

Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Relief Department Records Collection



Summary Information

Repository: Hays T. Watkins Research Library, B&O Railroad Museum

Creator: Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, Inc. (organization)

Title: Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Relief Department Records Collection

Dates: 1900-1971

Bulk Dates: 1905-1960

Extent: 163 Paige boxes (202.5 linear feet), containing 15,146 expansion envelopes

Language of Materials: English

Abstract

The B&O Railroad Relief Department Collection contains the records of the railroad industry's first employer-administered health insurance and pension plan. Those who participated in this program applied for membership, were evaluated by doctors for physical condition, and, if accepted, received medical treatment and compensation for injuries sustained while on the job and whose families received compensation if the employee was killed while on the job. The records include applications, forms, claims, doctor's evaluations, test results, and correspondence associated with B&O employees who applied for access to this program between 1900 and 1963. The collection is not complete and may not contain records for every employee who applied to or participated in the program during this time. The records contain a mix of administrative, financial, and medical records.

Scope & Contents

The Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Relief Department Records Collection consists of 162 Paige boxes (approx. 202.5 linear feet), containing 15,146 individual employee case records which were received by the B&O Railroad Museum from the old B&O Camden freight warehouse, when that property was sold to the Maryland Stadium Authority for incorporation into Oriole Park Stadium at Camden Yards in the early 1990s. The length of time that the records were held at Camden is unclear but believed to have potentially been since the mid-1960s, likely before the effective end of the B&O as an independent company through merger with the Chesapeake & Ohio Railway in 1963. The record envelopes are located presently in the Museum's collections storage. Each carton contains a number of expandable accordion envelopes (5" x 11"), each containing tri-folded standardized forms, correspondence, and other documents for one B&O employee who applied to join the Relief Department program. Each employee who applied for membership, regardless of acceptance status, was assigned a unique identification number. Envelopes range in thickness from approximately one eighth of an inch to five inches,

depending on the length of time the employee was a member and how many claims they filed with the company during that time. Within each box, envelopes are arranged by ID number; however, due to multiple moves throughout time, the original arrangement of the envelopes has not been maintained. There are also gaps in the numbering system, making it clear that the Museum did not receive 100% of the records dating from 1880.

Inside each envelope are reports of medical examinations, injuries, and disabilities, as well as personal correspondence between individuals and physicians or B&O Relief Department personnel, certificates of disablement, and records indicating next of kin to whom benefits should be paid in case of death. Employees represented in this collection encompass different races, ethnicities, genders, and job positions, indicating that the program was made available to all employees of the B&O regardless of perceived dangers associated with any one position. As a group, the envelopes show signs of deterioration as a result of age and long-term storage conditions. The original boxes used to store the documents while in the care of the originating company are standard cardboard made of corrosive, acidic paper. Many of the papers inside an envelope were folded multiple times to fit, with the many onion skin copies particularly fragile. Records date from when each employee first applied to participate in the Relief Department program and end when the employee left the B&O (i.e., employment elsewhere, retirement, or death). The Relief Department was established in 1880 and was administered until approximately 1963, when the B&O merged with the Chesapeake & Ohio Railway; however, the majority of records show the initial application dates ranging from approximately 1905-1920.

There is a further unprocessed portion of this collection consisting of approximately 300 large cardboard cartons (approx. 1,100 linear feet). These cartons each measure 16”w x 22”l x 11”h and contain on average 375 expansion envelopes per carton. In 2024, the NHPRC awarded the B&O Railroad Museum a second two-year grant to continue processing this collection. Through this second phase of work, 25,000 more expansion envelopes are expected to be processed and made available for research in 2026.

Contents of the Inventory

An Excel spreadsheet inventory containing demographic information on each B&O Railroad employee member of the Relief Department program represented in this collection was compiled during processing from 2022 to 2024. Each entry contains some or all of the following information:

- Relief Department identification number
- first, last, and middle name
- birthdate
- application date(s)
- status in the program (accepted or denied)
- occupation, department, class, and division
- location (town, state)
- contribution rate

The inventory does not include information on accidents, claims, medical records, or details on correspondence. It is meant to serve as a directory and container list. Requests for access to the inventory should be submitted to the archives.

