

# The Lumberman's Library



## An Account of ACM's Rolling Reading Room

By Robert G. Dundas

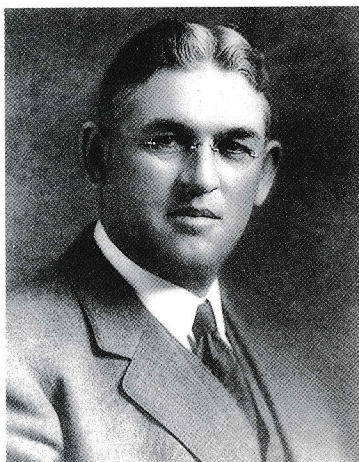
*To Montanans, the term "ACM" conjures up thoughts of a large and powerful company that controlled or influenced much of the mining and forest products industries in the state from the late 1800s to the mid-1900s. The ACM (Anaconda Copper Mining Co.) was not only the biggest mining company in the state, but the ACM Lumber Department was also the largest logging and sawmilling concern. With four to five hundred men employed in the woods, and about the same number of workers at the Bonner mill east of Missoula, Montana, there were many employees in need of entertainment during their off hours. In the early days, the company provided social clubs for its sawmill workers, but the men in the logging camps were isolated in the woods most of the year.*



During the evenings, many men played cards or other games, visited with each other, spent time maintaining their equipment, or just rested after a hard day's work. Then, in 1921, reading gained in popularity as a pastime for some ACM loggers, when the company built a library railcar.

Over the years, several brief articles about this unique library have appeared in newspapers, a library journal, and forest products publications like *The Timberman* and *West Coast Lumberman*. Much of the following description of the library car's origin and early history (including all quoted passages) comes from a December 19, 1926 *Missoulian* newspaper article about the library car when it was stationed at the ACM's Greenough headquarters logging camp up the Blackfoot River drainage east of Missoula, Montana.

How and why did the railcar library come to be built? Most people would not regard lumberjacks and sawmill workers of the early to mid-1900s as bookworms. Kenneth Ross, General Manager of the ACM Lumber Department, shared that view. Ross remembered that, on an inspection visit to their headquarters logging camp in the Nine Mile area west of Missoula in 1919, he encountered two women: Missoula County librarian Ruth Worden, and the Missoula city librarian. Miss Worden asked Ross whether the company would like to have some books for the men to read in the logging camps. The library would provide free books, with new selections supplied as requested.

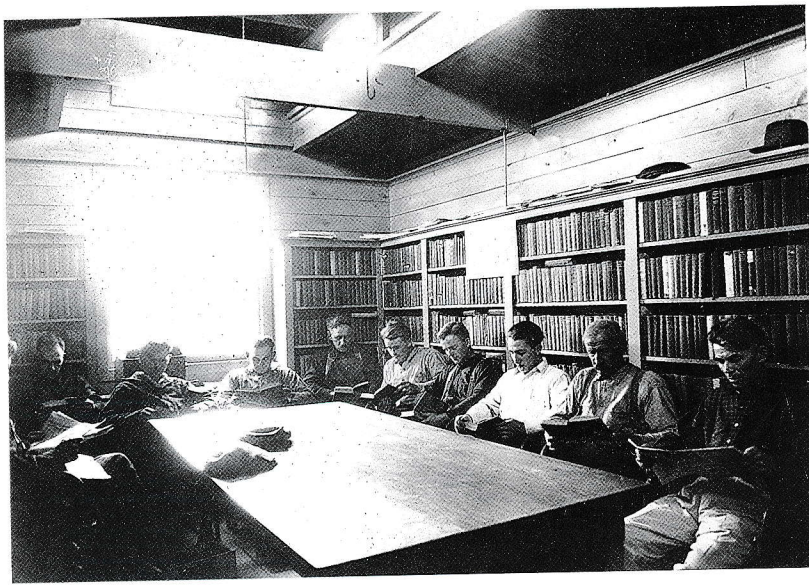


**Kenneth Ross,  
General Manager  
of the Anaconda  
Copper Mining  
Company Lumber  
Department from  
1900–1926. (Toole  
family collection)**

