

This Train Is Bound for Glory The Story of America's Chapel Cars

CHAPTER FOUR



Chapel Car *Emmanuel*, one of thirteen American chapel cars that followed the transcontinental railroad lines westward, brought the gospel and the sacraments to thousands of new towns along the tracks from 1890 to 1946. *Photo: American Baptist Historical Society, Mercer University, Atlanta*

Online Version

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In Memory of my husband and co-author
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CHAPTER 4

The Hoyt Brothers, J. D. Rockefeller, and the Chapel Car Syndicate



Reverend Wayland Hoyt [far left #1] and his railroad magnate brother Colgate Hoyt [3RD from right #8] traveled together on many trips. This trip in 1878 was to Yellowstone Park with the party of Indian fighter Nelson A. Miles. In 1890 the brothers on another train trip viewed churchless towns along the rails and from their discussion came the decision to build the first Baptist chapel car *Evangel*. [Montana Historical Society, Helena]

Early in 1890, as the Cathedral Car was being constructed in the shops at Pullman, Illinois, Dr. Wayland Hoyt, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Minneapolis, went on an extended journey through Wisconsin and Minnesota with his brother Colgate Hoyt, a railroad executive. This was not the first time that the two had journeyed together. In the summer of 1878 they had a memorable adventure traveling as a part of the Nelson Miles/Colgate Hoyt Expedition to Yellowstone Park and the Yellowstone Valley.

Colgate Hoyt, then a member of the business elite of Cleveland, Ohio, was married to a niece of General W. T. Sherman. Her sister was the wife of Colonel Nelson A. Miles, probably the army's most successful Indian fighter. By the summer of 1878, relative peace had come to the Yellowstone Valley, and Miles believed that the country was safe enough for civilian excursion parties. He in-

vited Colgate Hoyt to join him, and Colgate gathered a group of friends, including his brother Wayland, and headed west for a two-month excursion.¹

The journey of the brothers twelve years later was of a different nature. Their father, the Honorable James M. Hoyt, was an influential Cleveland lawyer and active Baptist layman, and he had reared his sons in the Euclid Avenue Baptist Church of Cleveland, the same church that played an important role in the childhood of John D. Rockefeller. Wayland Hoyt, graduate of Brown University and Rochester Divinity School, was serving his first year as pastor of the First Baptist Church after pastoring several prominent churches in Cincinnati and Philadelphia.

As the brothers traveled in Colgate's private car on the Duluth/St. Paul branch, Wayland was much disturbed by what he saw from his window—a sight he knew could be repeated a thousand times in these vast regions. A brilliant preacher, he later shared what he saw with the delegates of the Sixty-sixth anniversary of the American Baptist Publication Society that met at Chicago on May 28, 1890.

The other day I was riding in a railroad car. The train stopped at a station. I looked out of the car window, and I saw—well, I saw nothing unusual. You could parallel what I saw a thousand times in the vast regions of this new Northwest. I saw a hamlet of perhaps thirty or forty houses, log Houses, —it chanced to be a lumber region, but well built and comfortable. There were several stores; people walking about; men at their various handicrafts; men hanging about the station; little children playing in the streets.

Of course I saw it—the saloon, and it was not difficult to imagine the serpent slime of blight and wretchedness it would draw through that humble settlement. I did not notice the name of the town. It would be no cause for wonder if it already called itself a city and was staring into the future with the most unblinking and audacious eyes of enterprise; certain it would be a metropolis with a swiftness of growth which Jonah's gourd could not begin to match.

But looking out of that car window did I see a church? That sight did not greet me. Then there came upon me what the absence of a church must mean there—desecrated sabbaths, the hard humdrum of life, simply material with never a push toward higher things, the sad plight of the little children, on the spiritual side, I saw playing in the streets, and I could almost look into some one of those houses, and discern some poor pioneering saint, deprived of all religious privilege, struggling to keep the spiritual life throbbing amid such bitter, irreligious winter.

“Well, the train started, and I found myself asking myself the question,” Hoyt said. “What does that town need for its moral regeneration and uplifting and how can its needs be met?”²

This concern moved Wayland Hoyt to further action. He turned to his brother Colgate and said, “You railroad men ought to be doing more for this new country than you are doing.”

¹ James S. Brust and Lee H. Whittlesey, ‘Roughing It Up The Yellowstone To Wonderland’: The Nelson Miles/Colgate Hoyt Party in Yellowstone National Park, September 1878, *Montana, The Magazine of Western History*, spring, 1996, 56.

² Anniversary Meeting Report, American Baptist Publication Society, Chicago, 1890, 69.

