

Boxcar Facts and Information Holocaust Museum & Education Center of Southwest Florida

The Holocaust
Museum
& EDUCATION CENTER
OF SOUTHWEST FLORIDA

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The Holocaust Museum & Education Center of Southwest Florida's boxcar was acquired in Austria in 2006 after a four year international search by board member Jack Nortman. It departed the Port of Rotterdam, Netherlands on May 16, 2007, arrived in Miami, and traveled by truck to Naples. The boxcar was restored by the Woodworker's Cabinet in Naples and dedicated at the Naples Depot in January 2008.

There are a handful of boxcars on display in the United States. However, in all locations, the boxcar is a stationary artifact. *To our knowledge we are the only museum using it as a traveling educational tool.*

Artifact facts:

- The boxcar was manufactured in the Vorm. Schumann Factory in Germany in 1919.
- It is made of wood and imported steel from Belgium.
- The steps at each door ARE original to the manufacture date.
- Hook & latch system for connecting boxcars.
- "Bumpers" – 2 at each end of the car as shock absorbers.
- Wire flap near door was for a sheet of paper with the following info:
 - Where the boxcar was leaving from and headed to
 - Who sent it and who will receive it
 - What is in the boxcar and how much of it (quantity/weight)

Inscriptions:

- Builder's plate/Bullet plate found on left back of boxcar gives manufacture information:
 - Manufacture date – 1919
 - Factory – Vorm. Schumann Factory
 - Number in sequence of boxcars made in that factory from its founding until this car was produced in 1919 - # 5241
- On the wheel/axel housing:
 - Wittman Haspe Factory or Schütte-Meyer & Co. Letmathe
 - Top date refers to manufacture date
 - D.W.V. date refers to the axel box being built according to the standards of the Union of German Rail Car Makers for that year.
- "Ausgemustert" – meaning to discharge or be dismissed from service. The car was in the service of the German Railway System until 1945. From 1945 until 1969 it was in the Service of the Austrian State Railway, when it was dismissed from service. During WWII, the German and Austrian systems were one in the same.

- “König Albert” on the steel - refers to Belgian king; steel was imported
- “→ 4,50 m ←” refers to the length between axels
- “Kk – G Bremse” – refers to the special pressed air break system of the wagon, which was developed in Germany and used by European railways. Kunze-Knorr-Güterzugbremse = brake system Kunze-Knorr for a goods train.

[The above information was obtained from Alfred Gottwaldt and Wolfgang Diener, railroad historians in Germany.]

Frequently Asked Questions:

Q. Was the boxcar used during the Holocaust/WWII?

A. We cannot be 100% sure that this boxcar was used in deportation, but the following are indicators of that use. This boxcar was in the service of the German Railway System during the 1930s and 40s. The boxcar is the TYPE of car that was used during deportations.

Q. Is this boxcar real, meaning “old”?

A. Yes, this boxcar was built in 1919. As it stands today, the wood is 75% original and all the metal is original to when we acquired it (with the exception of a few nuts and bolts). It has been sealed and painted to withstand the south Florida weather.

Q. What was the average length of time someone spent in a boxcar?

A. About 2 – 4 days on average. People whose experience was up to 6 weeks in a boxcar were generally sent to Siberia, not to the Nazi concentration camps. Although their experience was equally horrible, it was different than what we usually think of as the deportation to the camps.

Q. Were the windows opened for the prisoners?

A. Not usually. Windows and vents were often blocked.

Q. Were people given food or water?

A. No, they had only what they brought with them.

Q. Were people allowed off the train to go to the bathroom?

A. No. Usually, there was either a bucket in one corner of the boxcar or a hole in the floor for people to relieve themselves.

Q. How many people would the Nazis have put in one boxcar?

A. Anywhere from 70 – 120 men, women, and children were put in the boxcar at one time.

Q. How much does it weigh? How wide is it? How long is it?

A. 10 tons, 10 feet wide, and 30 feet long

Quick Facts:

- During WWI and WWII, these types of boxcar were known by soldiers as “40 and 8.” They could carry 40 soldiers or 8 horses.

- After WWII, the French people sent 48 boxcars of this type to the U.S. filled with French goods in what was called the “Merci Train.” Because so many Americans had generously given money to help rebuild France, the French people filled 48 trains (for the 48 states at the time) with goods and sent them to the U.S. One was give to each state and some are still standing today.