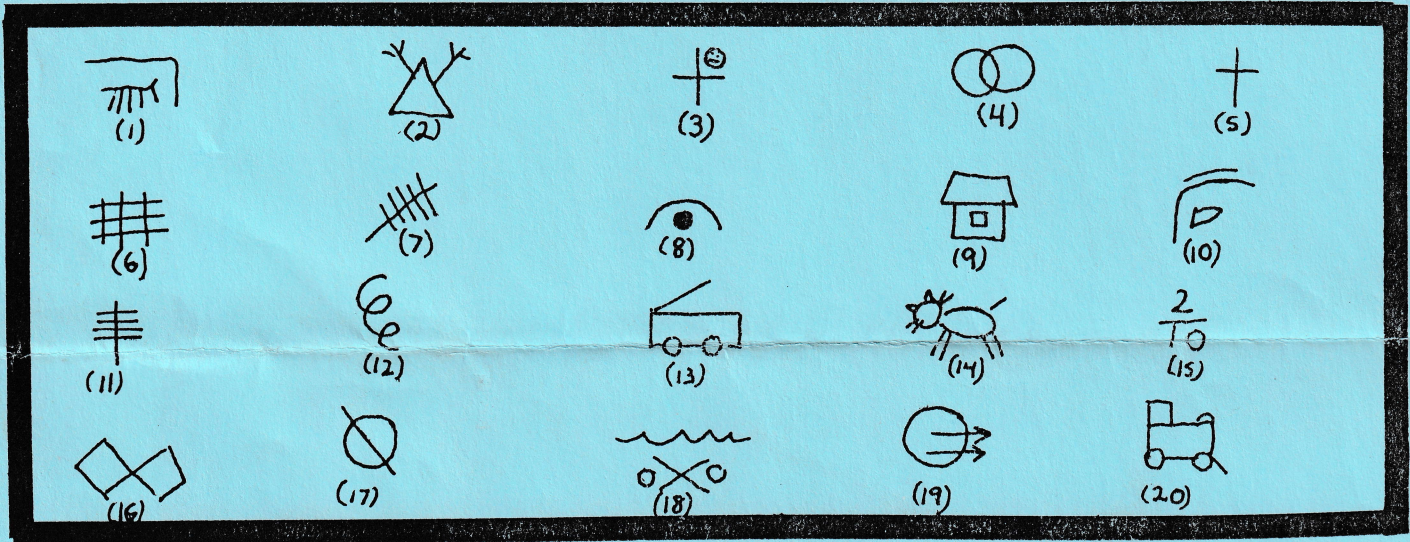


# Steamtown

National Historic Site  
Scranton, Pennsylvania



## HOBOS



HOBO SIGNS (See below for meanings)

One of the effects of the Civil War was the creation of the Hobo. Thousands of men who had left their homes for the battlefield, had become restless after four years of war and excitement. They became drifters and used railroads as their primary means of transportation, as long as they could ride for free, hanging onto or riding in or on any piece of the train.

The busiest hobo junction in the United States was Mattoon, Illinois where the North - South and East - West tracks of the Illinois Central railroad crossed. Both main lines were double-tracked to handle the great volume of traffic. The hoboes were very inventive as to where they would hide while hitching a ride. Some rode on the rods used to support the cars, they road in battery boxes under passenger coaches, freight cars etc.. The hoboes had a unique method of calculating the odds of being arrested by an agent of the railroads police department. For example, on the Illinois Central Railroad, between Chicago and Cairo Illinois the odds were 254 to 1 in favor of the hobo. The calculation: Mileage between the two cities, (363) multiplied by the number of tracks (2), that product multiplied by the average number of runs (35). Divide the product by the average number of miles guarded by one agent of the railroad police department (100). The result is the 254 to 1.

Hoboes are often called bums or tramps, but although all three are migrants, they are not the same. As quoted by S. H. Holbrook in "The Story of American Railroads", Ben L. Reitman, who hoboed a good deal himself, remarked that a hobo works and wanders, a tramp dreams and wanders and a bum drinks and wanders.

The hoboes also had a unique method of communication through the use of chalk drawn figures. These figures appeared at various locations, where they ate and slept, (called a hobo jungle), on a

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The hoboos also had a unique method of communication through the use of chalk drawn figures. These figures appeared at various locations, where they ate and slept, (called a hobo jungle), on a sidewalk, a picket fence etc. and were of extreme importance to the hobo that came through after the one who drew the figure. Some of the signs directed him to a hot meal while another warned him to leave town fast.

The meaning of the signs illustrated above:

- |                                  |                                 |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1) Beware of dog                 | 11) Policmens house             |
| 2) Man with gun                  | 12) Judge lives here            |
| 3) Doctor                        | 13) Trolley stop                |
| 4) Police                        | 14) Kind lady                   |
| 5) Religious talk gets free meal | 15) Thieves about               |
| 6) Jail                          | 16) Keep quiet                  |
| 7) You'll get cursed out         | 17) Good road to follow         |
| 8) Authorities on alert          | 18) Fresh water safe camps      |
| 9) Well guarded house            | 19) Hit the road quick          |
| 10) You can sleep in loft        | 20) Good place to catch a train |