

## Boxcar Artist

# The Truth Comes Out

In July of last year, NW Magazine carried a story about chalk drawings of a sleepy sombrero-topped character that have been appearing on the sides of freight cars for 25 years.

The drawings are always the same: a Mexican type lounging beneath a palm tree with the name Herby and the date inscribed at the bottom.

Throughout the years, the curiosity of rail employees and fans failed to uncover the identity of the artist who left his Spanish-flavored graffiti on so many freight cars.

Now, according to Sally Bixby Defty of the St. Louis **Post Dispatch**, the artist has gone public.

He's Herbert A. Mayer, who retired earlier this year from his switchman's job with the Terminal Railroad Association of St. Louis. (The Terminal Railroad connects all railroads in the St. Louis area, including NW, and is owned jointly by them.)

Twenty-five years ago he was a man full of nervous energy who had just quit smoking. To keep his hands occupied, he picked up a piece of lumber crayon in a rail yard and drew the first Herby.

It takes Mr. Mayer just two downstrokes, a zigzag, horizontal line, a curve, a wiggly line and fewer than 30 seconds to draw Herby, so it wasn't unusual for him to make sure each car in a train carried the drawing.

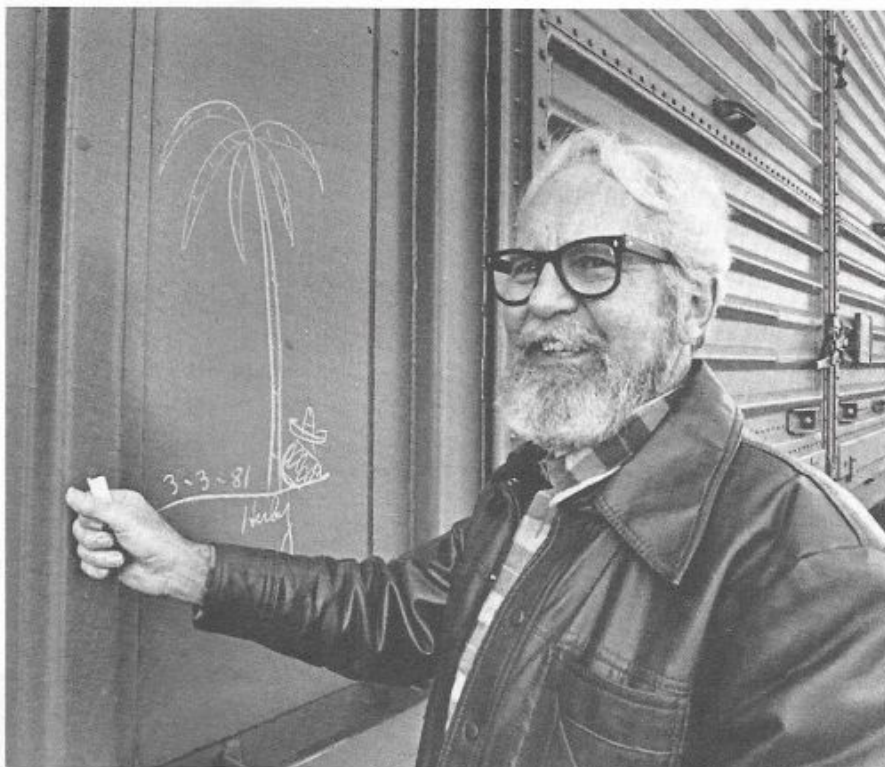


photo: St. Louis Post Dispatch

Retired railway employee Herbert A. Mayer and "Herby"

Mr. Mayer estimates he's drawn 700,000 Herbys since 1955. "There are 3.5 million freight cars out there, and each has two sides. So you're talking about seven million car surfaces. Do you realize how many I had to do before I started to see them showing up about 1965?" he asks.

Asked why he never drew on a locomotive, caboose or passenger car, Mr. Mayer explained, "I wouldn't paint a Herby on the leaning tower of Pisa. No sir, just on dirty old freight cars."

Mr. Mayer is quick to point out that

Herby is not intended as a slur against Mexicans. In fact, he's visited Mexico several times and says the people are wonderful. The first drawing "just popped out that way," he explains.

Now that retirement has limited his access to freight cars, Mr. Mayer is concentrating on getting a trademark for Herby so that a man who is selling Herby caps and jackets will not be able to continue profiting from the creation. Meantime, Mr. Mayer is selling his own mail-order T-shirts from his home in Affton, Mo. **NW**

## Luck of the Roll

How would you like to have \$500 every time you stopped at the Norfolk and Western Railway Co. offices in Roanoke?

You can, in a fashion, if you play the Heritage Roanoke Area Game. It's much like Monopoly, except that the properties are Roanoke area businesses. Players buy property, add branch

offices, take out mortgages, pay fines and take in cash.

Norfolk and Western occupies one corner of the playing board and participants who land on that spot pick up \$500.

On the other hand, you might get the NW "doubles card," be forced to wait for a train at a crossing, and lose one turn.

If that happens, open up the in-

struction booklet and read a little about the critical role NW played in the founding and development of the city.

The game was developed by Heritage Citigames Co., of La Crescent, Minn., which has marketed games for a number of other cities in the country, as well.

The Roanoke version is selling for \$9.95 in a number of stores.