

A new display at the **Oakland B&O Museum** Train Station *"Nothing Could be Finer Than Dinner in the Diner"* Oakland, Maryland



During the golden age of American trains, the dining car was the heart of train life, a place for passengers to relax and enjoy a meal in the company of newfound friends. Railroads took great pride in their culinary arts, and used the dining car to attract passengers from their competitors. And the food was by all accounts delicious. As early as 1872, a Harper's Magazine article spoke of train dining in glowing terms: "The cooking is admirable, the service excellent, and the food is various and abundant." A passenger could dine on broiled mutton chops, breaded veal cutlets, and freshly hunted buffalo, washing it down with a glass of real French champagne. Most long distance trains carried a full dining car. The 80-foot dining cars could seat 36 people in the dining section, and contained complete pantries, lockers and kitchens. The typical kitchen was only 16 feet long and 7 and a half feet wide. In this small area three or four cooks prepared full meals, including baking rolls, muffins, pies, etc., and roasting beef, turkey and hams. Most dining cars were manned by a steward, three to four cooks and six to eight waiters.

The china closets would contain 700 pieces of china and 300 pieces of glassware. The car carried about 600 pieces of silverware. And then there were 1,100 pieces of linen. A typical meal would begin with a waiter coming through the train ringing a chime, announcing "Dinner is being served in the dining car, two cars ahead." The tables would be covered with fresh linens, adorned with fresh-cut flowers. On the table would be fresh water in a heavy crystal or silver pitcher. The B&O even had its own water spring at Deer Park, Maryland, and used this water exclusively in its dining cars. Since most of the diners are gone now, the railroad china used in the dining cars has become valuable and collectible. Each railroad had its own china pattern. The B&O even had three patterns. One known as the derby pattern, was used exclusively on race trains going to Laurel and Delaware Park Race Tracks. The other two patterns were carried on the long distance dining cars. The "B&O Blue china" was used for breakfast and lunch, and the more formal white and gold "Presidential" china was used for dinner.