Miss Worden was a member of one of Missoula's founding families. Ross had known her since she was a little girl, so he did not want to be too abrupt with her although, as he later stated, "It annoyed me very much, as I did not think that camp libraries would do us any good, but only cause us a lot of bother." Nevertheless, Ross informed the logging camp clerk that, if he wanted to care for the books, then it was fine. Consequently, the library sent a shipment of books to the logging camp headquarters. Shortly thereafter, Miss Worden arrived at Bonner, inquiring whether the library could provide books for the sawmill workers. Ross recalled, "I happened to be very busy and was very much annoyed; and not having heard anything from our camp's library, she was an unwelcome visitor this time. However, I introduced her to our storekeeper, telling him that he could take in some books and look after them if he wanted to." But, that was not the end of the matter, as Ross remarked upon another visit from Miss Worden, "In a short time, she appeared in the office again, and said the store was not a suitable place to keep the books; that people who read books usually got them in the evening; and that it was going to be necessary for someone to take charge of the books to have them exchanged as often as necessary. I told the young lady I would undertake the job myself. Accordingly, I took a big room in our local hotel, engaged a girl to look after the keeping and exchanging of the books, and was very glad to get the job off my hands."

Ross soon changed his opinion of the libraries' value, noting, "At the end of the first year, I was handed a report from our Bonner library and found that over 4,000 books had been read during that time. I also received a report from our camp library and found, to my great surprise, that quite a number of books had been read there." Ross believed that relations improved between the workers and the company because of the education the men were receiving through use of the libraries. One incident in particular caught Ross' attention. A long-time ACM teamster confronted an





Interior view of the ACM library car reading room in late 1926, when the railcar was at the Greenough headquarters logging camp. (Missoula Public Library collection)

agitator, who was staying at the company rooming house in Bonner. "This old employee," said Mr. Ross, "had been reading from the good books that had been furnished, and some others, who had been reading these books joined in the argument with the result that the man with the propaganda was obliged to quit."

"Of course, I became very much interested in our lumberman's library," added Mr. Ross. "In order to distribute the books among our different logging camps I had a library car constructed, 14 feet wide and 40 feet long, equipped with a great many books. I put a good man in charge of it whose duty it is to distribute the books at the various camps. This car is usually switched from one camp to another at intervals of two weeks." Such was the genesis of the library car. Because the Anaconda Copper Mining Company Lumber Department had the largest logging railroad operation in Montana, the railcar was a great way of getting books around to the logging camps.

The library car, "painted gray, and carrying a placard with the label 'Missoula County Free Library'" toured the logging camps and was an instant success, with many timber workers patronizing it. In 1926, car librarian James Dwyer provided testament to the popu-

larity of the library car. During seven months, the car received 5,010 visitors and 3,195 books were checked out. Generally, 300 to 350 books were in circulation at any time. Mr. Dwyer noted that 10-25 men used the library each Sunday and during winter, when the logging camps were at their full complement of men, the figure rose to 60 patrons. The *Missoulian* further commented that, "The men like to draw out books on Sunday to take to the outlying camps to read during the week. Many in the camp where the car is established draw them out to take to their bunks to read. Mr. Dwyer

says that during the week on winter evenings the car is crowded. Even the first week in November before the camp's full quota of men had reported for work, from five to ten men spent every evening between supper and bedtime enjoying the comfort, entertainment, and touch with the outside world through newspapers and magazines afforded by the library car."

The car was well appointed. "Inside it is well lighted and heated and comfortably furnished with a long table and arm chairs. Open bookcases, four shelves deep, filled with books, line the walls on either side, half the length of the car. Papers and magazines lie within convenient reach on the table or on top of the bookcases. A Victrola under the window at one end of the car suggests that silence is not always the rule and that the library car partakes of the nature of a clubroom and a community center."

