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## **The Bygone New Canaan Club Car on the Railroad: R.I.P., 1976: Cameron on Transportation**

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**Categories :** [Opinion](#), [Transportation](#)

**Tagged as :** [Cameron on Rail Transportation 2017](#)

**Date :** November 26, 2017

We all dream about traveling first class. Big comfy seats, real food and free drinks. This is the only way to fly.

But did you know there used to be a handful of private, first-class “club cars” on the New Haven Railroad’s commuter trains? Among the most legendary was Car 5113 that ran from New Canaan from 1908 to 1976.

The New Canaan Historical Society has preserved all of the original paperwork for the private club known as “The New Canaan Car” (NCC). And the story is fascinating.

The plush custom-built car carried about 60 passengers, half the load of a regular coach. The car had its own buffet from which an attendant, Willie Spaulding (who worked for 26 years), dispensed continental breakfast

in the morning and poured alcohol in the evening.

Pulled on train No. 331 in the morning, the private car left New Canaan at 7:43 a.m., arriving at Grand Central by 8:48 a.m. The return run on train No. 332 left New York at 5:09 p.m. and was back in New Canaan by 6:15 p.m.

Membership was not cheap. In 1966, initiation fees were \$200 and the monthly surcharge was \$100, not including the price of the ticket. By 1974, the NCC was paying Penn Central \$69,300 a year to haul its private car.

Over the years, I heard rumors about this railroad “unicorn” — often reported but seldom seen. One of the rumors was that this gentlemen’s club did not allow women members. But that wasn’t the case, according to its by laws. However, I could not find a woman’s name anywhere in its membership directory.

Members were allowed to bring guests (even women) with permission of all other members. The NCC was famous for its birthday parties and holiday fests. One set of minutes went into great detail about the BYO liquor cabinet, which originally had an honor system until a lock and key was needed in 1968.

NCC memberships were handed down from father to son, but there was no apparent waiting list. In 1972, the membership committee asked for help to identify “goodly and likely candidates” to replace retirees.

After the bankruptcy of the New Haven Railroad, Penn Central took over and the railroad raised its hauling fees. Even though many of the NCC’s members were CEOs of companies doing a lot of freight business with Penn Central, it didn’t help. The railroad was broke.

The arrival of Metro-North saw the railroad convert from old, heavyweight cars pulled by locomotives to the all-electric M2s, marking the end of the line for the NCC.

In 1976, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, parent of Metro-North, said it was willing to rebuild a bar car just for the NCC for \$70,000. But that seemed too rich even for the New Canaan crowd. Even worse, then-Gov. Ella Grasso said the state should not subsidize millionaire commuters in private cars.

The last run of the NCC’s private car was on April 1, 1976. When the train arrived in New Canaan at 6:15 p.m., the party continued for nearly two hours.

The next day, members stripped the car of all its furnishing, which were owned by the club, including 64 chairs, six bridge tables and three smoke stands (ashtrays), which went into storage.

By 1979, the furniture storage fees drained the NCC’s treasury. After 71 years, the club was dissolved — a sad end to such an illustrious history.

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