

The Nickel Plate Road's 40000- and 42000- series 36-foot Stock Cars A Short History

By Ray Breyer, Associate Editor *NKP Magazine*



General American built cars 42150-42449 for the NKP in 1924. These were the most commonly-seen NKP stock cars well into the 1950s. Jay Williams collection

The Nickel Plate Road was constructed in the 1880s as a mainline railroad that specialized in moving freight between Chicago and Buffalo very quickly. With few online industries or traffic bottlenecks handling priority freight was always extremely important to the company.

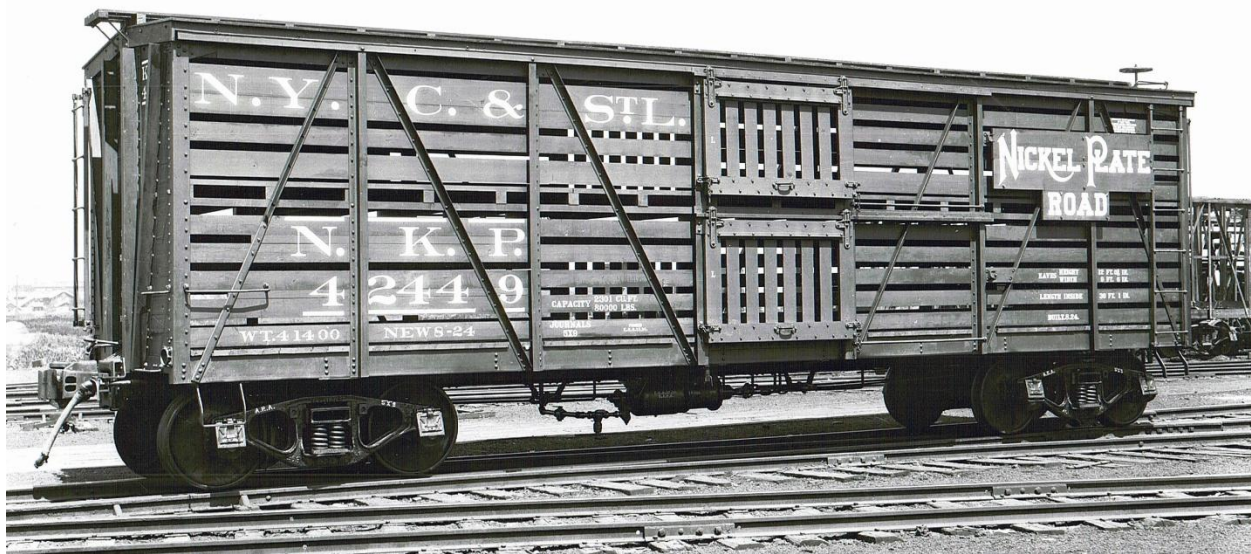
When most people think of a NKP freight train they think of long strings of refrigerator cars, but other time-sensitive commodities were a part of their traffic mix as well, with live animal traffic being one of them. The Nickel Plate served some of the largest stockyards in the country: Chicago, St. Louis, Cleveland, Buffalo, Indianapolis, and Peoria just to name a few of the road's 206 online stockyards. And traffic wasn't light: before World War I the NKP averaged 120,000 tons of live animal traffic annually. With the railroad's expansion in 1924, that number leapt to over 476,000, or more than 23,800 carloads a year (averaging 65 cars a day!).



NKP 777 leads a train westbound out of Bellevue OH, in 1956. Behind the engine is a long string of empty stock cars returning to Chicago Union Stockyards, including several of the 42000-series cars. NKPHTS Archives, Thomas Gascoigne collection.

To handle this heavy traffic load, the NKP initially ordered 700 stock cars in 1882. By the time these cars reached their 20-year lifespan the railroad had turned to car leasing companies like Street's and Quaker City for their stock car needs. The expansion of the railroad's livestock traffic in the early 1920s demanded a large influx of new stock cars, and rather than lease more cars railroad management decided to buy new ones.