The 1926 *Missoulian* article additionally reported, "Fourteen hundred volumes are now catalogued in the library car. While many books were donated, others were purchased by Miss Worden from a fund of about \$400 subscribed by the men themselves. In addition, the county library supplies books, and to it monthly reports are sent by the librarian in

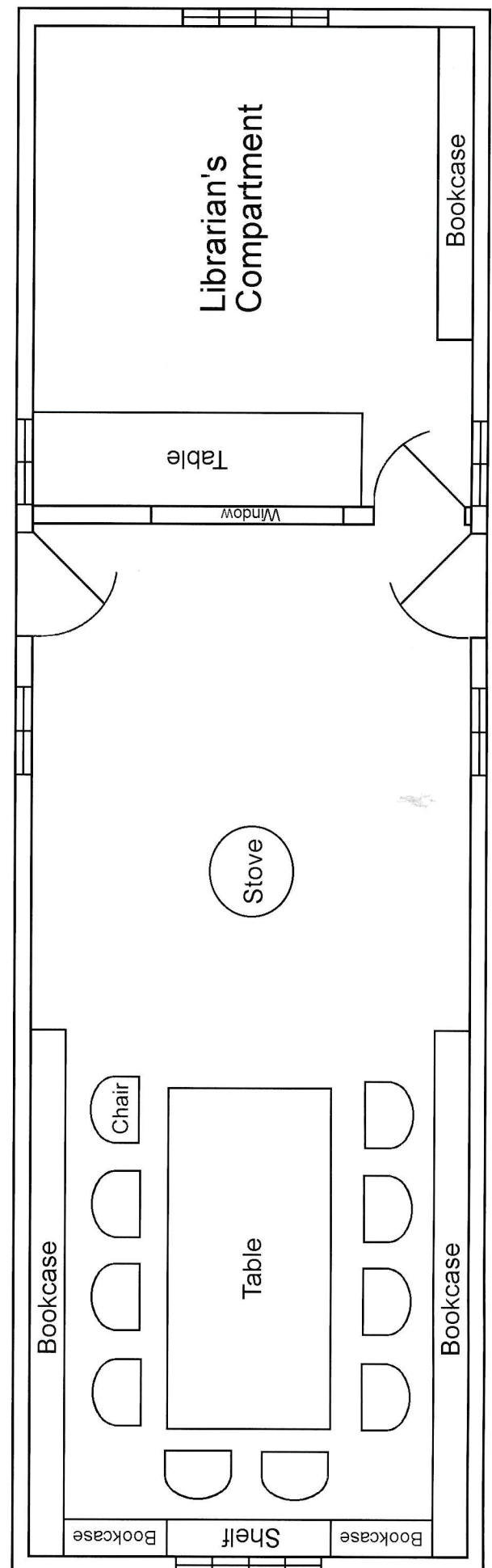
charge of the car. The books are equipped with pockets and cards similar to those of the Public library books. Space is allowed on the cards to record the name of the borrower, the date the book is drawn and the date returned. When books are drawn the cards are retained on file by Mr. Dwyer."

"Although stories of western life and of adventures are in great demand and Zane Grey and James Oliver Curwood are popular favorites, some serious reading is also done. Recently, Librarian Dwyer sent a request to the main library for Stuart's 'Forty Years on the Frontier.'"

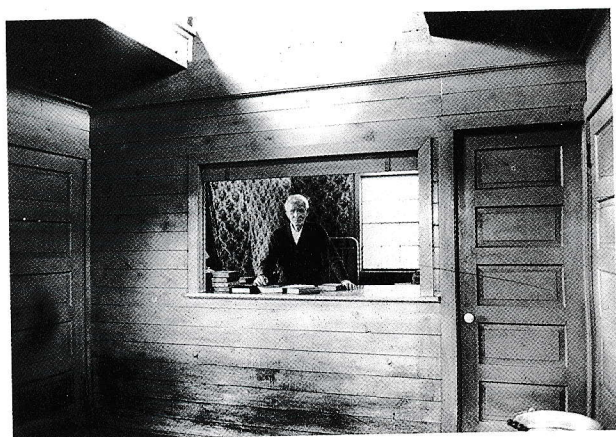
"Occasionally,' Miss Worden has written, 'we have requests for books on subjects that some man is studying. One winter we helped a man get a patent on some water power device; another year we supplied plays and books on the drama to a young college student. One of our local bankers, after a visit to the camps, remarked on the library car and its work and said it was surprising to him that books would interest the men in such numbers and that he notices that the men's accounts grew as they patronized the car as it seemed to do away with a great deal of card playing.'"

