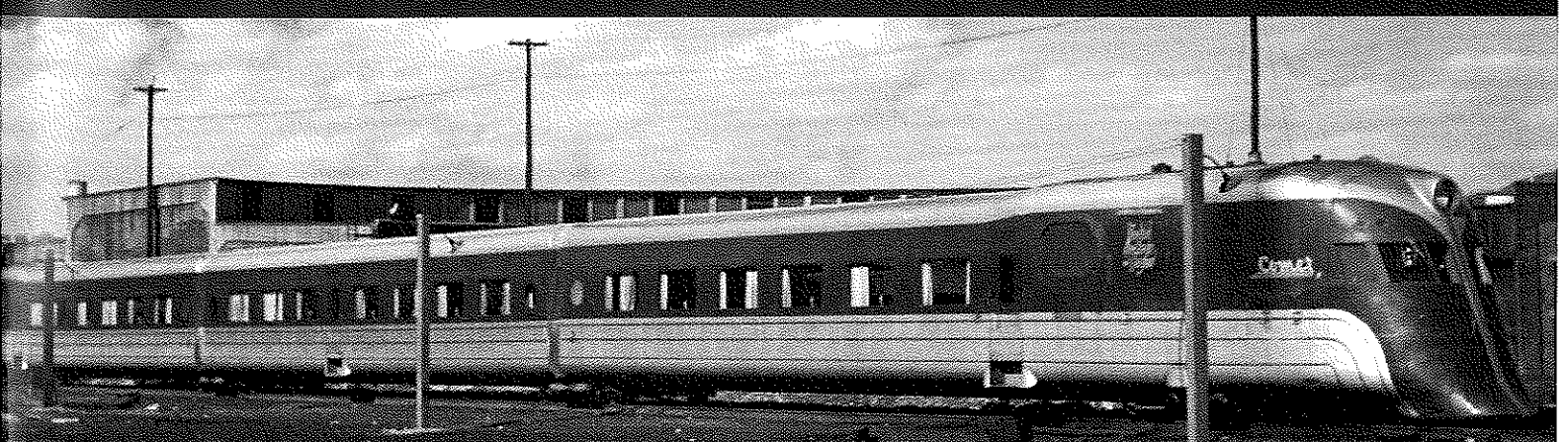


*The New York
New Haven
and Hartford
RAILROAD*

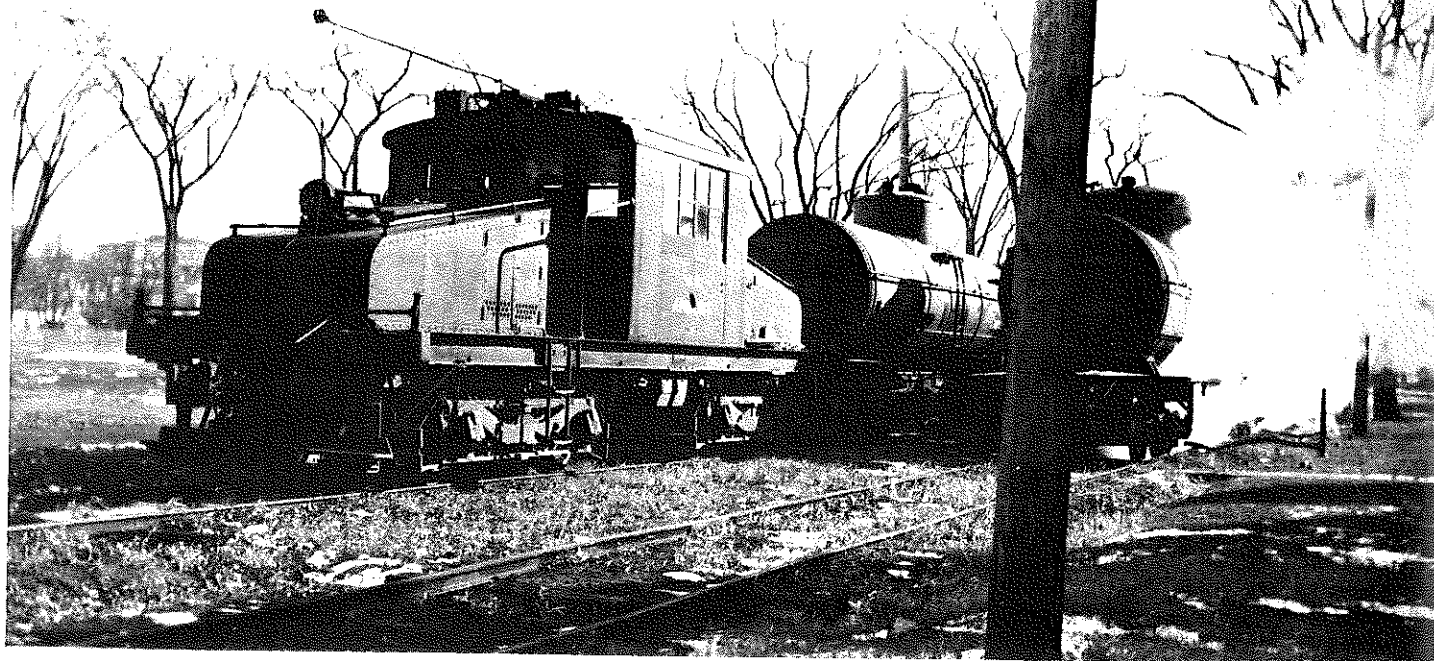
Shoreline



"THE COMET"...



TROLLEY STOP



Armory locomotive at Hill Street oil spur, August 1937. Built by GE in July 1918 as construction number 6920, she was rated at 50 tons. In 1941 she was purchased by Montreal & Southern Counties and numbered 325. In 1951 she was transferred to another Canadian National subsidiary, Oshawa Railway, who retained the number 325. She was scrapped in 1961 by Oshawa Railway. H.L. Goldsmith Photo

THE UNITED STATES ARMORY RAILROAD IN SPRINGFIELD

BY DONALD E. SHAW

The following account of the Springfield Armory trolley freight operation is contributed by Victor Newton, of Longmeadow, Mass. The original was authored by the late Donald E. Shaw in 1946, and few copies were produced for his close friends. It was written prior to the Xerox era, and was typewritten on onion skin paper with carbon between the sheets, limiting the number of copies to the manual impact of Mr. Shaw's Royal. We are grateful to Vic Newton for making this story available to us — a New Haven related freight operation that few railfans saw in daylight.

