

THE DISPATCH

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Seashore Trolley Museum, Kennebunkport, Maine

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The "Berkshire Hills" Arrives at Seashore

by John L. Trowill

On March 13, the former Berkshire Street Railway parlor car *Berkshire Hills* made the longest (and probably fastest) journey of its career in a 225 mile trek at speeds up to 60 MPH from Pittsfield, Mass. to Kennebunkport, Me. After a checkered career ranging from its role as a luxurious, extra-fare vehicle for residents and visitors in the Berkshires of western Massachusetts to the ignominy of a burned, unwanted hulk in a building reconstruction, the car will once again serve as an unforgettable means of electric railway transportation at the Seashore Trolley Museum.

Unfortunately, the ravages of man and the elements have taken their toll on the car, but there remains a strong backbone, photographs and carefully taken measurements, and at least one example of each type of the intricate decorative carvings and inlays of mahogany so that restoration is feasible.

The *Berkshire Hills* made its debut on the Berkshire Street Railway system in 1903, after construction by the Wason Manufacturing Company in Springfield, Mass. At over 45 feet in length, it was the longest car of the Berkshire fleet. Despite its length it sat only 28 passengers in luxurious wicker chairs on carpeted floors, surrounded by picture windows and heavy draperies. This luxury did not come cheap, as the bill for the car's

construction came to \$20,000, a tidy sum in 1903!

From delivery until 1923 the car was used in various types of service ranging from executive tours to tourist excursions and private charter trips over Berkshire routes that traversed the states of Massachusetts, Vermont and Connecticut.

When trolley service ended in 1932 the car was sold for \$300, deprived of its running gear, and relegated to duty as the Berkshire Hills Diner in West Pittsfield. Later after several additions were made to the rear and front and both ends of the car were encased in brick, the car served as the cocktail lounge for the Coach Light Restaurant. Later the car served as a storage room for a pet shop.

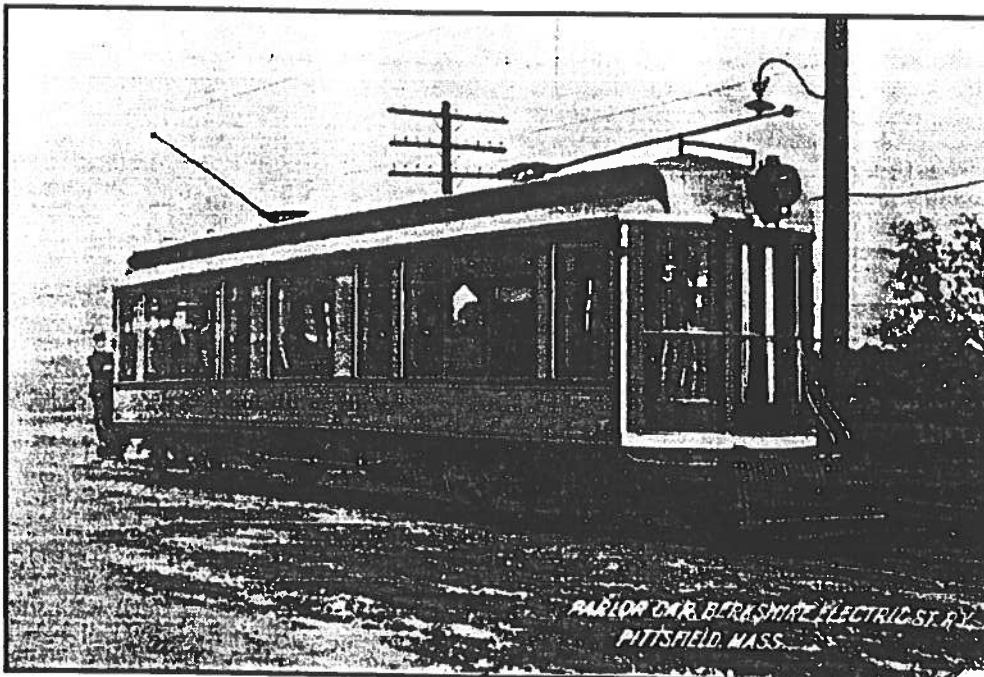
During this later period, Seashore member Kinsley Goodrich, a noted historian of the Berkshire Street Railway system, had kept an eye out on the availability of the car with the eventual goal of having the car restored as an operating trolley once again. He approached successive owners of the property about the concept of donating or selling the car to Seashore, but was rebuffed on each occasion.

