

C&OHS Acquires Private Car *Erie 400* (C&O Business Car No. 2)

By Thomas W. Dixon, Jr.



Private car Erie 400 as it appeared on the private car track at Huntington, W. Va., before being donated to C&OHS. (C&OHS Collection)

C&OHS has just been given the private car *Erie 400* by Mr. John Hankins, Esq., and family of Huntington, W. Va. It will be an important historical and interpretative piece for us.

The car was built by Pullman in 1924 (Lot 4857) for use by J. P. Morgan, Jr. He was president of the J. P. Morgan banking house made famous by his father, who died in 1913.

The era of the private railroad car was in its twilight years when Morgan acquired this car in 1924, but some wealthy people still owned and used cars much as they did yachts. The car was assigned "Erie 400" as a name. We are not sure why it was selected, and we would like to hear from anyone with additional background on the car.

Car was sold to C&O in 1937. Its C&O service lasted until 1971 when it was sold to John Hankins of Huntington, W. Va. Most of the heavyweight business cars used by C&O in the 1920-1970 era were not built new for the railway but purchased secondhand, as in this case, since private owners no longer wanted to use them in the changing transportation

environment of the country in the 1920s-40s.

In 1944, the car operating as C&O business car No. 2, was included in the consist of a special speed test run from Washington to Cincinnati, then Cincinnati to Newport News the following day. That speed test was done to confirm that the new passenger train, *The Chessie*, could be successful with its record-breaking speed across the C&O.

During its sojourn on C&O the car was used by the line's general manager. We have only one photo of it in the C&O green with gold lettering, but numerous examples of it in the post-1950 tri-color blue, yellow, and gray, a few of which are reproduced with this article. Several of C&O's business car fleet were sold soon after Amtrak took over its remaining passenger operations. After that date the difficulty and out-of-pocket costs of using business cars accelerated, so the fleet was pared down and began specialized work as opposed to the "rolling offices" of the past. Managers traveled by automobile and airplane and the office cars were relegated to a secondary role. Today CSX has a business car

fleet, but the cars are not used for everyday travel by officials.

The previous owners refitted the car with a plush interior redolent of the early days of luxury rail travel. While on C&O it was fitted with more spartan "Mid-Century Modern" furnishings and décor.

An advantage for us is that the car is in very good physical condition and with a little work can be made available not only for display to our Heritage Center visitors, but as a specialty venue for rental, just as we do with *Gadsby's Tavern*.