C.A. Brown

U.S. ARMORY RAILROAD

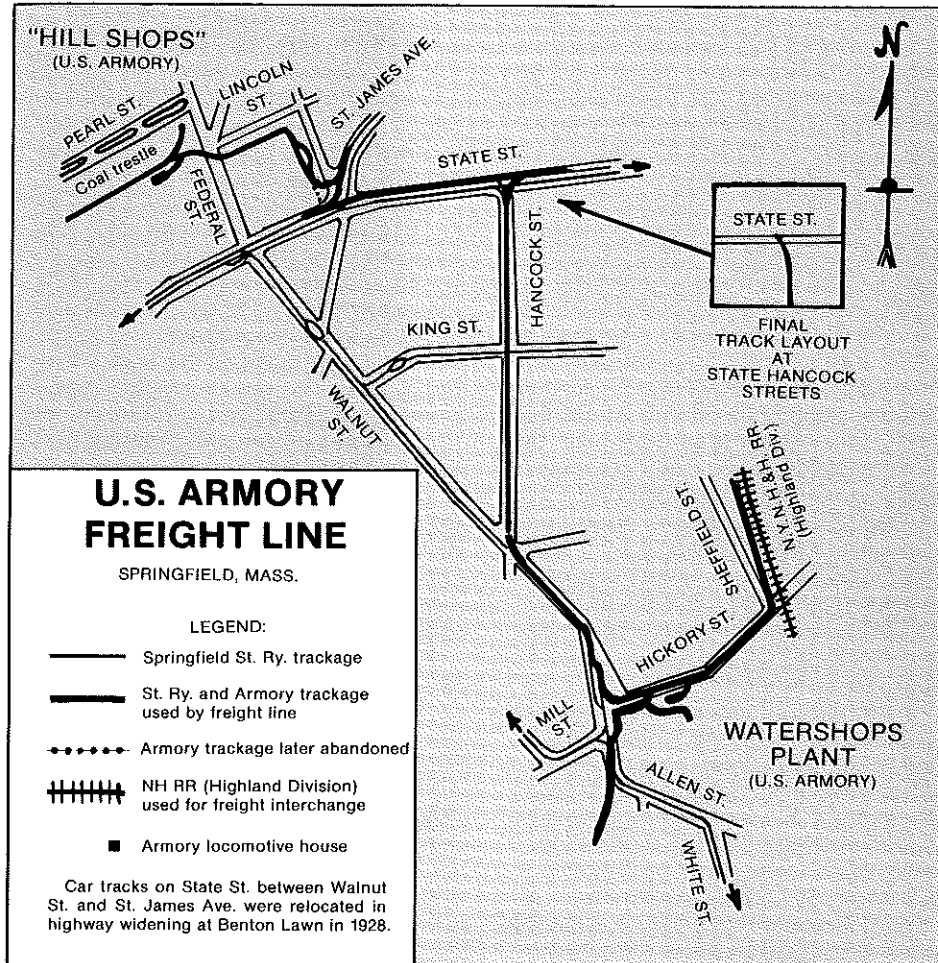
Walnut Street is a historic thoroughfare. Its route was first traced by the wheelbarrows trundled by day laborers, between the so-called "Hill plant" and the "Watershops" of the United States Armory. In more recent years,

horsedrawn teams and drays marked out the road which is now traversed by heavy automobile traffic over a smooth and well paved surface. Walnut Street has also, in its day, carried a busy freight railway line, operated in conjunction with the local street railway system.

This electric "railroad," serving the two U.S. Armory plants here, has been abandoned for the past 7 years, during which time practically all traces of its existence have been removed;¹ yet there are many long-time Springfield residents who will remember the Armory's trim, business-like electric locomotive and the strings of railroad freight cars which it used to haul over the streets between the New Haven RR siding at Hickory Street and the Watershops and "Hill" plants. Folks who had occasion to be abroad in the wee small hours often used to encounter these Armory-bound trains rumbling slowly down State Street over the trolley tracks, but night-riding motorists from

out of town often rubbed their eyes in amazement, as they would come upon red-lanterned freight cars in the middle of a city street.

It has been said that it was the urgent transportation need of the Springfield Armory that gave the initial impetus to the trolley express business hereabouts, a little over 35 years ago.² It was at that time that tracks were built into the plant yards at both the Hill and Watershops, and work cars of the Springfield Street Railway, equipped with automatic couplers and other standard MCB equipment, were used to haul railroad freight cars over the street railway's lines and into the government's property. A siding connection was made at Hickory Street with the Highland Division of the New Haven Railroad, with the "trains" routed down Hickory Street to the Watershops, thence via Walnut, Hancock and State Streets to the Hill plant — about a 2-mile trip each way. For several years, around the time of World



War I, the Feeding Hills - Hancock Street trolley line also used the Hancock and Hickory Street trackage, while State Street itself was shared with a half-dozen regular car lines. However, the freight movements on the Armory line were usually made late at night, after regular trolley service had ended, and, as one old timer puts it, "About the only thing we had to watch out for was the all-night State Street car, and an occasional motorist who just couldn't make himself believe that railroad freight cars could be traveling up State Street — and on the 'wrong' track at that!"