Arrangement Note

The contents of the collection is arranged by the Relief Department membership number assigned to each B&O Railroad employee who applied to participate in the program. Membership numbers were assigned in order received and were not reused even if the employee was ultimately not accepted to participate in the program. The records related to a given membership number (corresponding to one railroad employee) are arranged by date within accordion expansion envelopes. The envelopes are then arranged by membership number within each box. However, the boxes themselves are not arranged by number range. Please consult the collection inventory to verify the location of a given employee by membership number or name.

Conditions Governing Access & Use

Access to all collections preserved at the B&O are governed by the rules and regulations of the Hays T. Watkins Research Library (HTWRL). Researchers interested in accessing records from this collection should contact the HTWRL to make an appointment. Please note that research is by appointment only and must be arranged at least one week in advance. Appointments are available Monday-Friday, 10 AM - 3 PM. All requests should be submitted using our online Research Registration Form. Additional questions or concerns may be submitted to research@borail.org or 443-627-2375.

In addition to the rules and regulations of HTWRL, the historical medical collections preserved at the B&O Railroad Museum are also subject to Maryland Health Code 4-302 (2013), which protects the medical records of both living and deceased patients created in the course of patient care in perpetuity without provisions for the passage of time. Due to the presence of medical records throughout this collection, all potential researchers requesting access to the collection for evaluation of research applicability and for use in all research projects (regardless of goal or end product) must apply for access according to the procedures outlined in the *Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Relief Department Collection Access Plan* (approved July 2024). Access of records by the descendants of employees documented in this collection must also be applied for. For additional information and to access the relevant permissions forms, please contact HTWRL.

Physical & Technical Access

The original paper records of this collection are stored at the Museum's offsite storage facility, including both processed and unprocessed materials. Digital copies of a small portion of the collection are available to in-person researchers who have applied for and been granted access to the records according to the procedures outlined in the HTWRL's access plan.

Source of Acquisition

CSX Transportation, 1987-present day, successor company to the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, Inc., 1827-1987.

Custodial History

The B&O Relief Department Records Collection was created by the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Company starting in the early 1900s until the company ceased administering the program in the early 1960s. As the company merged with other railroad companies over time, including the Chesapeake & Ohio Railway (1963), the Chessie System (1972), and finally CSX Transportation (1987), the records continued to be retained in the historic warehouse at the B&O Camden Station and freight yard in Baltimore, Maryland. When this property was sold to the Maryland Stadium Authority for development of Oriole Park at Camden Yards in the early 1990s, the records were transferred to the B&O Railroad Museum for storage and preservation.

Preferred Citation

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Processing Information

Finding Aid Author: Anna Kresmer
Date: July 2024.

With support from The National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC), as part of the project *Preserving and Expanding Access to the Records of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Relief Department and History of the Development of the American Industrial Worker*.

Biographical or Historical Information

The Baltimore & Ohio Railroad (B&O) was chartered by the Maryland General Assembly on February 12, 1827. The company was founded by a group of prominent businessmen in Baltimore, Maryland, with the express desire to create a shipping route connecting the harbor of Baltimore with the Ohio River and mid-western settlements on the other side of the Appalachian Mountains. The B&O was the first “common carrier” railroad to be founded in the United States and the site of its founding is considered the birthplace of American railroading. Breaking ground in Baltimore on July 4, 1828, construction of the B&O reached Wheeling, Virginia (now West Virginia) on December 24, 1852. Expanding through the laying of tracks, as well as by mergers and acquisitions of other railroad companies, the B&O reached St. Louis Missouri by 1893.