In 1922 The Illinois Car & Manufacturing Company of Mt. Vernon IL delivered 300 brand new stock cars to the Nickel Plate: 150 single deck cars in the 40000-40149 series, and 150 double decked cars in the 42000-42149 series. The cars were quite conventionally-built for the time, and bore a more than passing similarity to Harriman S-40-9 class cars being built at around the same time. In 1924 the NKP ordered 300 more double deck cars from General American, placing them in the 42150-42449 number series. These cars were built to the same plans as the 42000-series.



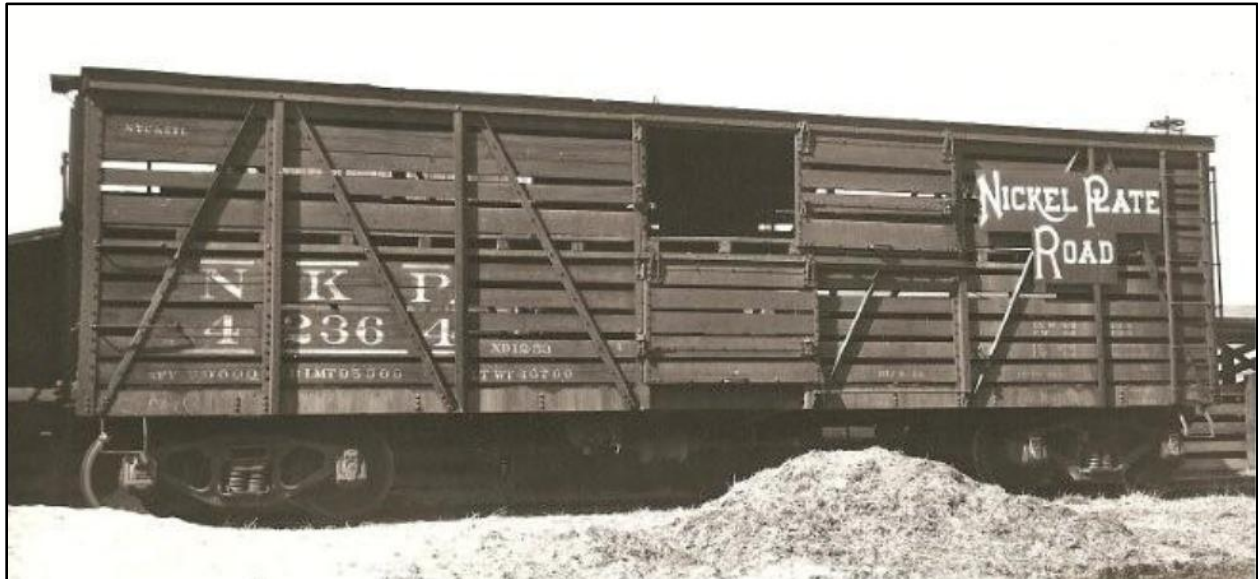
*Another view of General American built NKP 42449, showing end details.
Jay Williams collection*

Between 1922 and 1938 these 600 stock cars handled the bulk of the NKP's stock car requirements, occasionally being supplemented by 100-200 Mather cars on short term leases. War clouds in Europe saw a sharp increase in live animal shipments in the United States, and between 1938 and 1946 the NKP's car shops in Conneaut OH and Frankfort IN rebuilt 344 of their 36' 1" IL stock cars into 40' 6" IL cars, placing them in nine number groups in the 41000-43654 range.



NKP 41249 was one of the 344 short stock cars rebuilt to 42-foot-long cars. Very similar to the 40000-series, the main spotting feature for these lengthened cars are the eight, rather than six, side panels. NKPHTS Archives.

The rebuilding program spelled the end for the shorter 40000-series cars by the end of 1946, but 199 of the 42000-series double-decked cars remained in service, with the last of them finally being retired in 1960. The lengthened cars survived in reducing numbers until the very last car, NKP 43612, was retired by the N&W in late 1979.



NKP 42364 is seen here at the St. Louis Stockyards being cleaned of bedding in the mid-1950s. Ray Breyer collection.



NKP 42314 heads west out of Wesleydale PA in April 1954. Originally painted the same oxide color as the NKP boxcars in the image, road grime, sun fading, soot, and "other stuff" quickly dulled and darkened these stock cars. NKPHTS Archives.