Colgate Hoyt's Syndicate of Friends

Colgate Hoyt had moved from Cleveland to New York City in 1881 to be a partner in the banking house of James B. Colgate and Company. The elder Colgates and Hoyts had been longtime friends, and Colgate Hoyt's name symbolized that bond. Now a vice-president of the Northern Pacific Railroad, Colgate Hoyt's resume also listed vice president of the Duluth & Manitoba Railroad, a trustee of the Wisconsin Central Railroad, and chief officer of the Chicago and Northern Pacific Railway. He had just been elected vice-president of the Oregon and Transcontinental Company, and soon he would be vice-president of the new Missouri, Kansas & Texas Railroad.



Railroad magnate and Baptist philanthropist Colgate Hoyt and wife Lida aboard their boat.

[Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia]

When Colgate spoke on behalf of railroad executives, he spoke with authority. He replied, "We think we are doing considerable: we provide the way for them (people in the towns along the route) to ship in and ship out, to get in and to get out. What more can we do?"

Dr. Hoyt called his brother's attention again to the fact that in all these new towns there were from one to five saloons, and in scores of them, no places of worship. "Why not build a missionary car of some kind to give these lonely and destitute communities an opportunity of hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ?"

The manner was dropped then, Hoyt related, "but shortly afterward, when in New York, in my brother's office, I saw a pigeon hole in his desk labeled 'Chapel Car Syndicate.' Then I knew that something had come of it. Something always does come of syndicates."³

A few weeks later, Wayland Hoyt summoned Minnesota Sunday school missionary Boston Smith to see him at his church office. Wayland told Smith, "I have a letter from my brother; he is thinking favorably concerning the building of that missionary car. He has organized a chapel car syndicate in Wall Street. Now I want you to sketch what you think would be a good plan in which the missionary can both live and hold services."

Smith would later recall, "I hurried to an architect's office [Harry W. Jones of Minneapolis?] and in two hours I had the drawings of what I thought would be a good car in which to hold services. This was at once forwarded to the Chapel Car Syndicate consisting of John D. Rockefeller, Charles L. Colby, John R. Trevor, James B. Colgate, E. J. Barney, William Hills, and a few other level-headed business men." These "level-headed business men" were all Baptists with Wall Street

³ Boston W. Smith, *The Story of Our Chapel Cars* (Philadelphia: ABPS), 3 - 4.

connections who had personal stakes in making profit and insuring stability in rail communities. Three of them—Rockefeller, Colgate Hoyt, and Charles Colby—were members of the same wealthy New York City Fifth Avenue Baptist Church.⁴

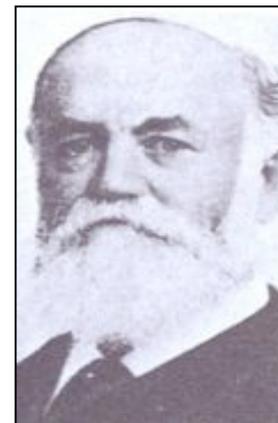


Family ties were strong among the members of the Syndicate. James B. Colgate's first wife was a Hoyt and his second wife was a Colby. [colby-sawyer.edu/archives]

The syndicate was a family affair for the Hoyts, Colgates, Colbys and Trevors, bound by years of Baptist associations, marriages, and friendships. Colgate's father, William Colgate, like his father before him, was a soap maker, the founder of the now Colgate-Palmolive-Peet Company. The elder Colgate was the prime benefactor of two major institutions—the American Bible Society and Colgate University, and son James B. Colgate continued those family traditions.

In 1852 James formed with J. B. Trevor a partnership known as James B. Colgate and Company, dealers in stocks, securities, and precious metals. James B. Colgate's substantial loans to the United States government strengthened the credit of the country, and for several years, he served as president of the New York Gold Exchange. Colgate's first wife was a Hoyt, and his second wife was a Colby, the daughter of the twenty-second governor of New Hampshire.

As for Charles L. Colby, his father was Gardner Colby, who had given large amounts to Baptist missions and Waterville College (Maine), which was later named Colby College in his honor. After he retired as a successful merchant, Gardner Colby became the president of the Wisconsin Central Railroad, exhibiting considerable executive ability and courage by undertaking the construction of 340 miles of railroad through primeval forests and unsettled territory. He developed extensive railroads throughout the northwestern part of the United States and was connected in prominent official capacities with one after another of the great companies operating in that region.