The B&O was the original innovator of American railroading, and its facilities were often referred to as the university of railroading. The first stone railroad arch bridge, the Carrollton Viaduct, was built by the B&O in 1829. The first American-made steam engine, the Tom Thumb, was built for the B&O by Peter Cooper in 1832. The first telegraph message was sent to the B&O's terminus at Mt. Clare Station in Baltimore in 1844. The B&O was also the first railroad used in warfare along the frontlines during the Civil War in the 1860s. They were the first railroad to use electric motors in 1895. And they were one of the railroads responsible for building Union Station in Washington, DC, in 1907.

At its height, the B&O network stretched across thirteen states and employed hundreds of thousands of workers. However, its decline began after the second world war. With the expansion of both air travel and the interstate highway system, the B&O struggled to compete for passengers and began systematically cutting service throughout their network in the late 1940s. This trend was not isolated to the B&O alone and continued throughout the country during the 1950s and 1960s. In 1971 Amtrak took over most of the nation's inter-city passenger traffic, including the B&O's.

In 1963, the Chesapeake & Ohio Railway took control of the B&O and by 1973 the two companies, along with the Western Maryland Railroad, are made subsidiaries of the Chessie System although they continued to operate as separate railroads. In 1980, the Chessie System merged with the Seaboard System to create CSX Transportation. However, it is not until 1987 that the B&O Railroad ceased to exist as a separate entity.

For a more detailed history of the B&O Railroad, please refer to the following publications:

- The Great Road: The Building of the Baltimore & Ohio, The Nation's First Railroad, 1828-1853, by James D. Dilts, published in 1993.
- History of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, by John F. Stover, published in 1987.
- Impossible Challenge: The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad in Maryland, by Herbert H. Harwood, Jr., published in 1979.

Contact

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Related Materials

Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Employee Records Collection, 1905-1971

Container List

Box	ID # Start	ID # End	Initial Application Years
1	652008	679904	1905, 1922-1932
2	631641	653481	1914, 1920-1926
3	640361	678897	1921-1923
4	624738	678665	1916, 1920-1924
5	640343	678666	1921-1923
6	640322	678658	1911, 1921-1923
7	654508	677215	1922-1923
8	654360	677761	1922-1925
9	654364	676955	1920-1923, 1936
10	654344	676986	1922-1923
11	156848	655656	1900-1901, 1922, 1934
12	157718	644995	1918-1925
13	153514	6446677	1901, 1917-1922
14	165495	645000	1901, 1915, 1922
15	482466	483712	1915
16	480986	480986	1915-1916
17	480986	484143	1915-1916
18	481622	635753	1915, 1921-1922
19	632884	635800	1920-1921
20	624749	635781	1911, 1916, 1920, 1930
21	633663	635796	1917-1923
22	631570	671159	1917, 1920-1923, 1930
23	659182	671248	1922-1923
24	641266	671262	1922-1923, 1936
25	651789	671223	1922
26	636139	671318	1920-1923
27	410684	671255	1920-1925
28	627078	628360	1917-1920
29	627728	646699	1920-1922
30	645713	646765	1915-1922
31	545751	646175	1920-1922
32	326403	628344	1916, 1920, 1928
33	616416	628357	1919-1920
34	628092	682148	1916-1923
35	562859	682126	1917-1923
36	552775	681915	1920-1923
37	652339	660469	1916-1923
38	600067	670147	1917-1923
39	656198	666096	1920-1923