Describing the colorful scene in the car, between the book bindings and the woodsmen's cloths, the *Missoulian* noted, "Some of the men stand before the shelves taking down first one book and then another, turning over the pages, perhaps returning all to the shelves, but even so having learned at least the good and friendly feel of books—their hearty grip, as it

**Floor plan of the ACM library car drawn to scale. The exterior dimensions of the library car are actually 12'3" wide by 40'4" long, rather than the 14'x40' quoted by Kenneth Ross. The walls are six inches thick all around. The floor plan is based on direct measurements of the library car, except for the reading room table, chairs, and stove (the sizes of which were inferred from numerous photographs). Also, the librarian usually had a bed in his compartment. Further dimensions and photographs of the car are available from the author.**







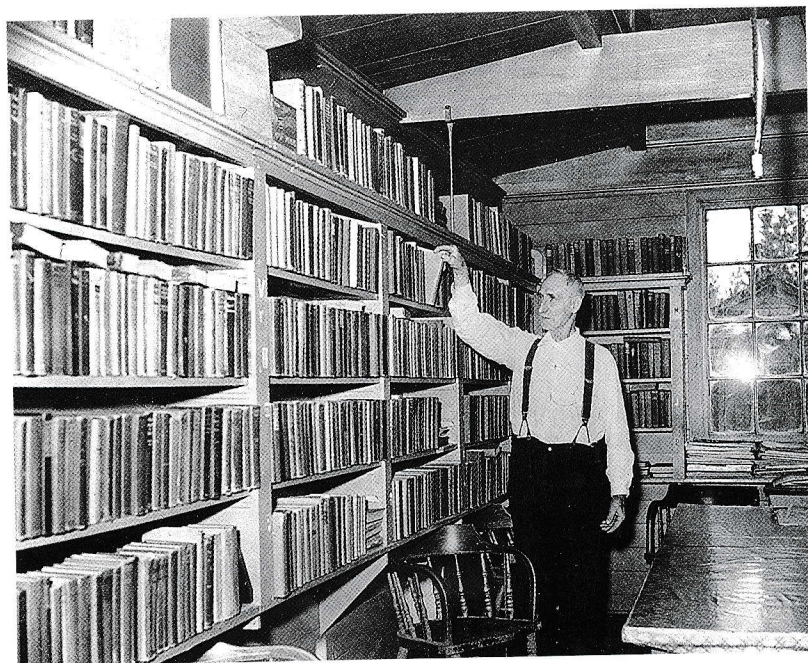
**Librarian Dwyer in his compartment at one end of the car, late 1926. (Missoula Public Library collection)**

were. If a package of new books has just come from the main library, it is opened on the table in the compartment at the end of the car reserved for Mr. Dwyer. Four or five men gather about with genuine eagerness. Selections are made quickly. Sabatini's 'The Snare' is the choice of one; two reach for Parrish's 'The Maid of the Forest.' A rustle of paper and several young 'giants of the forest' leave the car with bulky newspaper packages, containing five or six books, tucked under their arms. They must go early to make the long hike back to Camp 2 from Camp 6 before supper; supplied for the week with books."

