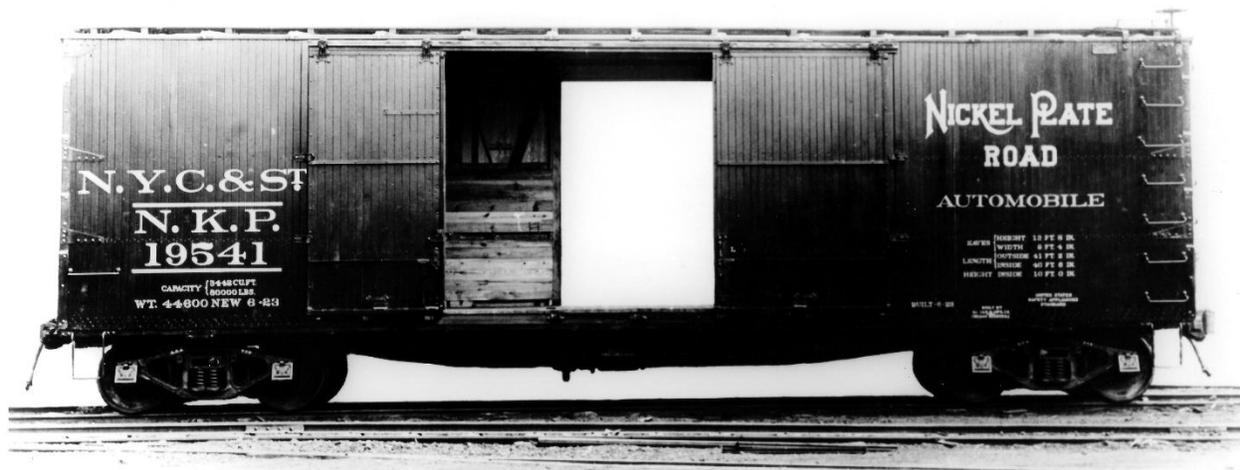


## NICKEL PLATE ROAD TALL, DOUBLE SHEATHED, AUTO BOXCARS

By Ray Breyer, contributing editor *NKPHTS Magazine*



*Illinois Car & Manufacturing Co. builder's photo.*

Railroads have been hauling automobiles as freight since the Duryea Motor Wagon Company opened their first factory in 1895. When the quantity of cars in the country was small, and when cars could only be afforded by the upper class, railroads could haul a few cars at a time in furniture boxcars or even baggage cars. But once Ford, Oldsmobile, and Studebaker began building middle-class cars in volume the need to haul cars skyrocketed. By 1906 the Michigan Central, Pere Marquette, and New Haven built the first dedicated automobile boxcars.

Through most of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century the New York Central family of railroads owned the largest number of auto boxcars. For example, in 1926 they owned over 38,000 of them, or 24% of all auto boxcars. The next largest fleet was owned by the PRR, with 9,400 cars, or 6% of the national auto boxcar fleet. The large number of NYC cars influenced several other railroads, including the Nickel Plate Road.



*NYC 262376, built by ACF in 1917, was one of nearly 14,000 auto boxcars built to the same general standard for NYC family roads between 1910 and 1922, making them one of the most common steam era auto boxcars built.*

*The NKP's 18000-series cars were copies of the NYC design and influenced the 16" taller 19000-series cars.*

*ACF builder's photo.*

When the Nickel Plate Road was owned by the NYC they received 200 36-foot long auto boxcars which were copies of LS&MS cars. The NKP was spun off from the NYC in 1915 and immediately began looking for new revenue streams, with automobile traffic being an important target. The railroad chose to build 1,000 copies of the NYC's 1915-designed 40-foot, double-sheathed boxcars, 200 of them with end doors to handle buses or trucks. The 18000-18999 series was delivered in mid-1917.

When the doughboys returned home after WWI they wanted cars and trucks: lots of them. Automobile production ramped up, and railroads scrambled to build more auto carriers. While the NYC had transitioned to building all-steel XAs by 1916, most other railroads were still building single or double sheathed auto boxcars. In 1923 the NKP returned to their 1917-built auto boxcar design but added an extra 16" to the inside height. This change necessitated new car ends, and the NKP chose Hutchin "indented rib" ends for their first 1,000 cars. A repeat order for a second 1,000 cars was placed in 1924, this time with more conventional 5/5/6 Murphy ends.



*A comparison between an as-built 20000-series cars and an 18000-series rebuilt into a 21000-series auto parts car shows the added height of the 19000s and 20000s. Cleveland OH 4/27/1929. Cleveland State University collection.*

Illinois Car & Manufacturing Co. built both groups of cars, delivering the 19000-19999 series in June of 1923, and the 20000-20999 series in September 1924. Standing 14' 7" tall at the running boards they were fairly tall boxcars, and about the same height as standard Western railroad single sheathed XAs of the time. The 19000-series was built with either Hutchins or Murphy roofs, and either Miner, Bradford, or National draft gear. The 20000-series were all built with Hutchins roofs and either Miner or Bradford draft gear. All cars rode on Bettendorf trucks.