Wealthy Baptist layman financier Charles L. Colby, a member of the Chapel Car Syndicate, was also instrumental in the Everett Land Company. [Norman T. Taylor] Collection]

Contributing to the chapel car project was one of the last charitable gestures of J. B. Trevor, a former business partner of James B. Colgate. Trevor and James Colgate were fiscal agents of the U. S. government during the attempt of railroad financiers Jay Gould and James Fisk to corner the gold market in 1869.

⁴ BSP, ABHS, MUA.

On Monday night, December 22, 1890, a few weeks after his gift of \$500 was made to the syndicate, Trevor died unexpectedly at his winter residence in New York. A former president of the American Baptist Home Mission Society, he was known for his generous gifts to the Divinity School at Rochester, New York (now Colgate-Rochester/Bexley Hall/Crozer Theological Seminary) and his interest in and support of Baptist missions.

William Hills' connection to the rest of the syndicate is less clear. He did not seem to be a part of the inner circle of friends. Hills, not only a donor to the first Baptist chapel car, would also pay for the costs of chapel car 3, *Glad Tidings*, in honor of his wife. He also guaranteed the addition of chapel car 4, *Good Will*. A member of the Mt. Morris Baptist Church in New York, he was the founder of the Hills Brothers Company.

The chapel car was not the only project of this select group of wealthy Baptist laymen. At least four of them—Colgate Hoyt, James Colgate, Charles Colby, and John D. Rockefeller—had combined their treasuries and talents in several other endeavors of much greater investment risk than the chapel car. At the same time these men were giving toward the building of the first Baptist car, *Evangel*, several of them were also deeply involved in the development and the resulting downfall of the city of Everett, Washington.

In November 1890, according to Bishop William David Walker, three Baptists—likely Boston Smith and the two Hoyts, came to see *The Church of the Advent: The Cathedral Car of North Dakota*, the first American chapel car, when it was on exhibit in Minneapolis. At the time of the Baptists' visit to Bishop Walker's chapel car, the first Baptist car, which Barney & Smith inked on their blueprint nameplates as "The Northern Pacific Gospel Car," was already in construction in the Dayton shops.⁵

At the 1891 publication society meeting in Cincinnati, the board reported "the very generous and noble gift of a chapel car for this Society."

Whereas, Messrs Colgate Hoyt, John D. Rockefeller, James B. Colgate, John B. Trevor, Charles L. Colby, William Hills, and E. J. Barney have generously ordered and paid for the construction and complete equipment of a chapel car, for the use and purposes of the American Baptist Publication Society in its colporteur Sunday school and Bible work: therefore, Resolved, That this Board of managers hereby accepts for the work of this society, the said chapel car as the generous gift of the brethren above named, and that this society does hereby agree to use the said car only for the purposes for which it was constructed and donated, to keep said car in proper repair, and to provide for this car a missionary or colporteur and necessary assistance, to carry on the work of this society as designed and practicable, and all this free from any expense whatsoever to the donors of the said chapel car.⁶

⁵ "Cathedral on Wheels," *The Illustrated American*, March 21, 1891, 222.

⁶ Anniversary Report of the American Baptist Publication Society, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1891, 65.

On the motion of L. E. Kline, of Missouri, a vote of thanks with cheers was unanimously and most heartily given to the donors, although some in the audience probably flinched at the mention of John D. Rockefeller.

The Standard Oil Company practices of John D. Rockefeller led many Americans, including Baptists who benefited greatly from his gifts, to question his motives and methods. In 1879 a Pennsylvania grand jury indicted Rockefeller for criminal conspiracy to violate the laws of trade, especially those that forbade a common carrier to discriminate against some shippers in favor of others.

That case never came to trial, but Rockefeller continued to be tried in the court of public opinion. In the decade to come, he would give millions to charity, and for each gift, the charge of “tainted money” would be flung. Seldom was “tainted money” taunted by Baptists. Rockefeller was hailed by most as “a leader and a giver who God has provided,” as a “God-fearing man of colossal fortune” whom “God had ready” and “society raised up.”⁷



John D. Rockefeller gave millions to Baptist causes, including a gift to build Chapel Car *Evangel*. Later he would dissociate himself from the chapel car ministry. [Rockefeller Archives Center, Tarrytown, NY]

Although many questioned the principles of Rockefeller, that he was a devout Baptist, there was no question. As a boy, inspired by his mother’s devotion, he joined the Cleveland Erie Street Baptist Church, which became the Euclid Avenue Baptist Church, and seldom missed services. In his adult years, he served as Sunday school superintendent at both the Cleveland church and the Fifth Avenue Baptist Church in New York.