Finally the last owners, Dina and John Fontaine, purchased the building and announced plans for converting the structure into an antique gallery and shop, with the car as the foyer. Be-

fore renovations were completed, the building's overworked furnace malfunctioned, setting the structure on fire during the severe February, 1994 weather. Rapid efforts by firefighters prevented total destruction of the car, but enough damage had been done to the roof and interior that its reuse by the Fontaines would be beyond their financial plans.

Within a week, Dan Cohen, Railway Collection Curator Paul Kochs, Kinsley Goodrich, and other Seashore members inspected the remains of the car and declared it restorable. After some negotiations involving the Museum's Director of Development Tom Bergen, the Fontaines agreed to donate the car to Seashore. Additionally the Fontaines requested \$13,000 for removal of the brick walls and for changes to their architectural plans that might be affected by the car's removal. Seashore member Peter Charow was able to obtain the donation of the majority of this funding from western Massachusetts residents.

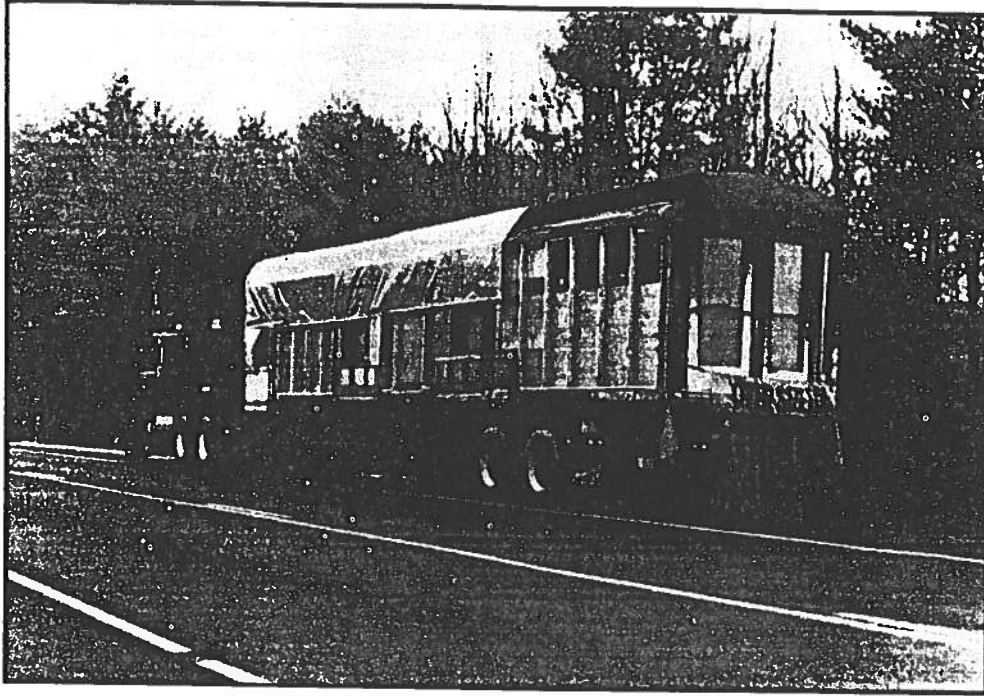
On the weekend of February 11, 1995, Paul Kochs led a crew consisting of Seashore members Dick Avv Mark Avv



Probably the most deluxe parlor car to serve any New England street railway was the Berkshire Hills.
(STM Library Collection)

Peter Charow, Kinsley Goodrich, Win Peck, and Tom Santarelli and Berkshire Scenic Railway members Jack Trowill and Ted Wichmann to prepare the car for its trip to Seashore.

This preparation was not to be an easy task. Upon conversion into a diner, all underframe components except one and one-half truss rods and the buffer knees had been removed and discarded. At some point in time, these remaining components



The tractor-trailer rig carrying the Berkshire Hills paused at roadside to check on the condition of the load.
(John Trowill photo)

were encased in a concrete foundation.

Above the floor the car was largely gutted. About six feet of one side had been removed to accept an outside entrance door and about 10 feet of the other side had been removed to serve as the restaurant entrance. Fortunately only one of the six end doors was missing. Although the fire had damaged a significant portion of the car's roof, only charring, not structural damage was evident to the remainder of the interior.