Popularity of the library car apparently peaked in the late 1920s. The year 1927 proved to be a record year, with 9,617 library visitors and 7,894 books checked out, according to a note in a *West Coast Lumberman* issue published in 1938. In 1941, the library was stationed at the ACM's Woodworth logging camp in the Blackfoot River drainage area, when a brief article about it appeared in the December issue of the *West Coast Lumberman*. Al Henderson, car librarian at

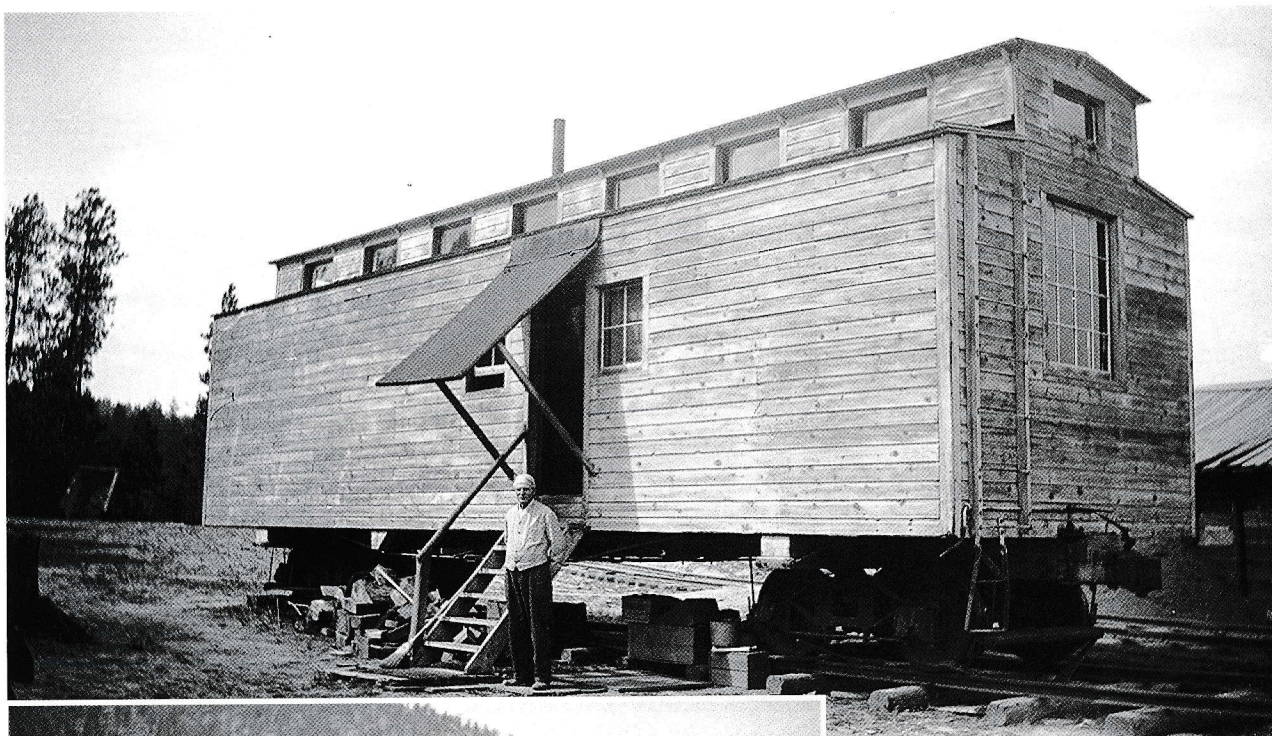
the time, noted monthly circulation of around 300 books, about half of peak levels. The decreased patronage was attributed to the popularity of radio and the greater ease of traveling to town because of better roads and availability of automobiles. Although the ACM ceased railroad logging in 1949, the library car continued to serve the company's logging camps until the late 1950s, when it was moved to the Lubrecht Experimental Forest.

The Lubrecht Forest (named after W. C. Lubrecht, Ross' successor as manager of the ACM Lumber Department) is about 30 miles northeast of Missoula in the Blackfoot River drainage and is part of the University of Montana School of Forestry. Created in 1937, with a donation of 19,058 acres from the ACM, the forest has expanded to 28,000 acres with additional land acquisitions. Part of the facilities at the forest headquarters include sleeping cabins that were once bunkhouses used by the ACM at its logging camps. Among them is a structure referred to as cabin 15, otherwise known as the library car. The structures came to Lubrecht