In June 1890, Colgate Hoyt asked Rockefeller to be a part of the chapel car investment. Hoyt had long been an adviser and associate to Rockefeller, a fellow trustee of the New York Fifth Avenue Baptist Church. In response to his friend’s request, Rockefeller gave one thousand dollars for the building of the first Baptist chapel car. According to a memo headed “Standard Oil Company’s Private Telegraph Line,” dated NY 6/26, 1890, to Mr. JDR, supposedly from Colgate Hoyt, “The gospel car subscription syndicate is closed and I have subscribed for you one thousand dollars on time. The amount is made up as follows—Colgate Hoyt 500, Charles Colby 500, John Trevor 500, James Colgate 500, Rockefeller 1000, Total \$3000.”⁸

⁷ William H. Allen, *Rockefeller: Giant, Dwarf, Symbol* (New York: Institute for Public Service, 1930), 353.

⁸ Early Chapel Car correspondence, Rockefeller 7 Others, Box 22, Samuelson Collection, Colporter files, ABHSA, MUA.

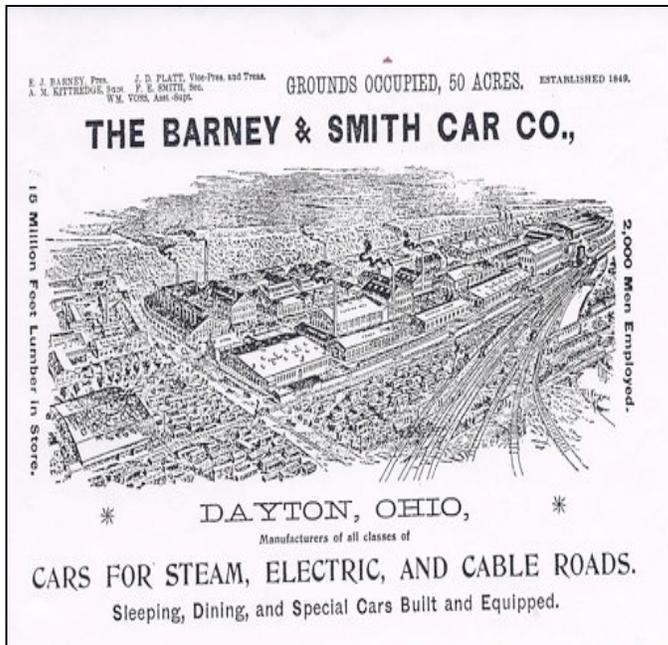
Rockefeller Would Drop Support Of Chapel Cars

A reading of later letters suggests that the giving was hardly enthusiastic. To be fair, it was not Rockefeller's choice that his name be used so liberally by the American Baptist Publication Society in connection with the chapel cars. Many times he was advertised as being the leader of the project. In actuality the Hoyts were the heart of the chapel car project. To Rockefeller, the thousand dollars he gave toward the building of *Evangel* was probably just a gesture of support for this current project of Colgate Hoyt.

When Rockefeller was asked in 1892 to contribute toward the building of a second chapel car by chapel car missionary E. G. Wheeler, he refused. Timing might have had something to do with the refusal. On March 2, 1892, the Supreme Court of Ohio decided that the Standard Oil Trust agreement was void, not only because the Standard Oil Company of Ohio was a party to the agreement, but also because the agreement itself was in restraint of trade and amounted to the creation of an unlawful monopoly.

On June 15, 1892, Rockefeller himself responded to Wheeler's request, "Your letter of the 9th is received: but I have so many other undertakings on hand, I cannot make any contributions for the proposed second Chapel Car."⁹

Even if the times and circumstances had been more auspicious, and Gates less controlling, it is doubtful that Rockefeller would have given more money to the chapel cars. One of his close friends and a mentor to Gates was American Baptist Home Mission Society and Baptist Education Society official Henry L. Morehouse, for whom Morehouse College would be named.



Morehouse had convinced Rockefeller, and Gates, that while the chapel car work is "doubtless doing good it is far more expensive in proportion to the results than the work of a practically similar nature done by the Home Mission Society; furthermore, that the Home Mission Society is amply able and thoroughly equipped to do all of this work; moreover it was the first in the field, and to have two societies competing for the work is unwise, expensive and confusing to the public. We agree in ad-

⁹ Correspondence between John D. Rockefeller and the Reverend E. G. Wheeler, dated June 15, 1892, Early chapel car correspondence, Rockefeller & Others, Box 22, Samuelson Collection, Colporter files, ABHS, MUA.

vising that you should not respond to this appeal.”¹⁰

In spite of pleas from Boston Smith and other chapel car missionaries continuing into the late summer of 1900, Rockefeller’s mind was closed to the subject of the chapel cars.