So the tasks for the volunteers were to carefully break away foot-thick concrete from the truss rods and buffer knees and to frame and cross-brace the carbody to prevent damage during a crane lift and subsequent trip by tractor-trailer to Kennebunkport.

Using sledges, wrecking bars, and a rented air compressor and jack hammer, the volunteers spent over 100 man-hours (at times in wind chills up to -12 degrees) in breaking the concrete and shoring the frame at the truck bolster points from the basement. Thanks to their efforts when jacked from each end, the car raised smoothly and displayed no sagging at the center. And, most importantly, the volunteers' efforts caused no damage to the car's remaining structure or components.

Simultaneously with the heavy work underneath, Kinsley Goodrich and Jack Trowill installed temporary 2 x 4s and plywood framing to fill the side gaps and the space of the missing end door. They also installed 2 x 4 cross bracing to withstand the crane lift and subsequent trailer ride. Much of the wood and installation hardware was donated by Kinsley. The doors to three small wall cabinets, once used for drinking tumbler storage, were secured to prevent damage during the trip. The electrical baseboard heaters and power cables added during the use of the car as a restaurant were removed, as was all debris remaining from the fire.

Early on Saturday, February 18, an 18 ton capacity crane and crew donated by the Petricca Construction Company were on hand to begin the lift onto a stretch trailer donated by John

Marchisio Trucking of Pittsfield, Mass. Volunteers Dan Cohen, Kinsley Goodrich, Paul Kochs, Jack Trowill and Ted Wichmann were also on hand to set cribbing on the trailer.

Protective timbers had been installed by the crane crew along the letterboard area of the car sides to prevent chafing by the lifting straps. The crane crew then positioned the lifting straps as close as possible to the car bolsters and strap spreaders of equal length to the car's width above the roof to prevent squeezing the car's upper structure during the lift. The actual lift proceeded without incident.

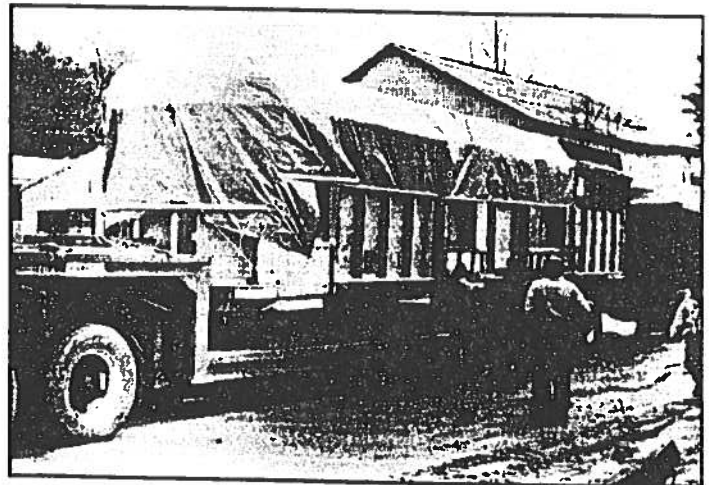
The final efforts completed by volunteers consisted of preparations for the highway haul. Some final hardware was removed from the car roof and measurements were made to insure that the load was within the required normal limit of 13 feet six inches. Loose material and nails were removed from the car that might damage the protective tarpaulins. Two tarpaulins were used to reduce air resistance and protect the car during its highway move.

At 5:45 AM on Monday, March 13, John Marchisio, with his daughter Rachael, Kinsley Goodrich, and Jack Trowill riding shotgun, released his tractor brakes, and the *Berkshire Hills* was finally on its way to a new home. Thanks to all of the advance preparations, the trip was without incident and the consist reached the entrance to the Museum in five hours and 30 minutes. John Marchisio generously donated his time and the use of his tractor-trailer as his contribution to the car's future.

At Seashore a space near the Bunkhouse had been cleared for off-loading the car. Paul Kochs, Fred Perry and Amy Colburn built cribbing on both sides of the trailer so that the car could be jacked up and the trailer driven out from underneath it, which was accomplished by 4:00 PM.

Dan Cohen and Paul Kochs feel that there are the correct and authentic air and electrical components and trucks available to outfit the car. Current estimates of restoration costs are over \$250,000.