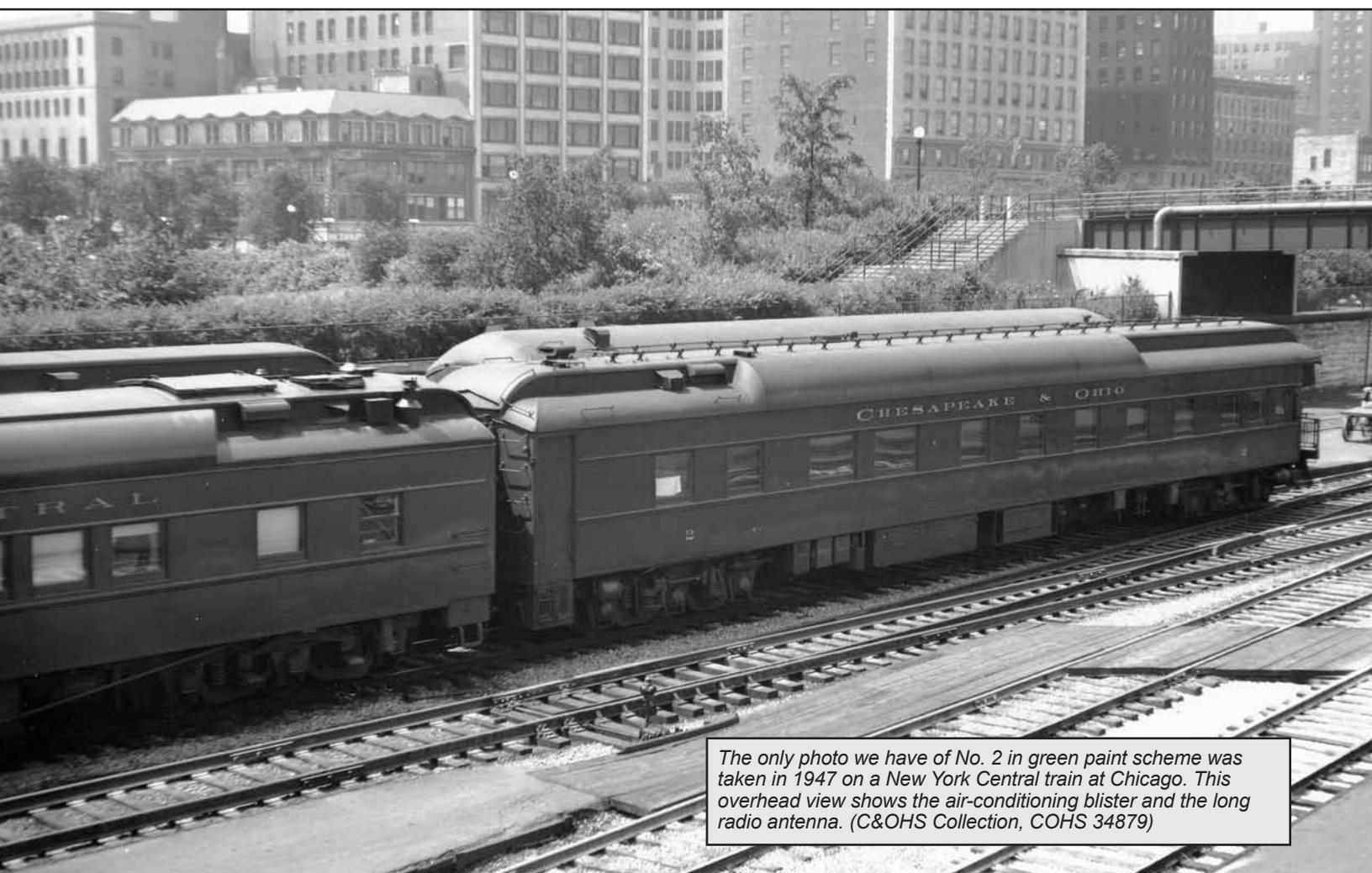
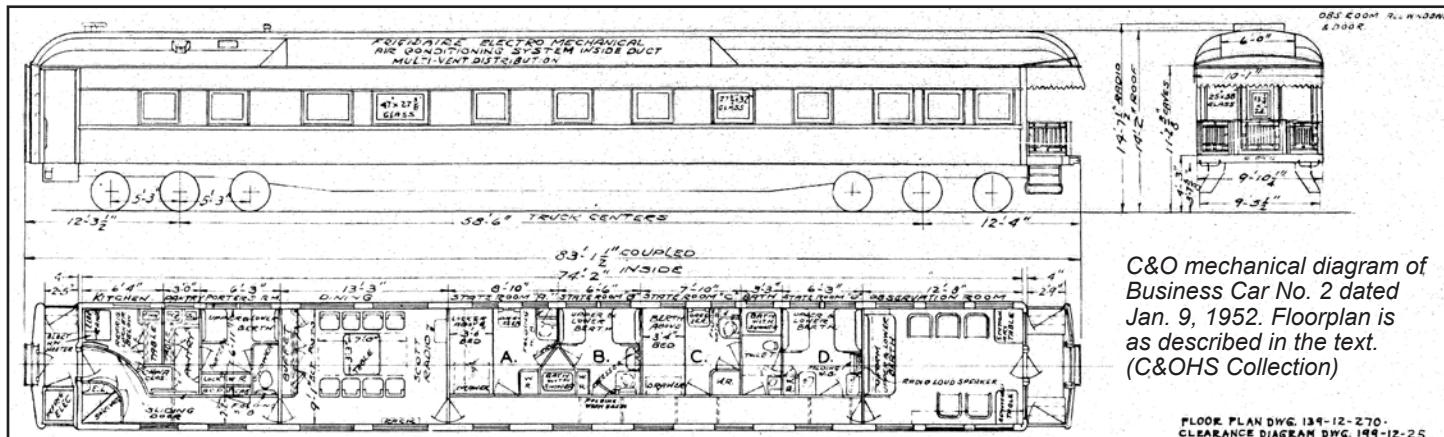
We want to express our great thanks to John Hankins and his family for this very important donation that will help bring our collection to a new level. The association of the car with the famous Morgan name should also be a good draw for our advertising program planned to center around the recently acquired *Chessie 29*. We now have a companion car in our collection also associated with a famous name.

The car is a typical private or business car with six-wheel trucks, weighing 224,500

pounds. It has the traditional open rear observation platform. The configuration of the car in C&O service was, from the front (vestibule end) as follows: First, a small kitchen and pantry; a small room behind it for the steward; and behind that a dining area with a table and buffet cabinet plus eight chairs. When in C&O official service this area was both for dining and meetings. Four bedrooms followed: Bedroom A

has a full bed; B offered an upper and lower berth; C provided a full bed and an upper berth, while D had upper and lower berths. The observation compartment had a sofa and five chairs with two small tables at the rear, facing out onto the open platform. The length of the car is 83½" over the coupling faces. Originally the car had smooth sides, but sometime in the late 1950s stainless steel fluting was added below the