Starting in 1935 several of the cars were pulled at random from the 19000- and 20000-series and assigned to automobile parts service for Chicago, Detroit, and Toledo factories, equipped with permanently mounted parts racks. To distinguish these dedicated service cars, they were renumbered by the NKP as follows:

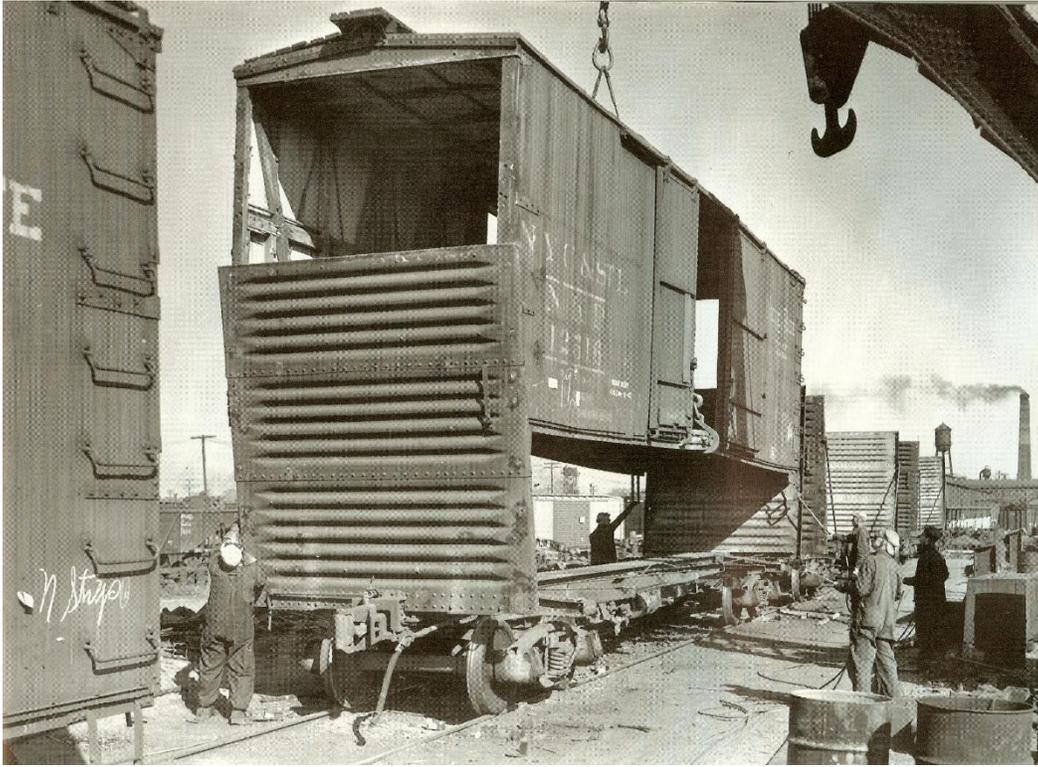
23000-23044: auto transmission racks.  
23500-23525: auto steering columns.  
23530-23579: auto parts bin racks.  
23580-23590: auto transmission racks.  
23600-23660: auto parts bin racks.

Beginning in late 1937, most of the cars were converted into plain boxcars, with the 9000-9499 series having their left side doors nailed shut, and the 12000-12999 series having the left-hand door removed and the remaining hole planked over. Cars were assigned at random to these two number series, but most came from the 20000-series, with that number group disappearing in 1939.



*A comparison of two 12000-series cars. NKP 12958 (top) is an early conversion that had its left hand door nailed shut and "AUTOMOBILE" designation painted over. NKP 12928 shows a slightly later conversion to a true single door boxcar, with the addition of the circa 1939-1945 "swing tail R". The rough appearance of car 12958 was typical of all of the cars that survived WWII. Both photos NKPHTS collection.*

Finally, between 1945 and 1947, the Nickel Plate began a car rebuilding program, converting 1,502 of the remaining cars into all-steel boxcars in seven different groups. There were still 1,350 cars rolling in early 1947, but by the beginning of 1950 they had all been rebuilt, scrapped, or reassigned to the MOW fleet.



*The end for virtually all of the 19000- and 20000-series boxcars came between 1945 and 1947, at the Frankfort IN car shops. The few unrebuilt cars still rolling in the 1948-1950 period were either scrapped or sent to the MOW pool. NKP company photo, John Corns collection.*