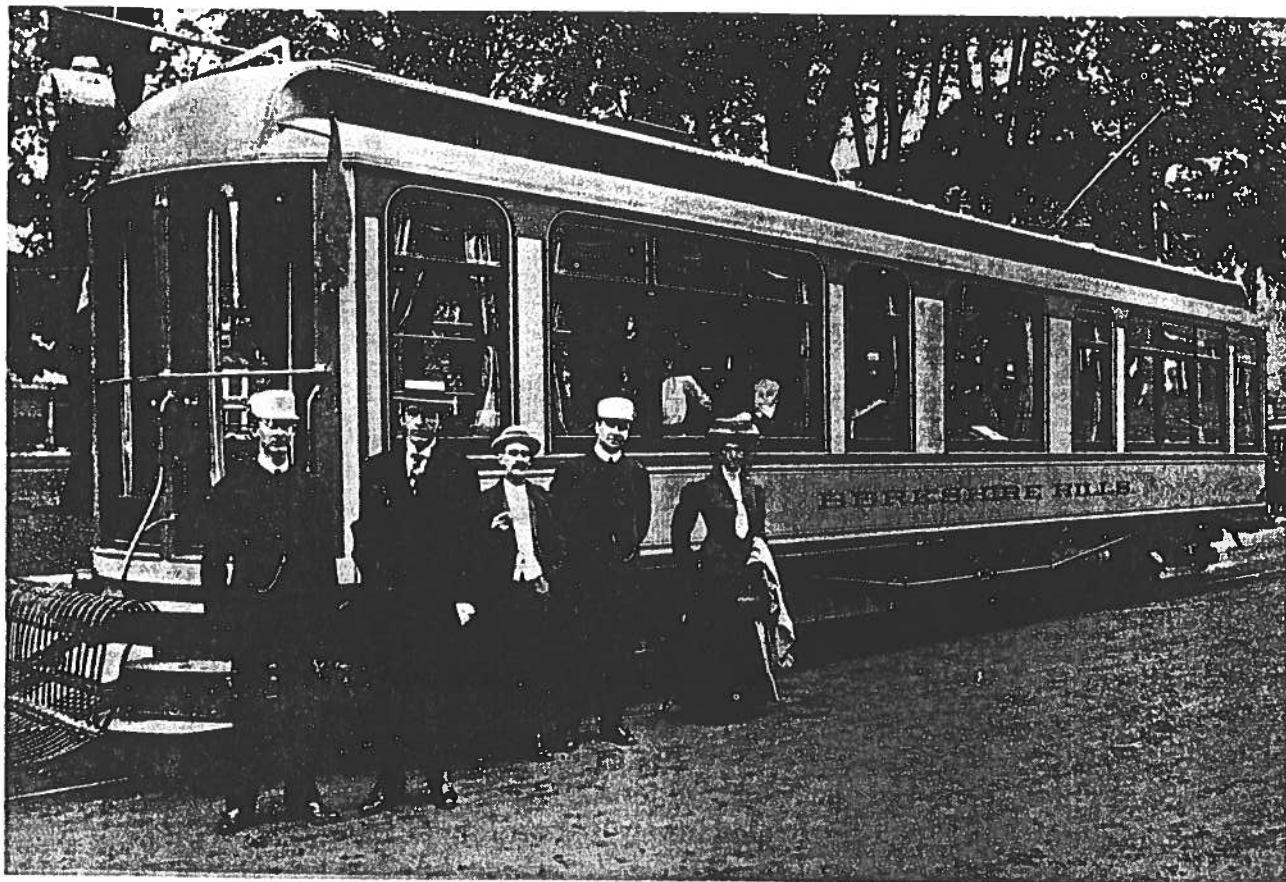
Peter Charow is heading up a fundraising drive in the Berkshires. However this car is so unique that trolley fans from across the nation will want to contribute as well. There has never been another car like it in the world!



