

THE STOREROOM

The Switch Lock and Key

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THE SWITCH LOCK & KEY

By Dale Jenkins

Introduction

From the mid-1800's, the railroad switch lock has been used to secure depots, maintenance of way buildings, track switches and freight cars. The manufacturers at the time were Myron Buck of St. Louis 1856, whom was joined by Alexander Handlan and reorganized as the Handlan Buck Manufacturing Co. in 1869, and the Adams & Westlake (Adlake Co.) Company of Chicago in 1857. In the beginning the locks and the key were made of brass, which could resist rust and severe weather. Between the 1830's and 1900's's the locks were designed as a heart shape. By the mid 1900's, the brass was becoming expensive to use and was changed over to a plainer, standard, steel production and the sliding keyhole cover was introduced to prevent debris accumulation. The key "bit" or "ward" was assigned to a specific railroad to fit a specific key opening.



Illinois Terminal Railroad

The Illinois Terminal Railroad Company was organized on July 8, 1895 as a steam road to operate between Alton to Edwardsville. The key “bit” was offset to the right at an angle. The front of the hasp was lettered **I T R R** and, on the back, “Handlan St. Louis”.



Illinois Terminal CO

On December 20, 1922, the company was reorganized as the Illinois Terminal Railroad. The switch lock “bit” would be mounted in a vertical position and would become the standard pattern for all future locks. The lock hasp would carry the initials “IT CO” and the key cover “HANDLAN BUCK MRG CO ST. LOUIS”.



Illinois Traction System

The Illinois Traction System was organized on April 30, 1904 and would go through a series of corporate mergers to create the one Illinois Traction System. The first locks were made of brass, but it appears by the patent date of March 20, 1920, the company had switched to a steel switch lock.





Express Car Key

The Illinois Traction Express Service would haul merchandise and U S mail in an express car, usually pulled by a passenger motor. Because of the high value of merchandise and stringent demands for security of U. S. Mail, a special padlock was assigned to these cars. The key itself had an offset “bit” and the key barrel was shorter and smaller in diameter of a regular switch key.



Illinois Power & Light

On May 25, 1923, The Illinois Power & Light Co. was created and would become the parent company of the Illinois Traction System. With this reorganization, the two companies would function as separate entities. With this, entrance into substations would require a mutual access and a standard IT lock, marked “IP&L” would be used.



Illinois Terminal Railroad

The railroad would transition to a new name on October 18, 1937, as the Illinois Terminal Railroad Company. The final lock would now bear the initials ITRR and the switch key would be a continuation in design of previous keys. After 1945 the switch key would be of a heavier construction and carry a serial number on the back side.



