

Railroad Words to Run By

By Edward H. Mazur, RM 3123

My family bought its first television set in 1952 from the Polk Brothers Store on Chicago's Northwest side, a Dumont with a big blond wood cabinet and a small round screen, black and white, with no remote. When you wanted to change the channel you got off the floor or chair, walked to the TV, and manually moved the channel dial. My parents put the set in the place of honor, our living room, and it became a shrine in the Mazur second floor rear apartment at 913 N. Francisco Avenue. When we went into the living room to watch the televised programs, we had to take our shoes off, ask permission to change channels and not be too noisy. I enjoyed watching the Friday night boxing matches brought into our home by the sponsor, the Gillette Razor Company – look sharp, be sharp – ta da!

My dad would come home from his job at the Oriole Dry Cleaner Factory, have a libation, and watch the television. I am convinced that he thought a higher being, perhaps even God, was transmitting from on high into our home. At the end of the evening's programming, especially on Chicago's WGN Channel 9 owned by the Tribune Company (World's Greatest Newspaper – self proclaimed), a Catholic priest named Father John Banahan (I do not remember a clergyman of any other denomination) would appear and offer a prayer, followed by the "Star Spangled Banner" and then the station sign-off. The priest was always introduced with a voice in the background proclaiming, "And now, words to live by."

For more than twenty years I was privileged to have as my train hangout Michael Moore's (may he rest in peace) Trains and Toys of Yesteryear in Niles and then Morton Grove, Illinois. Within the confines of this railroad temple I met many fans of the hobby, including fellow LOTS Members Cris Matuszak, Joe Piscitello, Bob Brown and Don Zimmerman. We all came from different professions and areas but shared a passion for toy trains. During the thousands of hours spent together over many years, we would talk trains and even came up with a language known to many railroaders that, perhaps, sounded like a foreign tongue to many of the clientele in the store.

Over the years, I wrote down and saved many of the terms, and this is the first of a series of articles sharing some of those "words to run your railroad by." Listed are some of the terms that we used from time to time. Since twelve is not a "baker's dozen," I will add as a bonus a number thirteen, compliments of current LOTS Board Chair, Victor Bodek.

1. **Alley** – noun. Clear track in switching yard.
2. **American** – noun. A 4-4-0 steam locomotive wheel arrangement.
3. **Approach Light** – noun. A signal that remains darkened until a train approaches the block that it regulates.
4. **Atlantic** – noun. A 4-4-2 steam locomotive wheel arrangement.
5. **Armstrong** – adjective. Manually powered equipment or device, especially turntables. Probably took this name from the muscular Jack Armstrong.
6. **Bad Order** – adjective. Rolling stock not in service condition due to defects. This kept Cris and Joe busy in the repair shop. Both are now certified Lionel repair persons. The "best of all the rest," in my humble opinion.
7. **Ballast** – noun. Select material, commonly gravel, cinders or crushed stone, placed on roadbed to hold track in line and allow drainage.
8. **Ballast** – verb. To spread crushed stone or dirt on the roadbed and ties.
9. **Beans** – noun. Food break for a railroader (slang term). We used it in "Let us go to the Works (restaurant across from Trains and Toys) for some beans." (e.g. lunch break, Friday night dinner before the four major sales events each calendar year).
10. **Bend The Iron** – verb. To throw a switch.
11. **Berkshire** – noun. A 2-8-4 locomotive wheel arrangement. Our favorite steam locomotives are the 726, 726 RR, and the 736, all "Berks."
12. **Big Hook** – noun. A wrecking crane. My favorite is the all-black Lionel Lines 6460.
13. **Carpet Railroad** – noun. Layout placed on the carpet or rug to run trains. Good for those who are young and agile. Difficult for those who are more mature and do not engage in a regular exercise program. Also known as a "Victor Bodekian!"

Please note that the list is alphabetized. This is just the first installment – hope that you enjoy them all. If you have any choice (or not so choice) words and terms that you would like to share with the LOTS family – please email, call, or write to me.