In addition to the trackage in the street, which was owned by the street railway, about a mile or so of sidings were government-owned. At the Watershops, a spur led into the property from Hickory Street, and ran the length of a long shed which on occasion doubled for a coal pocket and a shelter for the electric locomotive. As a coal pocket, it had a capacity for 20 carloads of coal, which was dumped

Before the purchase of the GE steeple cab locomotive by the Armory, box motors such as #0416 served as locomotives. West Springfield, October 1938. C. A. Brown Photo.

down a chute to the main yard, at a lower level. This shed was later used as an unloading point for steel and other heavy materials, as was the long open siding further down in the plant yard.

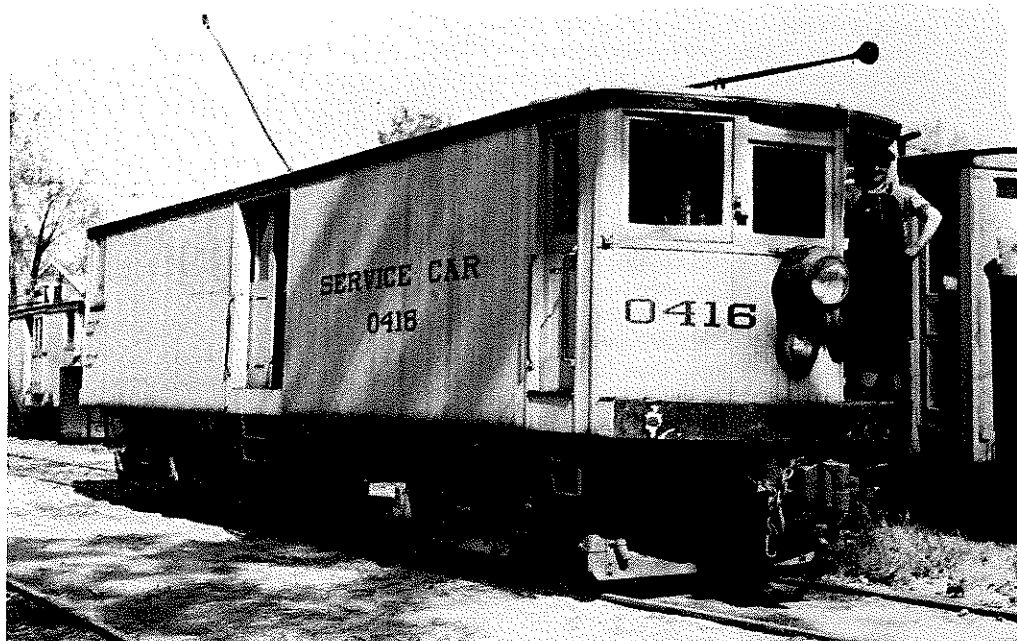
Coming up to the Hill shops, freight cars were sometimes left on Hancock Street, protected by red lanterns, while the motor unit went back to the Watershops to pick up more cars. Occasionally these standing cars were hit by unwary motorists, and on at least one

occasion, a moving train was struck by an automobile on State Street. Needless to say, the motorist came out a poor second in the encounter, despite the fact that the train was being operated at slow speed.

In 1914, a new branch-off was built from Hancock Street easterly into State, to facilitate the movement of the heavy freight cars, by the use of a longer-radius curve. During the first World War, it was necessary to operate the line day and night, and it was not uncommon to see a long train of box-cars stretching up State Street from Hancock Street toward Winchester Square, while this switching move was taking place. The turn out of Hancock Street had to be made very slowly, due to the danger of derailment because of the heavy freight cars with their deep wheel-flanges.

Returning from the Hill plant to the Watershops, the Armory "train" had to proceed easterly up State Street against the usual current of traffic, over what was normally the westbound trolley track. This involved little difficulty late at night, after regular service was over; however, when freight movements were made during the day — as was often necessary during World War I — a member of the crew would be stationed at Winchester Square to flag westbound trolleys on half a dozen busy lines until the freight could turn into Hancock Street and "into clear."

