



The City of New Orleans Railcar- A History

New Orleans Public Belt Railroad (NOPB)

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In keeping with the Pullman Company's practice begun by Colonel William D'Alton Mann, of naming its cars for great figures in the worlds of opera and the stage, the observation car was named for Madame Helena Modjeska. Madame Modjeska (1840-1909) was Poland's greatest actress of all time who moved to the United States and soon became a prominent actress.

Although she never lost her Polish accent, Modjeska became America's most distinguished Shakespearean actress of the 1880's and 1890's. She played twelve Shakespearean parts in this country in addition to other classic and contemporary roles. In 1883 she appeared in America's first professional appearance of Ibsen's "A Doll's House." She was admired for her high artistic ideas and for her positive influence upon the American theatre of her day. Throughout her American career, Modjeska made periodic return voyages to her native Poland for theatrical tours and visits with friends and family. The old city theatre in Krakow is now named in her honor.



It is particularly fitting that the Helena Modjeska will be calling the New Orleans Public Belt Railroad home in light of the long standing relationship between Modjeski and Masters, Inc., the engineering firm founded by Ralph Modjeski, the son of Madame Modjeska. Mr. Modjeski was one of the preeminent bridge engineers of his day and is one of the designers of the Huey P. Long Bridge, owned by The New Orleans Public Belt Railroad.

Historic Timeline – “City of New Orleans”

- 1927 – Helena Modjeska built by Pullman Company in January 1927. Served on the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western Railroad.
- 1945 – Leased from Pullman Company by the Wabash R.R. Ran on the premier Blue Bird and Banner Blue runs between Chicago & St. Louis and the Cannon. Ball between Detroit & St. Louis.
- 1954 – Modernized and renamed The City of Lafayette. Was last regularly scheduled open platform observation car in U.S.
- 1956 – Purchased from Pullman Company by The Wabash R.R.
- 1964 – Owned by Norfolk & Western R.R. on merger with Wabash. Renamed Lafayette and converted to a business-office car.
- Late 1960's – 1979 – Leased to Clinchfield Railroad and renamed White Oak. Used for steam excursions and the famous Santa Claus Special.
- 1979 – Went to Seaboard Coastline R.R. in Norfolk & Western merger.
- 1982 – Owned by CSX on merger with S.C.L. & Chessie System; leased to New Georgia R.R., renamed Blue Ridge.
- 1996 – Acquired by the Chamber of Commerce in Fernandina Beach, Florida, where it was renamed the Fernandina.
- 1998 – Acquired by Gregory Dodd and relocated to New Orleans.
- 2002 – Acquired by New Orleans Public Belt Railroad and renamed The City of New Orleans

