

Firm: Jackson & Sharp
Delaware Car Works
Office Location: Wilmington, Delaware
Operating Dates: 1863-1901
Principals: Job H. Jackson
Jacob F. Sharp

Information

Jackson & Sharp built the first narrow gauge cars in this country for the Denver & Rio Grande Railway (D&RG) in 1871. Over the next three decades, the firm built much of the freight and passenger rolling stock used by the D&RG.

Jackson & Sharp began in April 1863 at Wilmington, Delaware, as a partnership of Job H. Jackson (1833-1901) and Jacob F. Sharp (ca. 1815-1888). Jackson quit school at an early age and worked as a tinsmith and mechanic. Sharp worked as a carpenter and bridge-builder before taking a job in 1840 at the Harlan & Hollingsworth car plant. The partners opened a small car-building shop and built freight cars for the Philadelphia, Wilmington and Baltimore Railroad. Jackson managed the office while Sharp, an experienced car builder, supervised the shops. Their first passenger cars were built in 1865 for the Chicago Great Western Railroad.

The firm was reorganized in 1869 as the *Jackson and Sharp Car Company* and Sharp retired in 1870. Jackson soon acquired most of the company stock and developed the *Delaware Car Works* where Jackson & Sharp built many rail cars for the D&RG.

The financial panic of 1873 reduced rail car sales and the firm reacted by diversifying. It acquired the Christina River Shipyards, while continuing to fabricate sash and other millwork for the building trade. Sharp also became involved in the management of the Woodruff Sleeping Car Company. Business began to revive as improvements in the economy increased railroad shipping. By 1880 the firm was producing 400 passenger cars per year.

Exhibition awards recognized the quality of Jackson & Sharp cars. In 1876, the company received a Centennial Award at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition, in the "railway plant, rolling stock, engines" category for its passenger, boudoir, and library cars. In 1881 Jackson & Sharp received a Gold Medal and special mention for elegance in design and superior workmanship at the Cotton International Exhibition in Atlanta.



1879 Car-Builder's Dictionary



Denver & Rio Grande narrow-gauge coach *Denver* built in 1871 by Jackson & Sharp

By 1882 the Jackson & Sharp plant covered 25 acres, not counting the shipyards, employed between 800 and 1,000 men, and claimed to be “the largest Passenger Car Manufactory [sic] in the country.” That same year, Job Jackson took over the management of the Woodruff Sleeping & Parlor Coach Company and subsequently Jackson & Sharp built all Woodruff cars.

The Silver Crash of 1893 affected the business of Jackson & Sharp, but the downturn proved to be only a temporary setback. By the late 1890s, the firm again turned out about 400 cars per year. Job Jackson died in 1901 and American Car and Foundry, a rival rail car manufacturer, acquired the company and it became their Wilmington Works. At that time it employed about 1,500 men. American Car & Foundry used the Jackson & Sharp plant in Wilmington primarily to construct railroad cars for export orders until around 1920. During the First World War the Wilmington plant produced minesweepers. From the end of the war until 1938, the plant remained open primarily by building small pleasure boats and the occasional motor bus. It built its last rail car about 1931 and the plant closed permanently around 1945.

Credited Projects (partial list)

Rail Car	Location	Car Type	Date*	Status
D&RG Business Car No. B-8	Colorado Railroad Museum, Golden	Business Car	1872	State Register
D&RG Coach No. 60	Colorado Railroad Museum, Golden	Passenger Coach	1881	State Register
D&RG Coach No. 280	Central Park, Boulder	Passenger Coach	1881	State Register
D&RG Coach No. 307	Colorado Railroad Museum, Golden	Passenger Coach	1881	State Register

*Completion date or construction span is stated if known. Plan, building permit, or assessor dates are used if the completion date or period is unknown.

Reference Material

Chronic, Betty M., "Denver & Rio Grande Railroad Coach No. 280" Colorado State Register of Historic Properties nomination, April 28, 1998.

Dahm, A. Lewis, "Denver & Rio Grande Railroad Business Car No. B-8" Colorado State Register of Historic Properties nomination, September 9, 1996.

_____, "Denver & Rio Grande Railroad Coach No. 60" Colorado State Register of Historic Properties nomination, March 5, 1996.

_____, "Denver & Rio Grande Railroad Coach No. 307" Colorado State Register of Historic Properties nomination, November 29, 1996.

Farin, Tom. *Railway Car Builders of North America* website, www.ironhorse129.com, accessed February 4, 2007.

Site Files Database, Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, Colorado Historical Society, Denver.

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