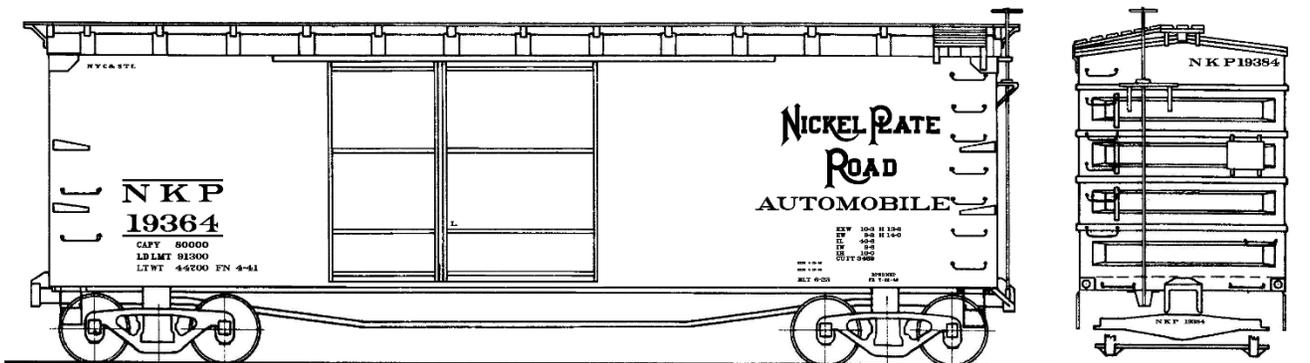
## Paint Schemes

NKP lettering and paint was fairly consistent throughout its history, with generally subtle changes.

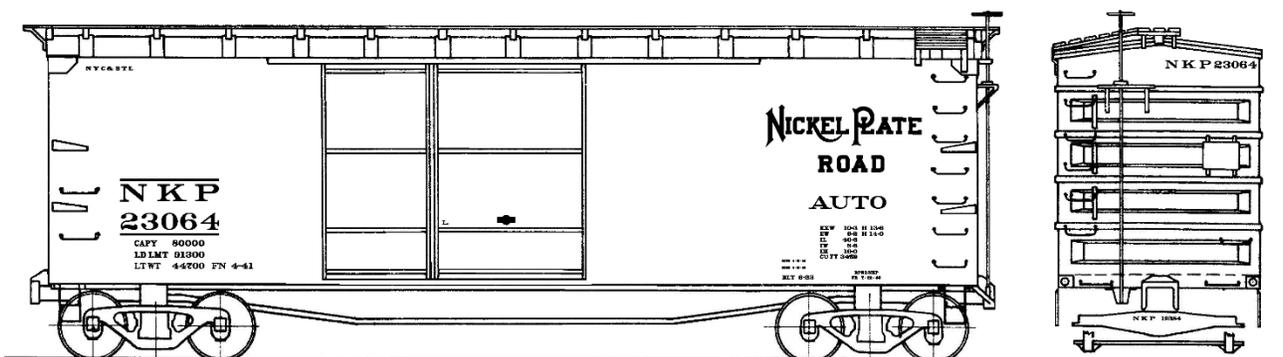
- 1923-1930: as-built lettering.
- 1930: changed dimensional data to new ARA standard and removed car end appliance data.
- 1935: Created 23000-series auto parts cars, using “AUTO” in lieu of “AUTOMOBILE”, and added rack symbol to doors.
- 1937: removed 9” tall “NYC&StL” above reporting marks and added 2” tall “NYC&StL” at the upper left corner of the sides. Added “SINGLE DOOR CARS” lettering to 9000-series.
- 1939: changed the “R” in “ROAD” from small block to “swing tail R” style.
- 1944: changed “AUTOMOBILE” to “AUTO”, for cars still in auto traffic service.
- 1945: changed the “R” in “ROAD” from swing tail type to “large R” type. While this is the most commonly known “R” used on NKP equipment, there is no photographic evidence that it was ever used on these cars, given that they were already scheduled for rebuilding into all-steel cars.

Note that the above dates reflect the adoption date of each change; actual changes on individual cars could take years.

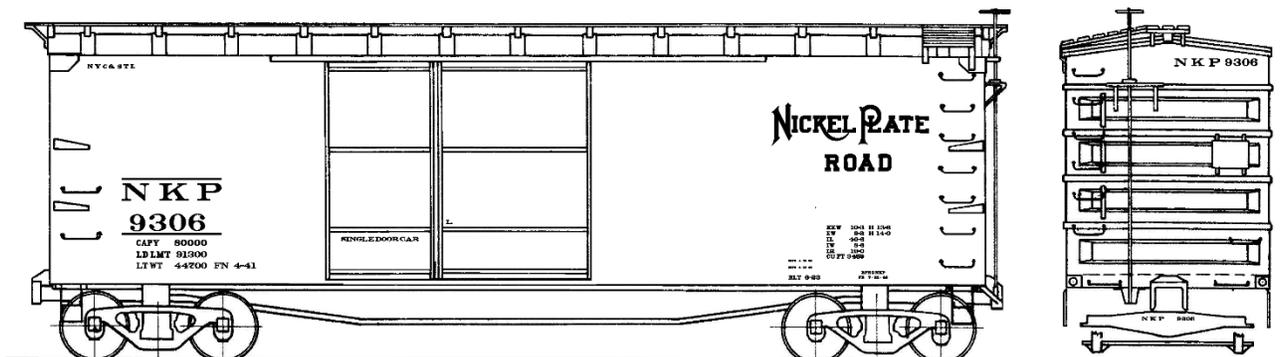




**AUTOMOBILE CARRIER SERVICE 1939-1950**



**AUTO PARTS SERVICE 1935-1950**



**PLAIN BOXCAR (SINGLE DOOR) 1938-1950**