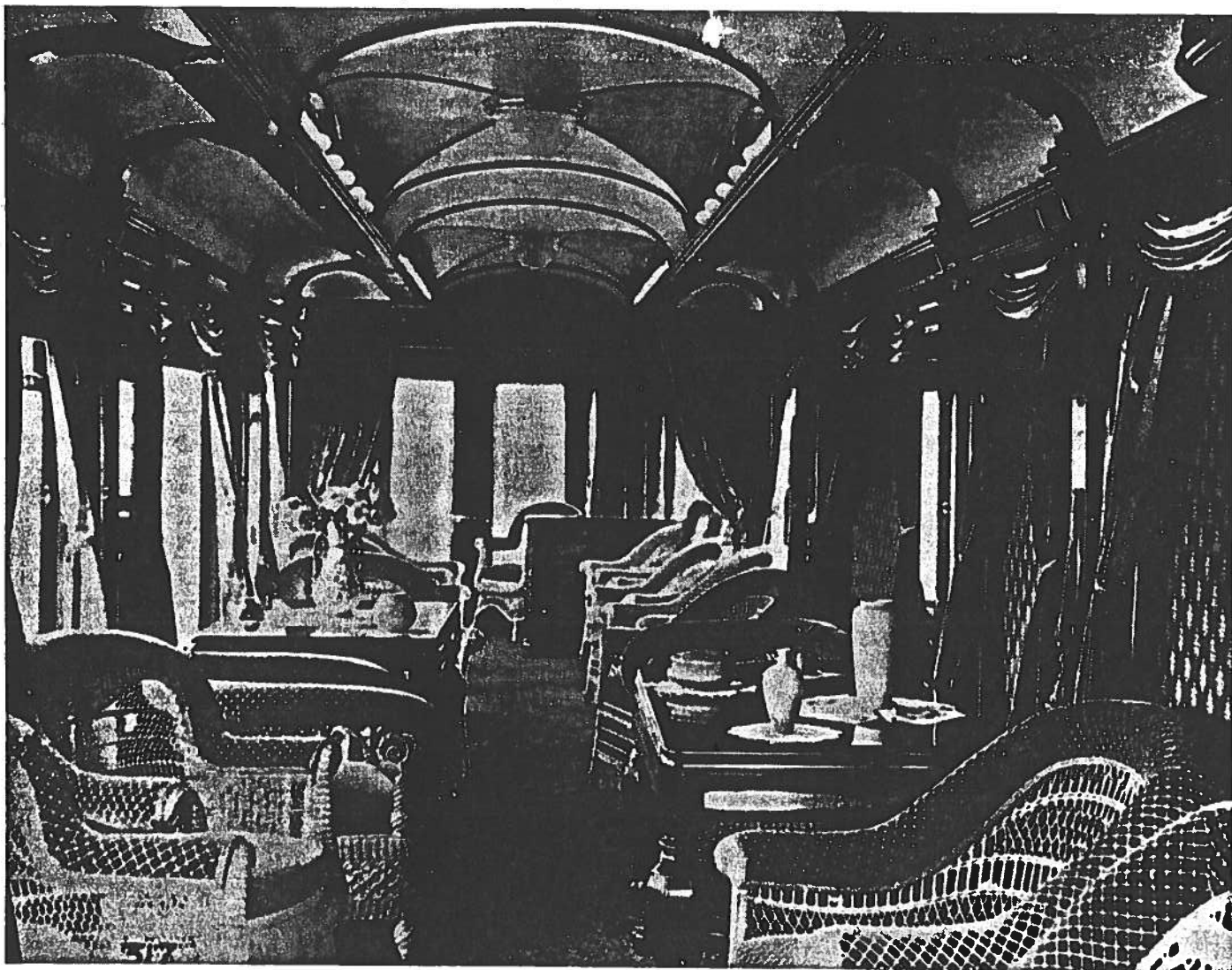
The tractor-trailer carrying the car has just arrived at the Museum. Volunteers are preparing to build blocking piles to support the car while the trailer is driven out from under the car.
(John Trowill photo)

**New England's
Seashore Trolley Museum**
the world leader in electric railway conservation
will soon undertake
its greatest restoration challenge,

The Berkshire Hills
the most elegant street railway parlor car in history...



... ***with your help!***



After a quest of many years, the *Berkshire Hills* has finally come to the Seashore Trolley Museum, singularly responsive to the Museum's central mission of historic restoration and conservation.

