

Looking for Former Car Numbers

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Here are some suggestions about determining former car numbers from the cars themselves:

1. Car numbers are placed on each side and end. They may also appear on the roof, on the centersill, on the truck side frames, on the truck bolsters and inside of box cars near the doors. When a car is relettered, one of these spots is sometimes missed.
2. Sometimes the old numbers are intentionally marked on cars after they are renumbered. Conrail placed them near the upper right corner of the car side and Burlington Northern placed them on the center sill.
3. Sometimes cars numbers are stamped on the side sill (especially Canadian, ITEL and National Railway Utilization cars) or on the center sill (e.g. N&W). The stamped numbers often remain untouched when a car is relettered.
4. Sometimes the old number can be seen under the new one, especially if spray paint or plastic film was used to cover it. Generally, looking obliquely at the number causes glare and makes the old number more legible. A digital photograph can sometimes be tweaked in Photoshop or a similar program to bring out the old number.
5. During the relettering process, the old number is sometimes marked on the car with a grease pencil, a marker or with chalk so that the car can be identified after the old number is painted out and before the new number is applied.
6. The original owners initials are cast into the truck side frames, striker or coupler, especially before the 1960s.
7. Sometimes the original ACI label remains. See separate document on visually reading these labels.
8. Serial numbers are stamped on the car body by some builders. They can often be used to determine the original identity. See separate document regarding serial numbers.

Contact Information

You can access Eric's Railroad Car History website from:

<http://www.railroadcarhistory.com>