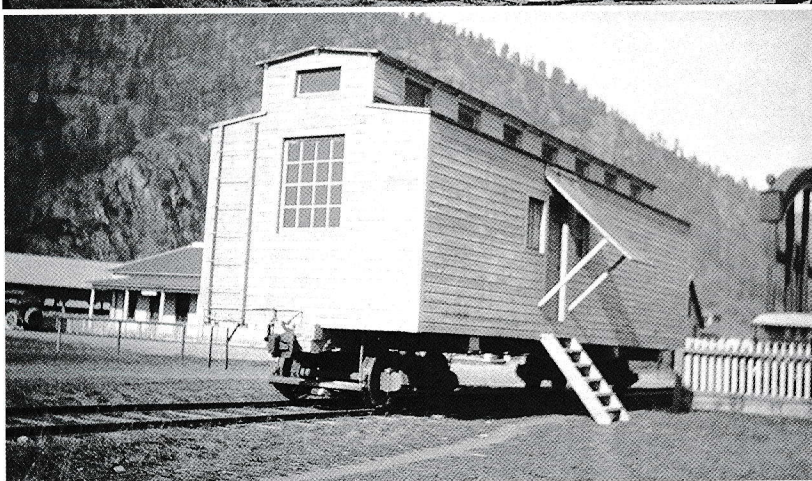


**Librarian Al Henderson poses in the library car at the ACM's Woodworth logging camp #1, c. early 1940s. (Photo 76-73, Anaconda Forest Products Collection, K. Ross Toole Archives, University of Montana-Missoula)**





**Above: The ACM library car photographed September 6, 1929.**  
*(Missoula Public Library collection)*



**Left: The ACM library car at Bonner, Montana, c. late 1923.**  
*(Missoula Public Library collection)*

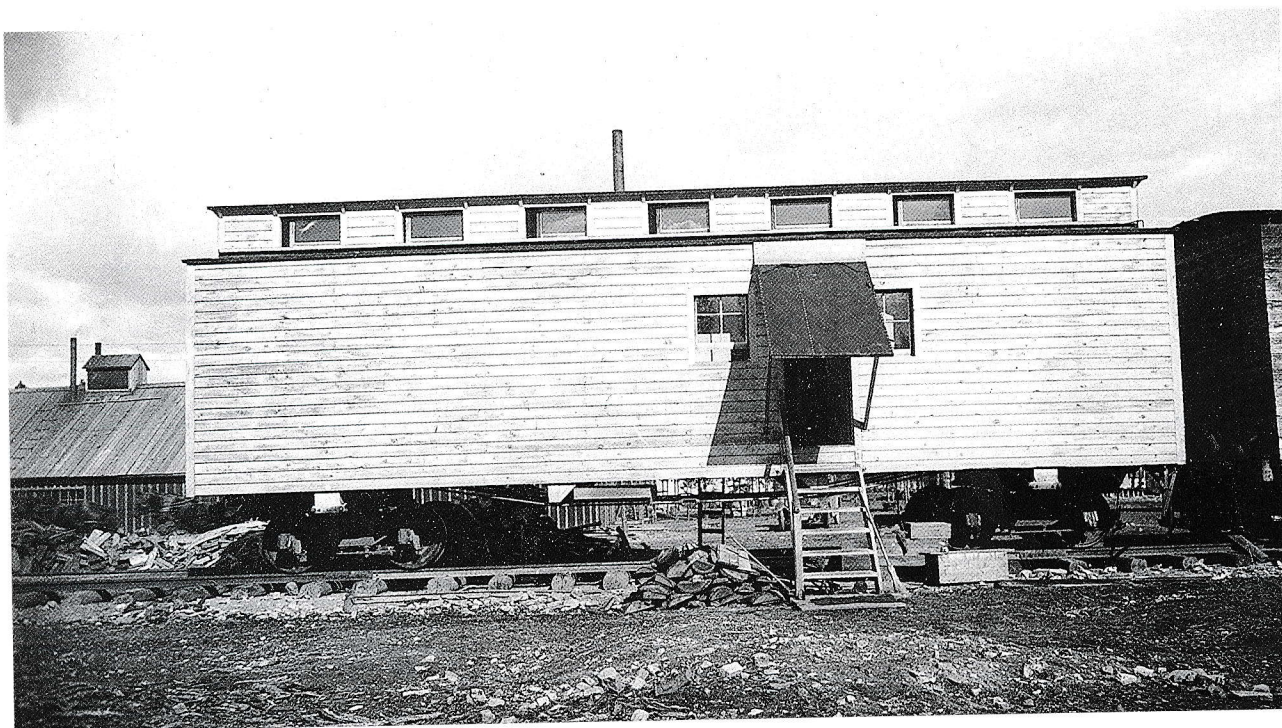
Forest from the ACM's Bear Creek logging camp up the Blackfoot.

