



Scratch Build A Pickle Car

by Tom Houle

Background

First, I have to admit an affinity for kosher dills. Perhaps that was the subliminal motivation that drove me to research and construct such a unique car. I also have to admit that in all my years of rail-fanning I've never seen a real pickle car. Nonetheless, ever since I first read Eric Steven's *Dollar Series* HO pickle car article in the November 1956 issue of *Model Railroader*, I knew that someday I'd build this car. Incidentally, that same article also ran some years ago in Kalmbach's *Easy-To-Build Model Railroad Freight Cars* book. Copies of the article should still be available from Kalmbach. See a current issue of *Model Railroader* magazine or visit Kalmbach's www.Trains.com website for ordering information.

Considering the popularity and distribution by rail of pickles from farms to processing plants to wholesale grocer firms, pickle cars must have roamed the country at one time. In a model railroad context, the low profile of the car distinctly contrasts with the usual assemblage of boxes, hoppers, gons, and tanks we tend to run in our freight consists. Pickle cars had varying capacities. This article (as does the Stevens article) covers the construction of 900 and 1300-bushel cars.

According to Stevens, these wooden open-framed cars used either wood (early) or steel (later) pickle tubs. The original diagonal truss rod side-braces eventually gave way to right-angle steel diagonal bracing. Steel bracing and steel tubs will simplify the construction of this car, but at the same time take away from some of the original's rugged timber charm. Eventually, these cars were

built completely in steel. Even then, some of these cars had exposed tubs. I had always thought the H. J. Heinz Company used all-wood pickle cars to transport their famous product. Alas, this is not the case. In spite of Athearn's best intentions, the NEB&W Guide to Athearn Tank Cars quotes Byron Rose—reportedly an expert on prototype pickle cars—as saying the H. J. Heinz Company never used open frame wood pickle cars

I have it first hand from Jerry Roy, my good friend and O scale mentor, that pickle cars were typically unloaded with netted scoops. The unloading crew dropped the scoops through hatches in the car roof. The nets allowed the brine to strain back into the tubs. Jerry recalls seeing these cars in northern Michigan being unloaded into wheelbarrows. The wheelbarrows were trundled to storage tanks and dumped. Eric Steven's article shows a worker dumping a wheelbarrow load through a roof hatch. The shallow roof pitch and recessed roof walk are there for a reason. They allowed the worker to easily wheel a load across the roof without running into a roof walk.

It seems likely that pickle plants would have used elevated platforms to allow direct access to the car roofs. What plants did to handle the varying car roof heights, I don't know. (Can anyone shed some light on pickle car loading/unloading practices? It'd sure help me, because my next project is going to be a small pickle processing and canning plant.)

Some Planning

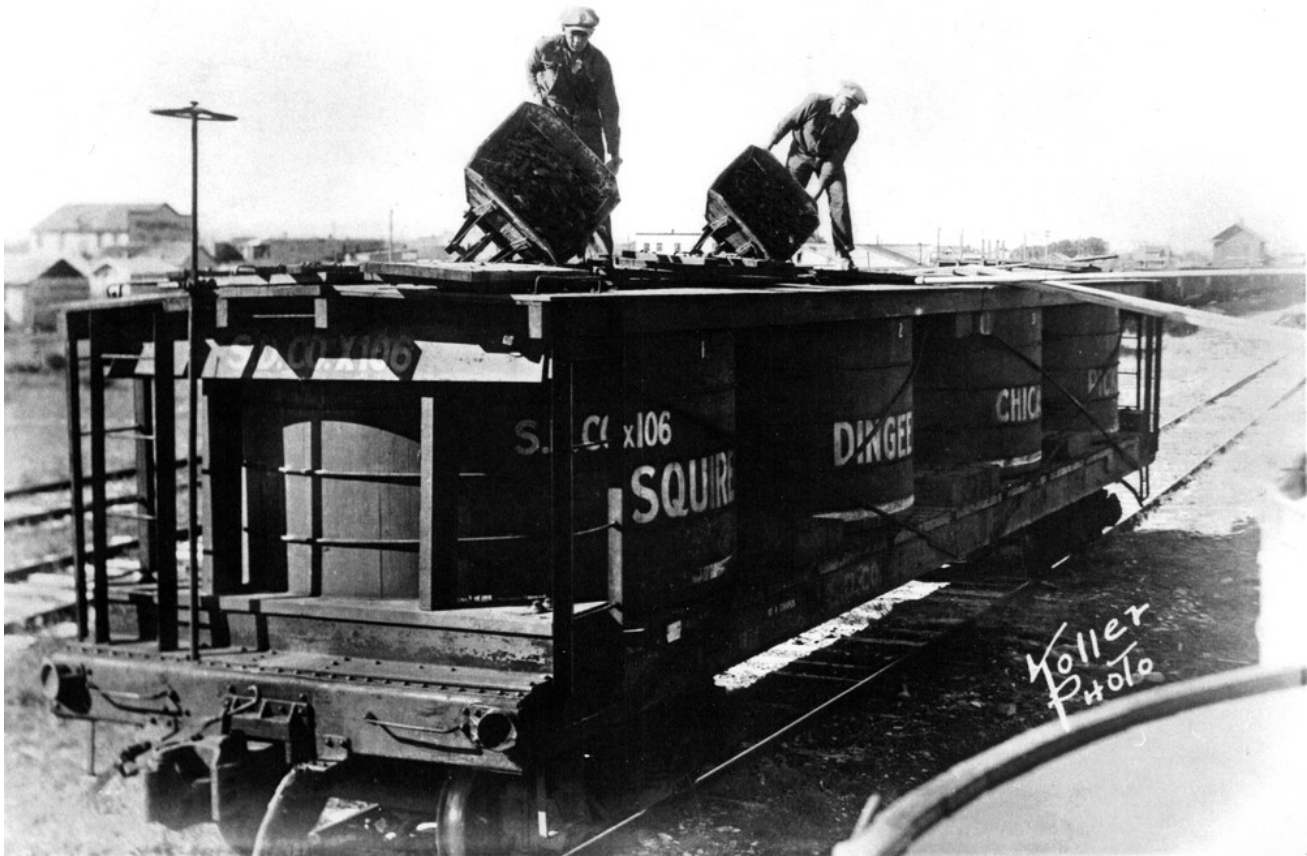
I was drawn to this project because of its all-wood construction. I like building with basswood. I cut my scratch build-

