew.

Later in the 1900s, some D&RG trains had **dining cars** on the more profitable routes.



D&RG Chama yard looking north showing the eating house and hotel circa 1905 by Werner, Charles A.



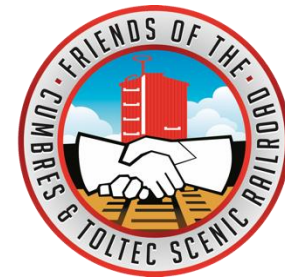
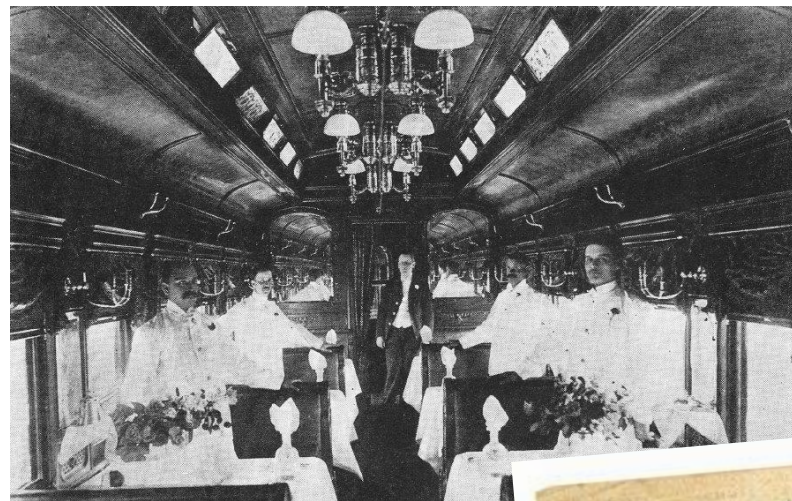
As locomotives advanced, trains could travel longer distances without refueling. Railroad companies created train cars with a kitchen and hired staff to cook and serve. Passengers could leave their car and go to a dining car where they were served a good meal.

Many railroads that served meals aboard the train had special **flatware** and **dinnerware** with the railroad's name or logo. These items can sometimes be found in antique shops and online. Some are quite valuable to collectors.

Top photo: The interior of a B&O Dining Car

Center Photo: A sign announcing "Notice to Passengers: This train does not stop for meals. Supper is now ready Pullman's Palace Dining Car Cosmopolitan attached to this train."

Bottom Photo: The exterior of D&RGW Dining Car Castle Peak.

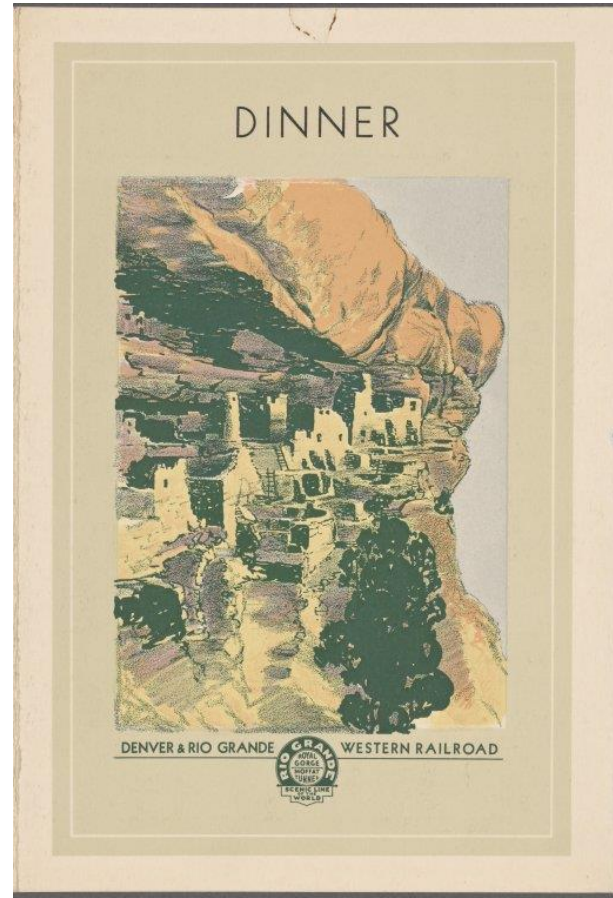




As travel got easier and more accessible people began to ride trains to see the magnificent sights in the western United States. During this time dining aboard the train became more popular. **Tourists** were often well-to-do and expected great service and food on their journey.



The Denver & Rio Grande Western ran several tourist trains in the mid-1900s that served meals aboard the train.



In addition to dining cars, many rail lines had parlor cars that provided amenities such as snacks, coffee, tea, and more.

Left photo: Passengers and train crew drink coffee in a D&RGW parlor car in 1950.

Center Photo: The Cover of a Denver & Rio Grande Western Menu from the New York Public Libraries Rare Book Collection.

Right Photo: The special as listed in a 1941 D&RGW menu from the New York Public Libraries Rare Book Collection.

The Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad

When you visit the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad, about 2-3 hours after leaving the station in Chama, New Mexico, or Antonito, Colorado, you will arrive at Osier Station. This is the meal stop for your trip.

What will you have for lunch? Cold stew, hard bread, bitter coffee, and dry, salty ham? No Way!!

You will be treated to a lunch served cafeteria-style with several entrees available. Best of all, there is a delicious menu of desserts to choose from. Your lunch stop will be about an hour long. Be sure to listen for 4 long blasts from the engine. The whistle blasts are your signal to board the train for the rest of your trip!



Passengers and train crew mill around the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad dining hall in Osier, Colorado.





Top left: Passengers sit down with their dinner in the Osier Dining Hall.
Bottom Right: Passengers line up to get their food in the Osier Dining Hall.

Watch this video by Roger Hogan to get a glimpse of the lunch that awaits you at Osier Station.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=11k5UYQI9f0>



Additional Activities

“What’s on the Menu?” Printable Activity

Mom, I’m Hungry Mini Book

Recipes from the Rails

Glossary



Dining Car: A railroad car that is outfitted as a restaurant.

Dinnerware: Plates, salad plates, and bowls

Eating House: A restaurant with cooked food. Often associated with low-quality food.

Flatware: Silverware, including forks, knives, and spoons

Hardtack: A hard, dry bread or biscuit lacking salt. Often used as rations or emergency food when traveling. It is inexpensive to make and long-lasting.

Harvey House: A restaurant, sometimes accompanied by a hotel, on the Santa Fe Railroad that was run by Fred Harvey.

Parlor Car: A type of passenger car that provides superior comforts and amenities to passengers.

Passenger: A person who rides a public or private vehicle including a train

Tourist: A person who is traveling for fun and enjoyment.

Unscrupulous: Behaving in an unfair or dishonest manner



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Prepared by the **Friends of the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad Education Committee.**

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