Sadly, those years have not been kind to this legendary jewel of electric traction. In the 63 years since the operating company converted to buses and the car body was sold, the *Berkshire Hills* has suffered more than its share of abuse and calamity, culminating with a severe fire in early 1994. After investigation, the verdict of the Seashore curatorial staff is that this car can and should be saved and restored to its former glory, and that Seashore's Town House Car Shop has that capability. However, it will be a very costly project. For all that, it is something which, as the leader in the field of electric railway preservation, the Museum could not responsibly decline to undertake.

The smaller, though similarly elegant trolley parlor car, *City of Manchester*, was also received here after an abusive secondary service interlude, but has long stood as an example of what can be done at the Museum in the area of extensive and first class restoration. Now the Museum faces the challenge of a much larger undertaking in an era of vastly escalated costs. Seashore can handle it, and we must, but considerable financial support is needed. Expected costs of the *Berkshire Hills* restoration may well approach \$250,000 and involve some 12,000 man-hours of labor, but what a prize it will be when finished. This most famous and beautiful of all the street railway parlor cars will live again, having been brought back

from the brink of ruin. Although substantial corporate and foundation support is anticipated, many-smaller contributions will be required to achieve our goal. All will be appreciated and acknowledged.

For those unfamiliar with the car and its parent company, a brief history follows. The Berkshire Street Railway, of western Massachusetts, was incorporated in 1901. Big time in its conception, by 1910 it had absorbed all the other trolley companies in the area, including the Hoosac Valley and Pittsfield Electric Street Railways. In 1905 the Berkshire system had itself come under the control of the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad.

The trolley operations of Berkshire County had their share of monumental events. The Hoosac Valley (North County) was electrified in 1889, barely a year after the first successful electric operation in Richmond, Virginia, and several months before horse power was replaced in Boston.

In 1902 the Pittsfield Electric Street Railway became the subject of national indignity over an accident involving then President Theodore Roosevelt. Having just delivered a speech at the City Square, Roosevelt and others were being driven to a reception at the local country club in an open landau. A cadre of press men and railway company officials were going to the club by streetcar, as the line ended there. Hoping to arrive before the President, they were urging haste upon the motorman, whereupon the two vehicles collided at a point where the tracks veered from the side of the road to the center of the street. A secret service agent and a horse were killed. T.R., though thrown to the street, was only slightly injured and, upon rising to his feet, shook his fist in the air and declared the accident a "damnable outrage".

Several months later, two lions escaped from a circus playing town, and roamed the city streets. Mayor Kelton Miller, aware of Teddy's big game prowess, wired the President to come and dispatch the lions. Responding, Roosevelt wired back, "Leave the lions alone. The trolleys will get them."

When the Boston and Maine's historic Hoosac Tunnel was early electrified in 1911, to reduce the smoke level and damage to the tunnel roof from the strong exhaust blasts of steam locomotives, power was furnished by the Berkshire's Zylonite plant in Adams.

In its final configuration, the Berkshire Street Railway operated from Hoosick Falls, New York, through the southwest corner of Vermont to the Massachusetts border, thence southerly the length of Berkshire County to the Connecticut line and so on, to end at the Canaan depot, which served the New Haven and Central New England Railroads. Although it was the only electric traction system in the United States to operate in four states, only briefly did the Berkshire Street Railway have any physical connection with the outside world.

This was in July, 1917, on the renowned "Huckleberry Line", in the town of Huntington, where rails of the Berkshire ended only several feet from those of Springfield Street Railway's Westfield Division, when a temporary connection was made for an exchange of cars between the two companies. Otherwise, through passengers had to walk a few feet between connecting cars. Construction of the "Huckleberry Line" was mandated by the Massachusetts Legislature as a condition of takeover by the New Haven Railroad. Having control of both the Berkshire and Springfield Street Railways, New Haven President Charles S. Mellen was pleased to comply, seeing an opportunity to compete with the Boston & Albany Railroad for passenger traffic. Begun in 1911, the 24 mile line through rugged mountainous terrain experienced several construction delays, and was not completed until 1917. Ironically, passenger service lasted only two summers. Freight hauling of hilltown granite,

lumber and farm products continued a few more years before the line was abandoned in the 1920s. The Massachusetts Turnpike is now built over much of this line.

Proceeds from the salvage of overhead and rail removed were used as a down payment on the last dozen new cars ordered by the Berkshire, in 1926; namely the 300 series. Built by Osgood Bradley of Worcester, Massachusetts, they were recognized as New England's most modern interurban cars. After only six years of service, they were transferred to the Connecticut Company's New Haven Division. Surely, the \$3,000,000 invested in construction of the "Huckleberry Line" contributed significantly to the early demise (1932) of trolley operations on the Berkshire Street Railway.