Hank Goetz, Director of Field Stations for the University of Montana School of Forestry, recalls the library car from when he was a forestry student during spring 1960. The car interior was essentially intact, its shelves containing reference books placed there by Forestry professors. The students sat and read at the long table as the lumberjacks once had done. The exterior, though, had undergone modifications. The standard-gauge trucks were removed, and the car was placed upon timbers lying on the ground. Also, the paint scheme

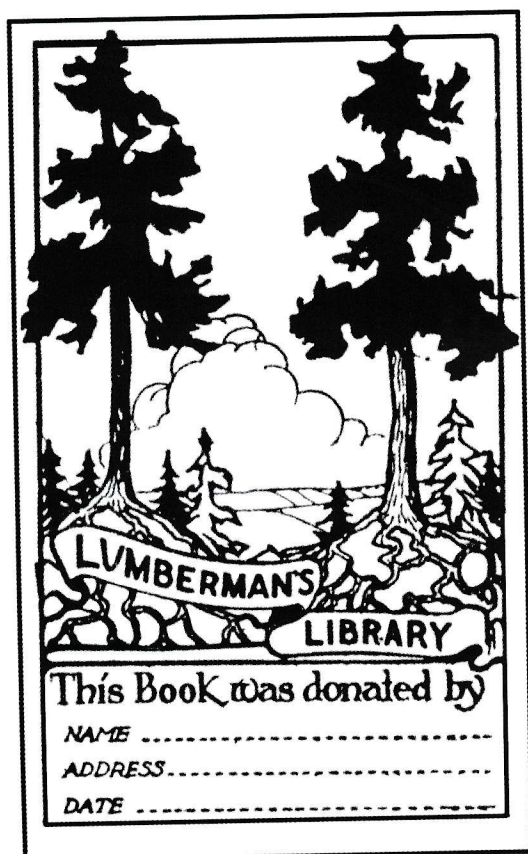
had changed to a gray interior and a white exterior. Another change was removal of the clearstory. However, the resulting flat roof caused problems by the 1970s (particularly with snow load in winter and standing water at other times), so the car was given a pitched roof. It also received new colors: white on the inside and rustic red on the outside.

Currently, the library car is used mainly for storage. The Fine Arts students from the University of Montana occasionally bunk in it when using the nearby pottery kilns. The exterior remains a rustic red, with the doors and window trim painted green. Yet beneath peel-





Side view of the ACM library car, c. 1926.  
(Missoula Public Library collection)



This bookplate, designed by a student from the University of Montana in Missoula, was pasted in books donated to the railcar library. (*The Timberman*)

ing paint near one door, some white is visible and underneath is a hint of the original gray. On the inside, the librarian's compartment survives in original condition. In the main room, the bookcases lining the side walls have been removed, although marks are visible through the white paint where the supports for the bookcases were once attached. The small bookcases still flank the window at the end of the car. A partition now divides the reading room. Although over eighty years old and having experienced renovations, the essence of the ACM library car endures.

Through the efforts of Missoula County librarian Ruth Worden and ACM Lumber Department General Manager Kenneth Ross, ACM loggers had an opportunity not afforded many forest workers. While there were always some woodsmen who loved reading, the library car also served to bring the world of books to many more individuals who otherwise may never have visited a library and who were unfamiliar with the world of knowledge contained in the volumes of printed pages. ❄