The Armory train was normally operated with a crew of three, consisting of a motorman (who was, in the early days, an employee of the street railway) in charge of the two "ground men," who were employed by the Armory, and took care of switching and flagging duties. After the government purchased its own locomotive, the regularly assigned motorman was made a full-time Armory employee also.



STEEPLE CAB PURCHASED

About 1917 or 1918, a siding was put in at the power plant at the Hill shops. Previously, the single track had run right over the coal crusher, where cars were unloaded and coal carried by an elevator to the coal pocket nearby.

As time went on, some difficulties arose in connection with the rates charged by the street railway for the use of its equipment and personnel. The company considered itself at a disadvantage in furnishing both motive power and the operator, who was paid at a bonus rate for all work performed after midnight, which was when most of the movements were made over the line. Hearings were held by the I.C.C. at the Hotel Kimball in 1918, as a result of which the government purchased a 50-ton 600 H.P. General Electric steeple-cab electric locomotive to be used exclusively in this service. Upon its delivery, a meter was installed in the cab, and the street railway company was henceforth paid only for power consumption and mileage operated over its tracks. The Armory also was to provide all personnel in the crew, including the motorman.

Purchased in 1918, this locomotive gave satisfactory service until the line was abandoned, some 21 years later. Although said to have been rated to haul 31 freight cars up a 1% grade, the locomotive's "train" was, according to operating practice on this line, generally held to a maximum of 10 or 11 cars, which was about all the Hickory Street siding would hold at one time. It was customary to haul not more than two cars at a time up the Walnut Street hill from the Watershops — not only because of the steepness of the grade — it averaged over 5% — but also because of the practically-continuous reverse curve, there being hardly a straight foot of rail on the hill.

Around 1918, too, a siding was built out onto a new wooden trestle, over a deep gully about where Building #20 was erected in the west grounds, a few years ago. Here, reserve stocks of coal for the power plant were stored during those war days. A shed to house the electric locomotive was also built down on the west grounds. A long siding extended westward along the ridge, by the present enclosed rifle range. W.V. Pickett, who operated the Armory's locomotive during most of the time it was in use here, recalls bringing down 9 cars of gun stocks a day to this siding, in the busy times of a quarter century ago. Due to insufficient flexibility of standard freight car draft-gear, it was difficult to bring more than one car at a time over the reverse curve across Federal Street, leading to

the west grounds, without lifting the leading truck of following cars right off the rails. However, the locomotive was equipped with a coupler with a wider swing, making it possible to pull one car over without trouble. This part of the line was not much used in later years, and had been abandoned west of the power plant for some time, when the rails were taken out in 1940.

Going back again to the line's earlier days, a new branch-off was built in 1920, leading into the grounds of the Hill shops from a point in St. James Avenue near State Street. About this time, too, a spur was built near the Watershops, into government property just south of Mill River, near the foot of Oakland Street. Here dies, drop forgings, etc. were stored in a long shed. This spur was never extensively used, however, although the track itself was not removed until several years ago.

CHANGES

In the early summer of 1928, highway improvements and track changes were made in State Street, between Walnut Street and St. James Avenue, involving the cutting down of Benton Lawn and widening of State Street. In connection with this change, the Armory branch-off from St. James Avenue was reversed in its direction. The resulting track layout at this point remained unchanged for the balance of the time that the service was operated.

Another change was effected at about the same time, further up State Street. With Hancock Street track being, by that time, used only for north-bound trolley cars on the Walnut Street line, the old special-work at State and Hancock Streets, including the easy curve especially built for the movement of freight cars in 1914, was removed and a single long-radius curve westward into State Street was installed at this point. This remained in use until November 1939, when buses replaced the Walnut Street car line.³ Within a month or so, the overhead wires were taken down by street rail-

way crews. However, the freight line had seen little use in ten years, and the final abandonment of the Armory's railroad, although forced by the street railway's shift from trolleys to buses, was actually of little official significance.