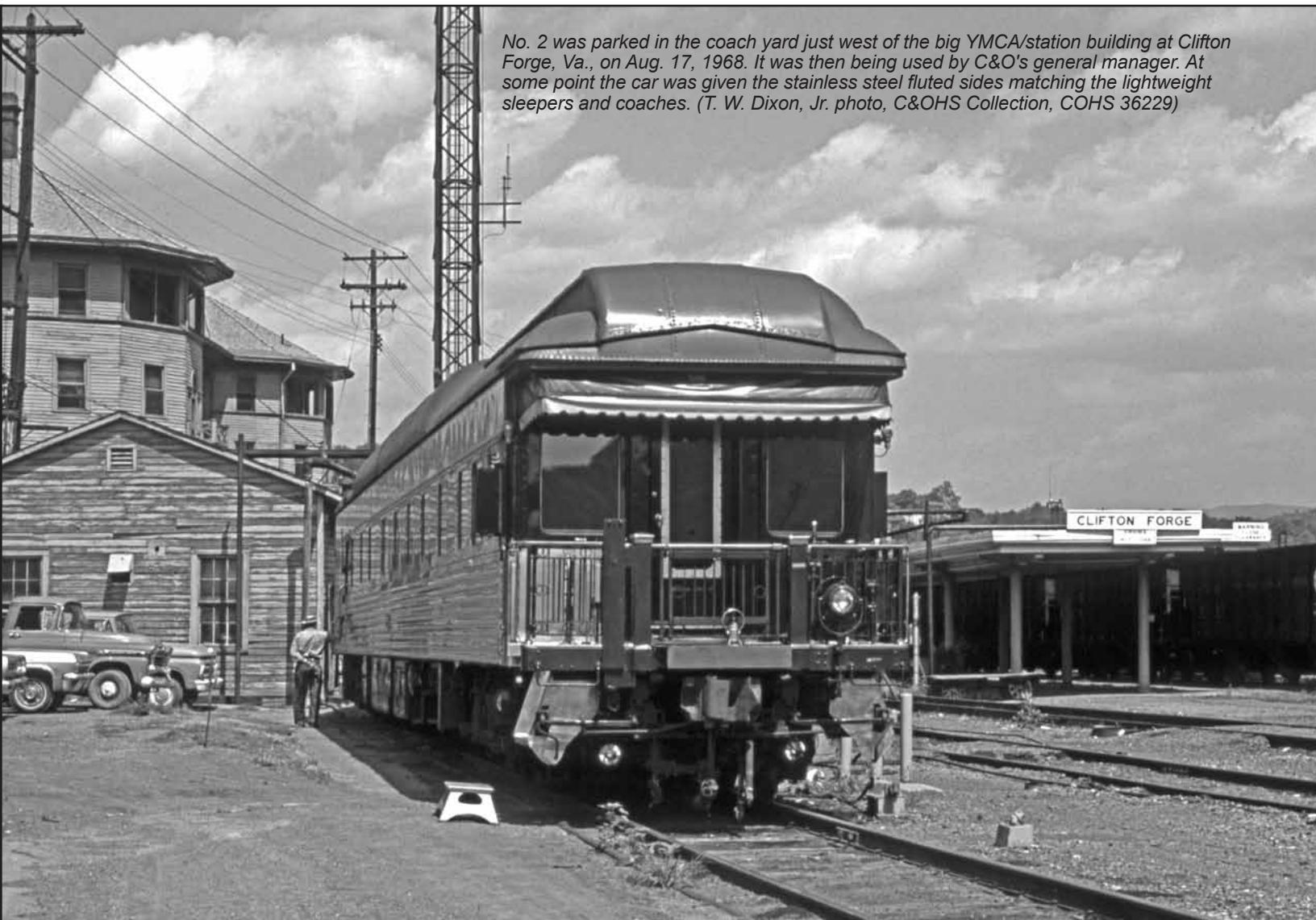
windows so that it better matched the lightweight sleepers and coaches then in use. The fluting is no longer on the car. As stated above, the interior is completely redecorated with little resemblance to the original or C&O-use interior.



No. 2 is parked on the "Carolina Pines" track at Huntington, W. Va., passenger station in 1955. Note it still has its original smooth sides. (B. J. Kern photo, C&OHS Collection, COHS 2743)



No. 2 was parked in the coach yard just west of the big YMCA/station building at Clifton Forge, Va., on Aug. 17, 1968. It was then being used by C&O's general manager. At some point the car was given the stainless steel fluted sides matching the lightweight sleepers and coaches. (T. W. Dixon, Jr. photo, C&OHS Collection, COHS 36229)





(Above) Business car No. 2 parked on the passenger pier at Newport News on Feb. 7, 1971, ready to go west on No. 42 later in the day. It was retired and sold later that year. (T. W. Dixon, Jr. photo, C&OHS Collection, COHS 29524)



Interior of "Erie 400" as it looks today. The inside was completely redone to backdate it to the plush golden era of private car travel. The car has its own china and linen.