ing teeth on basswood and have been using it ever since. If you cut your own lumber, you can use clear pine, redwood, or cedar. Northeastern Scale Lumber has an incredible array of basswood strips, milled sidings, and plain sheets. All items should be available through Walther's and your local hobby shop. I think it would be an excellent starter project for someone who wants to try scratch building their first car. For the same reason, it would also make a great first car in styrene. Styrene might be a better medium for this car than basswood because there won't be any of the basswood fuzzies that show up after the wood has been painted. Eric Stevens measured an actual wood pickle car and used the prototype dimensions to build his two cars. All lumber dimensions in this article are to scale, which unfortunately are not available in standard basswood or styrene sizes. I cut my lumber to the required dimensions on my Dremel table saw. All lumber dimensions are given on the drawings. It's not difficult to saw the lumber on a miniature table saw. It took me an hour or two—sorta like rollin' yer own. Gave me the feel of working in a car shop. Let's get started.

Erecting the Underframe

Ever built a stick and tissue model airplane? That's how this project feels as it goes together. The car is nothing more than a pile of lumber, a bit of styrene, and four wooden tubs. Do take your time. Expect to spend a week or two building this car. It won't fall together but it will offer you a lot of old-fashioned scratch building fun that you can't get from a plastic "shake the box" kit.

The underframe is shown in Figure 1.



Nissland pickles above: This is the photo that I based the model on. There are a lot of small details. The bottom band is a metal strap, rather than a metal rod. I did not model it that way, although I should have. Next time. The photo also shows how cucumbers were transferred from the salting vats to the pickle cars to be shipped. Wheelbarrows of pickles are dumped into the vats for shipping, hard, dirty work. Brine was pumped into the vats before loading to lessen the fall of the pickles. Notice the side of a vat visible in the photo. Photo courtesy of Rick Mills from the Nisland, Nebraska Historical Society

SDX118 below: This photo of a later pickle car shows the lettering. The car was built by the Thrall Car Manufacturing Company in Chicago Heights, IL. The car was a drab yellow with black lettering. There is possibly an enclosed Heinz pickle car in front of it.



Pickle & Vinegar Industries: Modelling Shipments

(Note: Not all possible shipments have been included, such as materials for maintaining plants/factories.)

VINEGAR FACTORY

Inbound

- Alcohol product
- Generator packing materials
- Bottles, etc.



Outbound

- Vinegar tank cars (bulk)
- Boxcars of product

Inbound

- Cucumbers
- Spices
- Salt
- Barrels, etc.



Outbound

- Pickle Cars (bulk)
- Boxcars of product

Inbound

- Brine stock (pickle cars)
- Vinegar (tank cars)
- Sugar, salt, spices, etc.
- Barrels, jars, tins, etc.



Outbound

- Boxcars of product
- Reefers of product

SALTING STATION

PICKLE PLANT