Towards the end — and while it was in use only on occasional trips between the New Haven's freight siding and the Watershops only — the locomotive was kept, when not in use, standing in the open, just inside the Walnut Street gate at the latter location. Here it remained for some months, isolated from the still-functioning lines of the street railway system, but still in serviceable condition. Early in 1940 it was sold to G.T. Abel & Co., salvage dealers, who also acquired a number of Springfield street cars, the street railway having by this time decided to abandon all trolley service by midsummer.

It was now necessary to get the idle locomotive off the Watershops property. Thus it was on the night of May 16-17, 1940, just a month before the last Springfield trolley cars came off the streets, the Armory locomotive was taken in tow by one of M.J. Manning's double-winch trucks, and slowly hauled up over the "dead" rails of Walnut and Hancock Streets to State Street. The night was wet and rainy, and some difficulty was experienced in getting the heavy locomotive up Walnut Street hill. At State and Hancock Streets, the towing job was over, since it was possible to operate the locomotive from this point under its own power, the State Street trolley lines still being in use at the time. Under the guiding hand of motorman Pickett, who had handled the controller for so many years, it rumbled slowly down State Street hill and, for the first and last time of its career, turned into Main Street and, its zebra striping glistening

Armory locomotive at the Hooker Street yard of the Springfield Street Railway in 1940, after its purchase by GT Abel & Co. Vic Newton Collection.



in the rain,⁴ journeyed north on Main as far as the Hooker Street yard of the street railway, where it arrived about 5 a.m. Here, it was put into open storage at the back end of the yard, to await possible sale. The Abel Company had purchased the locomotive as an investment, rather than just for its scrap value, and, in a rising equipment market, finally effected its sale. After lying at Hooker Street for about 6 months, it was purchased by the Montreal & Southern Counties Railway (a subsidiary of the Canadian National), and was delivered to destination at St. Lambert, Quebec on the 24th of January, 1941. Here, it was given the number "325" — the first number it had ever had — was equipped with a new steel pilot, railings at each end of the cab, new Golden Glow headlights, Westinghouse pneumatic horns and electric classification lamps.

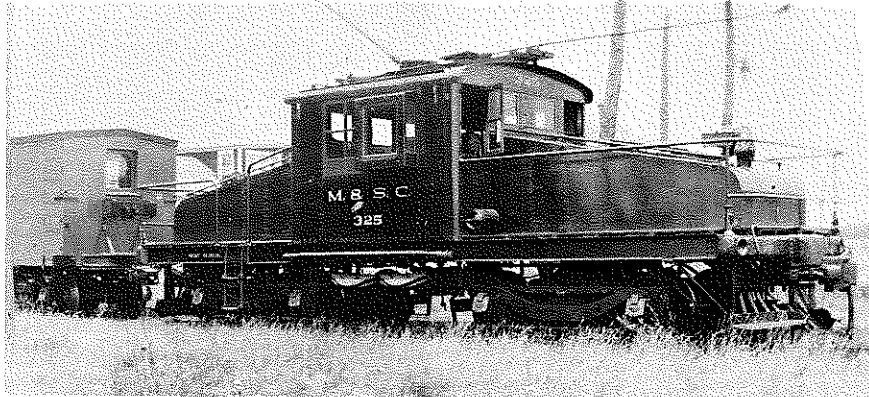
As further changes, to transform it from a switcher to a "main-line" locomotive, the motors were lined up for 3-speed operation, 2 of them permanently wired in series. It was necessary to add 8 grouping switches or contactors, rebuild the overload relay, and take care of other incidental changes to permit the motors to operate in parallel. The two compressors were not considered sufficient to provide enough air for long trains, so a third and larger compressor was added, being placed in the cab. The 3" wheel treads were replaced by standard 4" type wheels.

Put into service between M&SC Jc. and Granby, Quebec, with a rated hauling capacity of 350-850 tons, according to grades, it was reported in 1945 as having been in almost continuous use since delivery.