Today, as at the time of its delivery to Berkshire Street Railway property in 1903, the *Berkshire Hills* is recognized universally as the most magnificent and luxurious parlor car ever to have ridden the rails of a street railway anywhere. A product of the Wason Manufacturing Company, of Springfield, Massachusetts, it was grandly appointed with Santo Domingo mahogany paneling and woodwork, accented by beveled glass mirrors between the large picture windows. Three ornate ceiling cluster-lamp fixtures were supplemented by an additional 50 units of indirect lighting, recessed into fancifully carved moldings along both sides of the interior. Thirty-two electric heaters, a wall-mounted stainless steel water cooler and an in-floor icebox provided for passenger comfort. Plush blue and buff Wilton carpeting covered the floor and all windows were hung with dark blue velvet drapes embroidered in gold and lined with cream satin, tied back with tasseled gold sash cords. Interior furnishings included a carved mahogany desk and two matching buffets. The built-in cabinets held the finest crystal glassware. Seating was provided by 28 wicker chairs upholstered with costly tapestry.

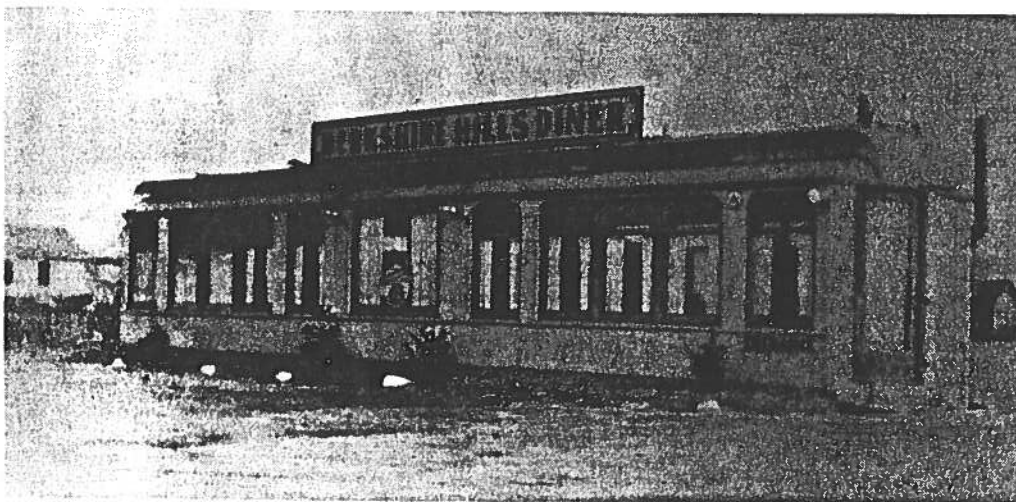
The exterior of the car was painted U. S. Mail white, a standard color for the then-common dedicated mail cars on the street railways, with buff trim, gold striping and lettering. The roof was a medium gray, and running gear dark green. This car was 45 feet, 8 inches in length and weighed 25,500 pounds. The cost of its construction was \$20,000, four times the expense of a conventional streetcar.

Delivered on June 6, 1903, the *Berkshire Hills* made its inaugural trip on June 25, carrying a club group on a four mile run from Pittsfield's Park Square to a reception at the Abbey Lodge. Its first long-haul test run occurred on June 27, with a 65 mile round trip from Pittsfield, southerly to Great Barrington, thence northerly through Pittsfield to Cheshire, and again south to Pittsfield. Prior to the 1907 acquisition of the connecting Hoosac Valley Street Railway, Cheshire was the Berkshire's northern terminus.

