



Long in the Service

The Cain Family

Many of us recognize the name: “**Sugar**” Cain, “**Sugar**” being the well known and well-liked bar tender on one of the McHenry jobs until his 1996 retirement. Here’s more of the **Cain** family story.

- **Leland C. Cain, Sr.**, with prior service on the New York Central, started to work for the C&NW part time in 1935 in the Dining Car Department and two years later, on 6/19/1937, earned a permanent job as a dining car waiter. Over the succeeding years, **Leland** worked up to Waiter-in-Charge and was elected General Chairman of Local 351 of the Dining Car Employees Union. **Leland** retired in 1985 with 50 years of C&NW service.
- His son, **Leland C. Cain, Jr.**, better known as “**Sugar**,” started working for the C&NW as a 4th Cook during the summer school break when he was just 16. 4th Cook, in case you didn’t know, meant Dishwasher. That was in 1941. His seniority date as a full time employee is 1/5/1943, shortly after which he volunteered for the army. Upon returning to the C&NW after the war, he was made 3rd Cook. Subsequently working up to 2nd Cook, 1st Cook, Chef and Head Chef, “**Sugar**” worked all the name trains of his era, his first assignment being on Nos. 87 and 88 – The Challenger. Later, he served on the Overland Limited, all four “City” trains, the Minneapolis 400, the Dakota 400, the Capitol 400, the Kate Shelly and the “Yellow Dogs.” “Yellow Dog,” actually a complimentary term, was the name the employees gave to the streamliners to and from Milwaukee because they were yellow, and because they made the trip so quickly.

“**Sugar**” was in the first dining car crew to work all the way through to Los Angeles on the City of Los Angeles under Chef **William U. Brown** and 1st Cook **McInerney**. “**Sugar**” explained that the Union Pacific would not let the C&NW crews work west of Omaha because the UP felt only their own people could measure up to Union Pacific standards. It took a vigorous protest by the union led by **Leland Cain, Sr.** to change that and immediately following, the North Western men were watched like hawks. The UP was looking for slip-ups. There weren’t any!

Shortly afterwards, Chef **Brown** went to his boss and told him he wanted “**Sugar**” for his 1st Cook. **McInerney** had more seniority. Brown said: “*McInerney isn’t doing the job; “Sugar” is, and “Sugar” is the man I want.*” It took a bit of doing but “**Sugar**” wound up as **Brown’s** 1st Cook.

Many high corporate executives – CEO’s and Presidents – had their own private cars and “**Sugar**” worked them in their travels over the C&NW. He also worked numerous Business Trains for **Paul Feucht, Ben Heinemann, Larry Provo, Jim Wolfe, Joe Alsop** and **Jim Zito**. With changes in the industry over the years, private car owners were allowed to furnish their own help and “**Sugar**” received an offer to go to work for one of those private car owners. He thought about it, perhaps for about 2 minutes, and declined, saying the North Western was where he belonged.

After several years on the Kenosha Club Run and following the retirement of “**Big Al**” **Jenkins**, “**Sugar**” took over the bar car on the McHenry Club Run. At that time, he and **Warren Sims** (on the Harvard Club Run) were the last two bartenders on the North Western.

In mid-1984, Chicago’s Regional Transportation Authority ran a contest – asking commuters throughout their Chicago Land service area to cast their votes for “the most outstanding, customer oriented employee” from among the railroad people with whom they dealt. The contest went on for several weeks and when the votes were counted, “**Sugar**” won by a landslide. A few days later on July 12, 1984, “**Sugar**” received checks totaling \$1,000 from the RTA and the North Western, the North Western’s being presented personally by President **Jim Wolfe** who rode the 5:20 pm train to McHenry that evening.

“**Sugar**” stayed on that McHenry job until he retired on February 23, 1996 with 53 years of C&NW service. “**Sugar**” told us the best advice he ever had was from his father who told him: “*When you get mad at the chef, and you will – sooner or later, just go out in the vestibule or in the washroom, quietly cuss him out, and then go back to work with a big smile on your face!*”

- “**Sugar’s**” son, **Leland C. (Charlie) Cain III** started in the B&B Department during summer vacations in 1976, going full time in that department in 1978. One of the officials paved the way for **Charlie** to move into train service on the Wisconsin Division in 1980. **Charlie’s** B&B supervisor was so mad about that he didn’t talk to **Charlie** for several months. **Charlie** became an engineer in 1988 and right now is working out of Waukegan.
- “**Sugar’s**” step-daughter, **Bessie Brown**, worked at the California Ave. Coach Yard from 1976 to 1996, a total of 20 years.
- “**Sugar’s**” brother, **Richard Cain**, worked for the C&NW as a 4th Cook from 1955 to 1957.
- And, **Kenny Wright**, “**Sugar’s**” nephew, spent 10 years on the section gang working at Proviso and 40th Street.

That’s about 164 years of service for the **Cain** family and still counting!



“**Sugar**” on the rear end of **Jim Zito’s** 1981 business train to the Powder River.



“**Sugar**” shakes hands with **Joe Pedajas** on **Joe’s** last trip in September 1982. You don’t suppose that J&B is for **Joe**?



“**Sugar**” was there when “**Waxy**” **Wilcox** retired in August 1983.



“Sugar” and Illinois Division Engineer **Rex Hauser**, CPT, February 25, 2005.



“Sugar’s” retirement plaque certifying 53 years of service.



“Sugar” fills us in on his service with the C&NW at the CPT on February 25, 2005.



“Sugar” in the galley of **Jim Zito’s** 1981 business train to the Powder River. “Sugar’s” skills went way beyond bartending; he was on board to do the cooking on almost all the business trains of that era. “Sugar’s” retirement marked the end of bar car service as there were no replacements for him.



*Our sincere thanks to **Mark Llanuza** who provided all the photographs on this page.*



This is the dining car crew on the November 1990 Retirement Train to Loves Park. “Sugar” tells us in the back row (left to right) are **George Jack**, then **Jerry Williams**. Front row left to right are **Gene Mims**. All the others are contract help, hired for this trip.