Thus the locomotive that did not have a railway to run on by the time World War II came along — to give the Springfield Armory its second wartime boom in a little less than a quarter-century — was still able to play an important part in the Allied war effort elsewhere.

LITTLE LEFT TODAY

Of the old Armory freight line, for which this locomotive was built, there is little left to be seen today. Almost all of the rail inside the plant grounds, as well as in the city's streets, was removed between 1939 and 1944. New buildings erected since the start of World War II now cover most of the area inside the Hill plant which was formerly traversed by the railway. However, the big iron gate is still in the high fencing along the west side of Federal Street, where the track used to enter the west grounds — and the Federal Street paving shows clearly where the rail used to reverse-curve



diagonally across the street from the east grounds at this point. In the Magazine Street sidewalk, a short piece of rail, apparently forgotten during track removal operations in that section in the summer of 1943, still extends from the curb toward the Armory fence — being a part of the old lead-in from St. James Avenue into the Hill plant property.

Mr. Wilford V. Pickett, who ran the locomotive practically all the time it was in use here, is now night foreman for the Springfield Street Railway at its Bond Street garage (formerly the trolley express terminal). Mr. Pickett went to work for the street railway in September 1916, later working for the Armory (from the summer of 1918 until 1921). After being furloughed from the Armory he went back to work for the street railway, but continued to work nights for the Armory on call, when there was freight work to be done. Starting work around midnight, these irregular tours of duty were usually good for four hours' work.

Others who saw service on the Armory's freight line at one time or another include Louis Bishop, now deceased; Charles Wheeler, who worked in the Armory garage and ran the locomotive for a while after Mr. Pickett was furloughed from government employ in 1921; George Mongeau; and George Woods, who — as yard foreman at the Watershops — ran the locomotive within the plant yard on occasion.

Among street railway men who operated that company's equipment in Armory service before the government bought their own locomotive were Louis Harper, Edward J. Gallagher, John Dineen (now a bus operator for the street railway), the late "Jack" O'Brien (who became a well known inspector for the street railway), D.J. McCann and Dan Smith, now both deceased.

For data used in the compilation of the above record, I wish to thank Mr. M.W. Cruze, chief clerk at the Hill plant of the Springfield Armory; Edward M. Cushion and W.V. Pickett of the Springfield Street Railway; Robert E. Cosgrove, former traffic manager of

For service in the harsher winter of Quebec, the Montreal & Southern Counties added "window boxes." To comply with Canadian regulations, full handrails were also applied to the ex-Armory locomotive. H.L. Goldsmith Collection.

the Springfield Street Railway, and more recently United States Commissioner of Labor serving this area; Malcolm Ross and personnel of the Springfield Department of Streets and Engineering; Arthur Ellis of Montpelier, Vermont; and the superintendent of the Montreal & Southern Counties Railway, at St. Lambert, Quebec, Canada.

I have also drawn upon my own notes and observations over a period of years; contemporary news items and the files of the Massachusetts Railroad Commissioners' Reports for various years.

—Donald E. Shaw
94 Federal Street
Springfield, Mass.
August 14, 1946

¹The only remaining rail of the old Armory line left in the streets in 1946, is a short piece in the sidewalk on Magazine Street, where the line used to enter the Hill shops.

²It was not until 1912 that the trolley express business became an operation of some magnitude in western Massachusetts, to continue to do so for some 15 years thereafter.

³When the power plant at the Hill shops was converted from coal to oil about 1930, traffic over the Armory railroad took a great slump. Since that time, tankcars of fuel oil comprised about all the freight carried over the line to the Hill plant. Four tankcars — 40,000 gallons of oil — usually came in at one time and were handled from the Hickory Street siding to the Watershops, with part of the shipment going on to the Hill shop. Last actual use of the line to the latter point was about 1937, although a limited service between the railroad siding and the Watershops was maintained for a year or two longer.

Fuel oil for both plants is now delivered by highway tank trucks.

⁴Eye-catching yellow stripes had been painted across the ends and along the lower part of the cab towards the last, to increase visibility at night.