

# The History and Purpose of the Caboose

## Where Does the Word Caboose Come From?

Eighteenth century French Naval records make reference to a *camboose*, which described the food preparation cabin on a ship's main deck. American sailors during the American Revolution were familiar with this term and it was commonly known during the early beginnings of the development of railroads. The first cabooses (without the 'm'), built beginning in the 1830's, were wooden shanties erected on flat cars that would have resembled the cook shack on the (relatively flat) deck of a ship, explaining the adoption of the French nautical term. Early cabooses were nothing more than flat cars with small cabins erected on top.

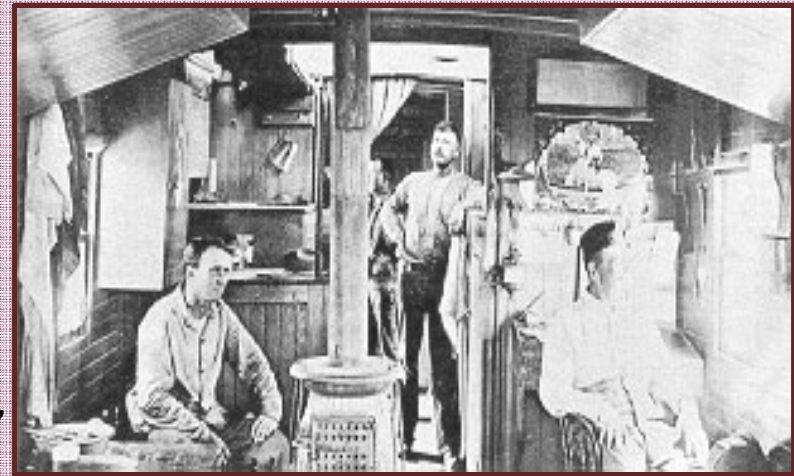


## What is the Purpose of a Caboose?

The caboose served several functions, one of which was as an office for the conductor. The conductor kept records and handled business from a table or desk in the caboose.

The caboose also carried a brakeman and a flagman. In the days before automatic air brakes, the engineer signaled the caboose with his whistle when he wanted to slow down or stop. The brakeman then would climb out and make his way forward, twisting the brake wheels atop the cars with a stout club. Once the train was stopped, the flagman would descend from the caboose and walk back to a safe distance with lanterns, flags and other warning devices to stop any approaching trains.

Once under way, the trainmen would sit up in the cupola and watch for smoke or other signs of trouble from overheated wheel journals (called hotboxes) and also shifting loads on cars.

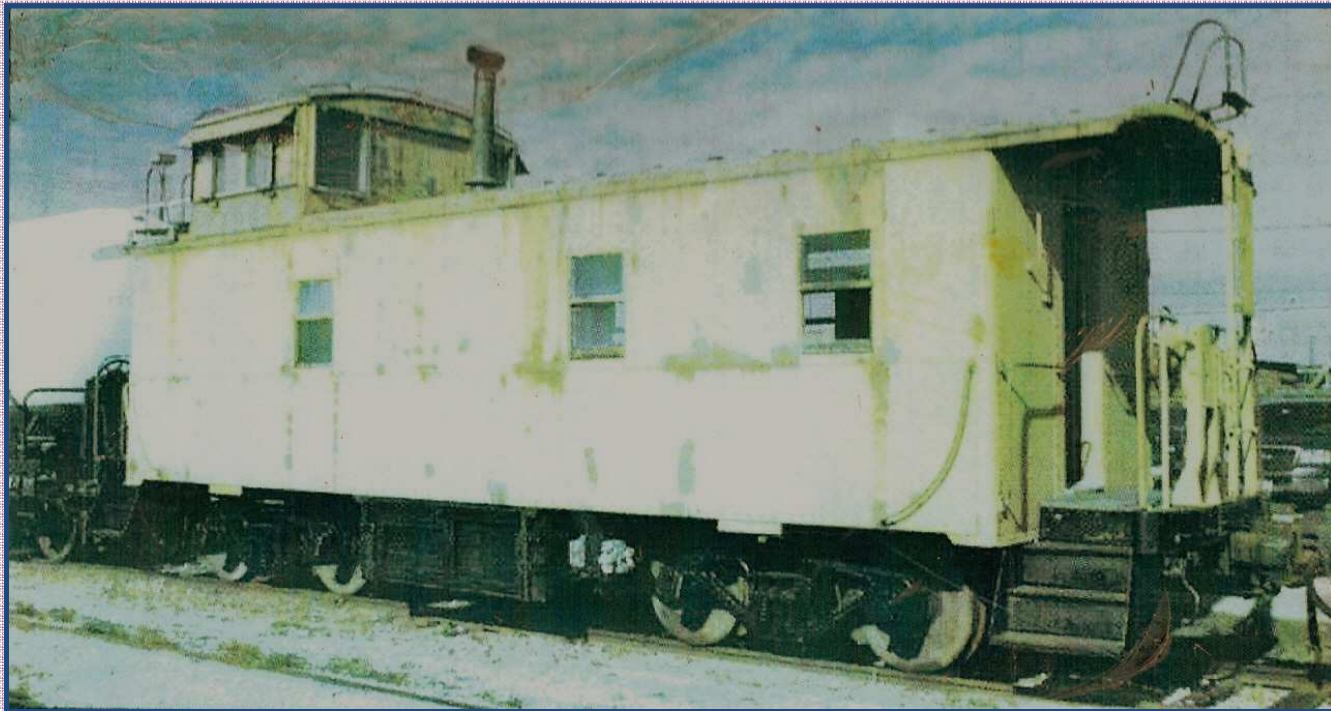


Cabooses were required by law until the 1980's when technology improvements replaced them.