On August 26, double-fare excursion trips began along this same route and continued through the end of October, on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. From 1904 until early in 1907, the *Berkshire Hills* was used only in charter service. A return to revenue service occurred in July, 1907, with the offering of a longer Great Barrington to Bennington, Vermont daily round-trip excursion at a premium fare of \$1.40. It took eleven hours and twenty minutes to complete the 134 mile trip. What a way to spend a day! Highly popular, these trips continued (April through October thereafter) for eleven years, until 1917, when they were suspended as a wartime austerity measure, never to resume. From 1909 through 1913, the *Berkshire Hills* had a running mate opposite, in the *Bennington*, a Laconia-built large-windowed passenger car, converted to a parlor car configuration and appointed in a similarly plush fashion. Idle throughout 1918, the *Berkshire Hills* was relegated, once again, to charter service only from 1919 until 1922, when it was placed in dead storage, said to be in need of a thorough overhauling, repainting and varnishing, inside and out; that all

furnishings should be refinished and reupholstered. For the next ten years it languished, for various periods of time, within the confines of the Housatonic and Pittsfield car houses.

With the cessation of rail service north of Pittsfield, due in part to a number of flood damaged or weakened bridges, the *Berkshire Hills* was sold, in 1930, to a party whose intent was to use it as a curio and souvenir shop, high up on the Mohawk Trail. With the extreme costs of hauling the car body up the steep Route 2 and negotiating the famous Hairpin Curve, he promptly reneged on the sale. Sold again at the time of conversion to bus service in 1932, it finally was moved, sans electrical and running gear, to a site on Route 20, west of Pittsfield, and identified as the *Berkshire Hills Diner*.



Additions were made over the years, but the car body remained visible as such until 1952, when it was encased in brick, covered with a roof and became the foyer of the renamed epicurean Coach Lite Restaurant, which

business thrived for nearly thirty years. After it was sold in the late 1970s, the new owner failed to capitalize on the establishment's reputation and failed within three years. Over the next several years, when not vacant, the building served as a pet supply store and warehouse, then briefly as a breakfast restaurant before bank foreclosure early in 1993.

Meanwhile, in the early 1980s, two local Seashore members kept a wary eye on developments and had communicated with a steady succession of owners in the hope that, one day, it would be available to the Museum. All was to no avail as the antiquity and uniqueness of the *Berkshire Hills* always seemed to fit the theme of the new owners and was looked upon as an asset to their enterprise. November, 1993 saw the entry of yet another new owner, but the scenario remained the same. To what better use could the *Berkshire Hills* be put than to be the grand entrance to a proposed antique auction gallery?

Then tragedy struck and a twist of fate resulted. After an all-night performance on a bitterly cold night, a furnace located directly behind and beneath the car malfunctioned, sending a plume of flame across the car body in the early morning hours of Sunday, February 27, 1994. First impressions of the damage suggested that the project of obtaining and restoring the car was history.

Within several days, the property owner decided that he could not make use of the facility as it was; he would have to raze and rebuild. He offered the Seashore Trolley Museum any part of the car body that could be salvaged. The local representatives urged an investigation and opinion by experts, rather than lose this prize to supposition.

A curatorial party from Seashore traveled to the site, inspected the car, and reported that the *Berkshire Hills*, though gravely wounded, was far from dead. The car body was still sound and restorable, though more expensively than before. Area supporters and contractors were rallied together for the task of freeing, transferring and transporting the piece free gratis. Sufficient funds were quickly generated in Berkshire County to meet the

not small moving costs. On the weekend of February 11-12, the *Berkshire Hills* was freed and jacked from its foundation of 63 years. It was rigged with cables and spreaders, lifted and transferred to an air-cushion flatbed stretch trailer on Saturday, February 18, then secured on site for two weeks.

At 5:45 A.M. on Monday, March 13, the transporting rig was off to Maine, and within 45 minutes, the *Berkshire Hills* left Berkshire County for the first time in over 70 years, arriving at the Seashore Trolley Museum at 12:30 P.M. after a smooth and trouble-free journey. On Monday, March 20, the car was lowered onto temporary trucks and rode the rails once again. Most of the major components needed to re-equip the car are on hand. While sufficient funds remain for stabilization, BIG MONEY will be needed to restore this car to its former glory. There is every intent to do just that and, with your help, we will.

In the summer of 1995, the Seashore Trolley Museum will launch, nationally, but focused in Western Massachusetts, a Capital Campaign to raise funding for the restoration of the *Berkshire Hills*. Donations or information inquiries may be directed to the *Berkshire Hills* Fund, Seashore Trolley Museum, P.O. Box A, Kennebunkport, Maine 04046, or to Peter S. Charow (Project Director for the *Berkshire Hills*), 14 Crane Ave., Pittsfield, MA 01201, telephone (413) 443-3667.