40	608447	657237	1919-1922
41	608377	657203	1910, 1919
42	608103	612146	1907, 1919
43	592630	612082	1912-1919
44	593346	595649	1917-1919
45	588475	598219	1916-1919
46	595428	598192	1918-1919
47	595285	675184	1916-1925
48	656149	657573	1916-1922
49	656083	657183	1917-1922
50	607003	657537	1918-1922
51	606873	620347	1916-1920
52	604080	620602	1919-1920
53	272624	607088	1905-1919
54	272915	323149	1905-1907
55	272584	350096	1905-1906
56	275230	309584	1905-1908
57	635809	643358	1920-1928
58	635840	643220	1908-1921
59	635885	687378	1920-1923
60	387329	687960	1923-1926
61	662934	687481	1923-1926
62	674072	674290	1920-1923
63	663389	674239	1909-1923
64	650506	663762	1919-1923
65	149414	653958	1900-1922
66	153377	685462	1900-1923
67	685011	685163	1916-1923
68	248466	6631184	1916-1923
69	663082	664792	1918-1923
70	662846	663950	1923
71	552460	665439	1918-1923
72	655445	686517	1923
73	665334	686948	1919-1923
74	680411	686949	1918-1923
75	680410	680720	1923
76	623152	680706	1910-1923
77	527787	648654	1912-1922
78	648122	677712	1914-1923
79	648150	677804	1917-1929
80	638386	672740	1921-1936

81	368617	640957	1921-1927
82	638406	667416	1918-1923
83	664973	667415	1917-1923
84	526041	529681	1916
85	524311	667371	1916-1923
86	524667	525301	1915-1916
87	445332	525385	1913-1916
88	445590	449957	1913
89	360618	655663	1910-1922
90	202653	363410	1902-1910
91	201994	363833	1902-1910
92	202873	673641	1902-1923
93	149621	657307	1922
94	445301	657329	1920-1922
95	628976	6290147	1920
96	626211	659005	1920
97	625616	657317	1918-1922
98	408998	633129	1910-1920
99	399704	411774	1911-1912
100	316811	411581	1907-1912
101	400190	595319	1911-1919
102	456516	959326	1913-1919
103	592164	595277	1914-1919
104	592174	598167	1914-1919
105	592172	655756	1918-1922
106	629870	655779	1920-1922
107	628127	682128	1920-1923
108	629831	754525	1922-1927
109	653268	655265	1922
110	653269	654819	1921-1922
111	653277	655249	1917-1930
112	623419	655254	1912-1923
113	623423	659526	1913-1922
114	623420	659556	1920-1922
115	623600	659558	1920-1922
116	305804	659557	1907-1922
117	305173	308511	1907
118	307911	311413	1907-1937
119	306916	311084	1907
120	305388	657377	1922
121	640207	659027	1921-1922

122	640315	659023	1921-1922
123	640193	657355	1921-1922
124	565699	659115	1918-1935
125	592538	601194	1918-1919
126	598634	601217	1919-1923
127	592552	601195	1919-1938
128	202785	221716	1903-1904
129	204722	225166	1903
130	224393	226972	1903-1907
131	204861	978946	1903-1923
132	630613	679075	1920-1923
133	630540	679004	1920-1923
134	630595	631663	1920
135	629443	679068	1920-1923
136	633525	678091	1916-1929
137	632999	676956	1920-1923
138	369481	677216	1910-1935
139	367625	370108	1910
140	367808	371632	1910
141	367811	552605	1910-1917
142	545610	552875	1917
143	545313	552749	1917
144	545249	549905	1917
145	333639	552824	1917-1918
146	334705	336286	1908
147	335864	338819	1908-1909
148	334864	642822	1909-1921
149	624153	642806	1920-1924
150	624157	642812	1920-1921
151	624158	625783	1913-1920
152	624408	675762	1920-1924
153	317556	675549	1907-1923
154	484964	675874	1923
155	613583	675542	1913-1923
156	632700	832833	1920-1921
157	632686	6544759	1918-1922
158	632719	665210	1920-1930
159	555229	6780341	1916-1923
160	656061	678067	1920-1924
161	656050	678161	1910-1924
162	656051	678132	1922-1923

163	641568	678103	1921-1923
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Appendix

An appendix to the finding aid was compiled by B&O intern, Nicole Handley, in the fall of 2022. This guide contains examples of all standardized forms found in the B&O Railroad Relief Records Collection and includes definitions of abbreviations, common information featured in specific forms, and other information that may be of use for researchers interested in working with this collection.