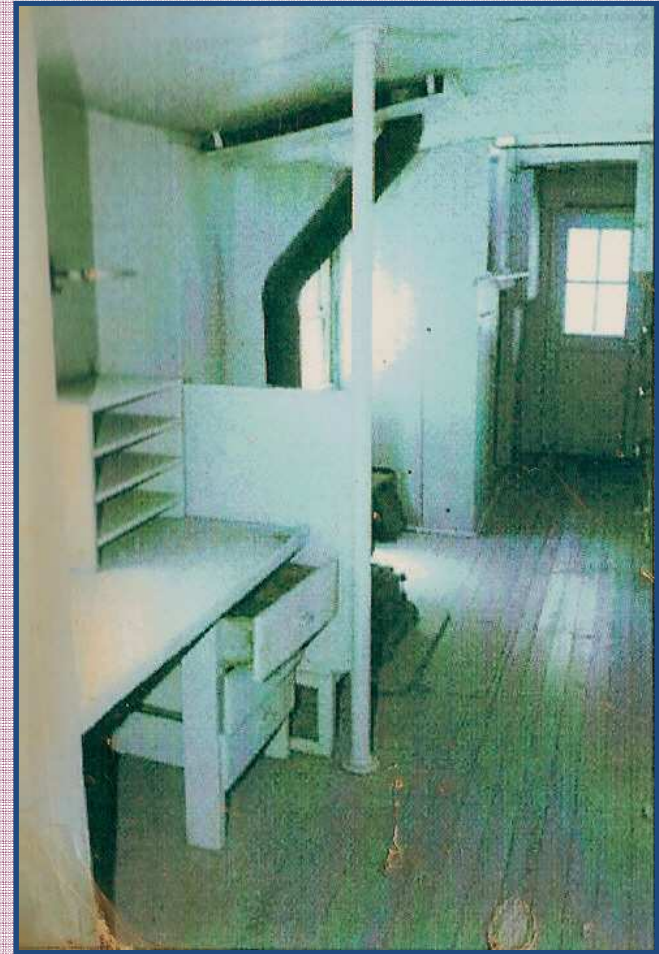
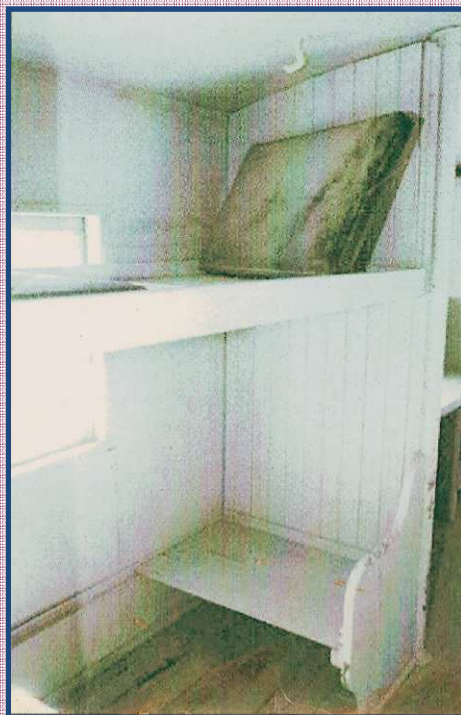


# Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Caboose #1642

This all steel, end cupola caboose was built in 1927, the year A.T.& S.F. switched from wooden to steel cabooses. It was built by the American Car and Foundry Company and was one of 150 in its class. In 1976 it was rebuilt to its present configuration and given number 999913. When the Santa Fe Railroad donated the car to the Galveston Railroad Museum, it was given its original number back.







# **A.T.&S.F. Caboose #1642**

## **Restoration**

A.T.& S.F. Caboose #1642 survived Hurricane Ike in 2008, but sustained damage. The sea water that submerged it accelerated the rust on the caboose body.

During the Summer of 2013, Eagle Scout Jordan Cartwright, a descendent of Santa Fe and Southern Pacific Railroad men, led Boy Scout Troop 123 of Galveston, Texas in the restoration of this caboose. For 9 consecutive weekends the Scouts and other volunteers spent more than 500 hours removing the rust and stripping the caboose to bare metal, applying rust inhibitors, then repainting it to its original Santa Fe “Mineral Brown” color.

The Galveston Railroad Museum, under the direction of Executive Director Morris Gould, supplied the Scouts with the materials required to complete the project. Kelso construction provided the scaffolding and Dan Rouse supplied the power tools.





**Eagle Scout Jordan Cartwright  
on A.T. & S.F. #1642 Before Restoration**



**Boy Scout Troop 123**



**After Restoration**