E. J. Barney and His Car Company

The last member of the syndicate, E. J. Barney, did not seem to be in the category of the exclusive Fifth Avenue Baptist friends, although he no doubt knew Charles Colby and Colgate Hoyt well.

Barney was a trustee of the First Baptist Church of Dayton, Ohio, pastored by Dr. Francis Colby; and Barney was connected to the railroad industry as a builder and as a trustee of the Wisconsin Central Railroad. He was head of the Barney & Smith Manufacturing Company, which was founded in 1849 by his father Eliam. It became Dayton’s most important company in the years following the Civil War.

A prospectus issued to potential buyers as the company went public in 1892 stated that the Barney Smith Car Company, as it was now to be called, was the second largest of its kind in the United States. Its customers recognized its equipment as of the highest grade, among who were included nearly all of the principal railroad companies in the country.

Many of the Barney workers were immigrants, brought in from the Black Forest region of Germany for their skill in woodcarving and fine cabinet work. Barney & Smith was probably ahead of other car builders in respect to its paternal outlook for the employees. They would survive the 1893 depression better than did Pullman employees, who lived in company houses and had to pay rent to Pullman although they were laid off. Much of the concern for the welfare of employees was due to the Barney family’s religious beliefs, which had passed down from father to sons.¹¹



Eugene Judson Barney

“Uncle Boston’s” First View Of *Evangel*

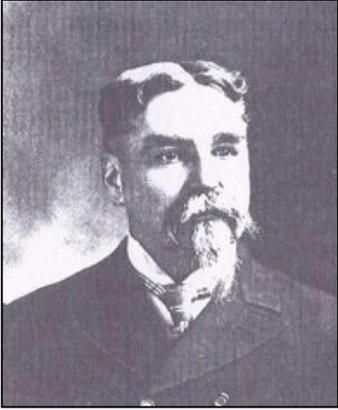
In the summer of 1890, Smith shared his concept for the design of the first Baptist car with the syndicate. The Barney and Smith Car Company agreed to build the car at cost for around four thousand dollars. Uncle Boston described his first visit to the car, with its catalpa-wood exterior and oak interior, at the sprawling, 130-acre Barney & Smith shop along the banks of the Mad River.

The following spring I was summoned to Dayton, Ohio. I was in-

¹⁰ Correspondence between John D. Rockefeller and John D. Rockefeller Jr., dated September 11, 1900, letterhead address 26 Broadway, New York, Early chapel car correspondence, Rockefeller & Others, Box 22, Samuelson Collection, Colporter files, ABHS. MUA.

¹¹ Scott D. Trostel, *The Barney & Smith Car Company: Car Builders* (Fletcher, Ohio:Cam-Tech Publishing, 1993), 49.

structed to call at the shops of the Barney and Smith Car Company. Mr. Eugene Barney, the president, received me most kindly, and at once invited me to accompany him to the yards of the great plant. There, upon one of the tracks, stood an elegant car, resembling a Pullman sleeper. On the side of the car I read at the top, "Chapel Car," and just below the



The visionary Minnesota Baptist Missionary Boston Smith, who first urged the wealthy Baptist laymen to build a chapel car that could bring the gospel to the many new towns along the rails, was thrilled to see his vision appear in the form of Chapel Car *Evangel* at the Barney & Smith shops in Dayton, Ohio. [American Baptist Publication Society, Mercer University, Atlanta]

windows the number "1," and the name, "Evangel." As I stood looking at the "Evangel" after the inspection, I could but think how a dream of mine a dozen years before had been realized.¹²

As Smith, overwhelmed with the beauty of the car he had dreamed of and hoped for so many years, left the shops after viewing *Evangel*, he could only say, "Surely God's hand is in this." In a letter to Colgate Hoyt, the grateful missionary wrote:

Dear Sir & Bro:

After more than two months of work in "The CHAPEL CAR," I feel constrained to write and tell you that my expectations have been more than realized. The Car meets a want that has long been felt. Already I see enough work in sight to keep the Car in constant use for the next twelve months and invitations from the smaller railroad towns are pouring in.

Mr. Mellen has indeed made my work on the Northern Pacific of the most pleasant character. His letter about gives me the Northern Pacific System. It could not be arranged more pleasantly.

I have made the trip from Chicago to Livingston, Montana. The Car has been crowded and scores of souls have been saved. On my last trip no less than fifty I think decided for Christ and confessed Him with their mouths. I sincerely trust the donors of "THE CHAPEL CAR" may never regret their investment.

Yours very sincerely, BOSTON W. SMITH

¹² Smith, *The Story of Our Chapel Car Work*, 5.