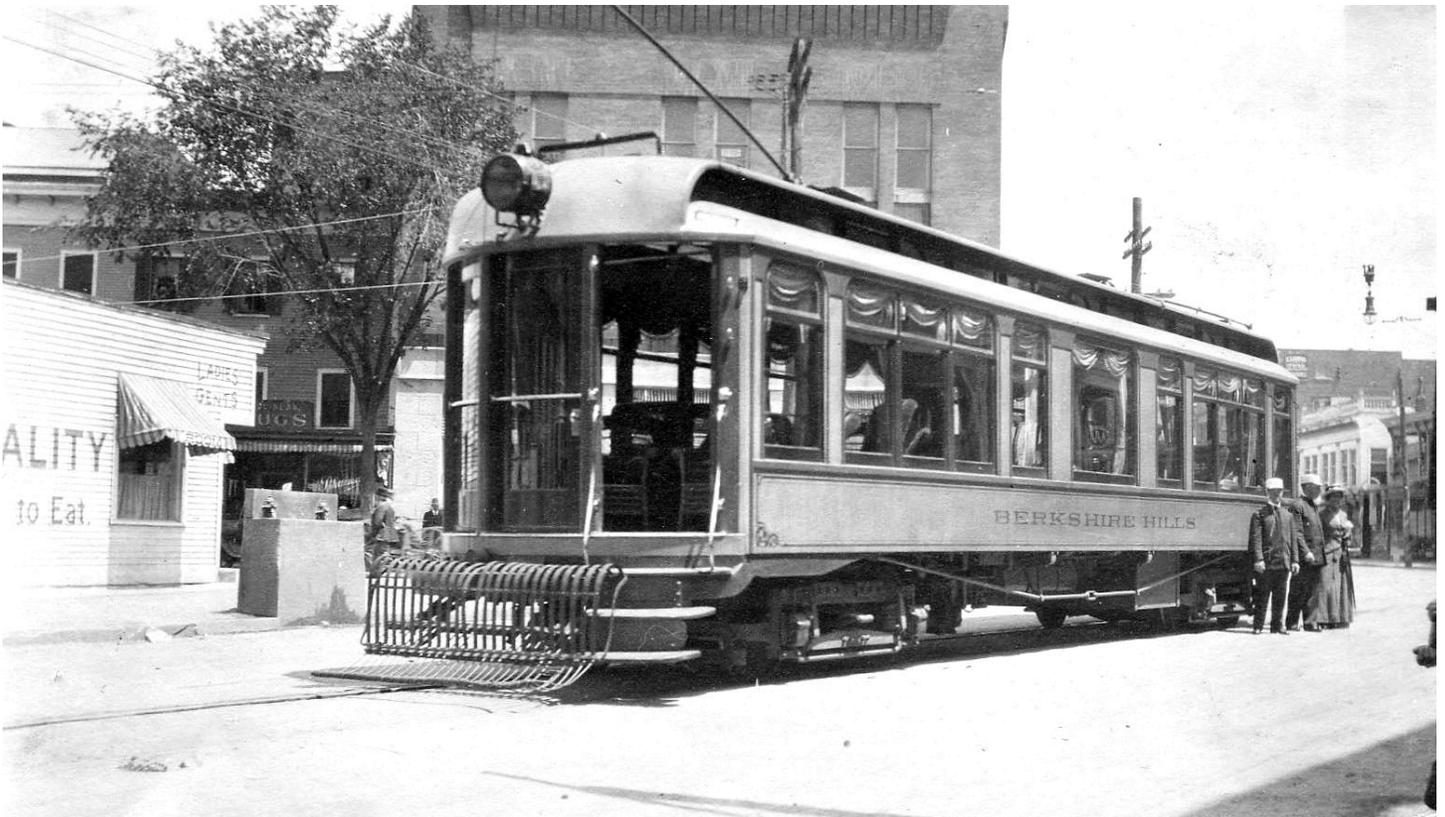


# Baby Boomer Memories: The Trolley Car that gave us Great Dining Memories

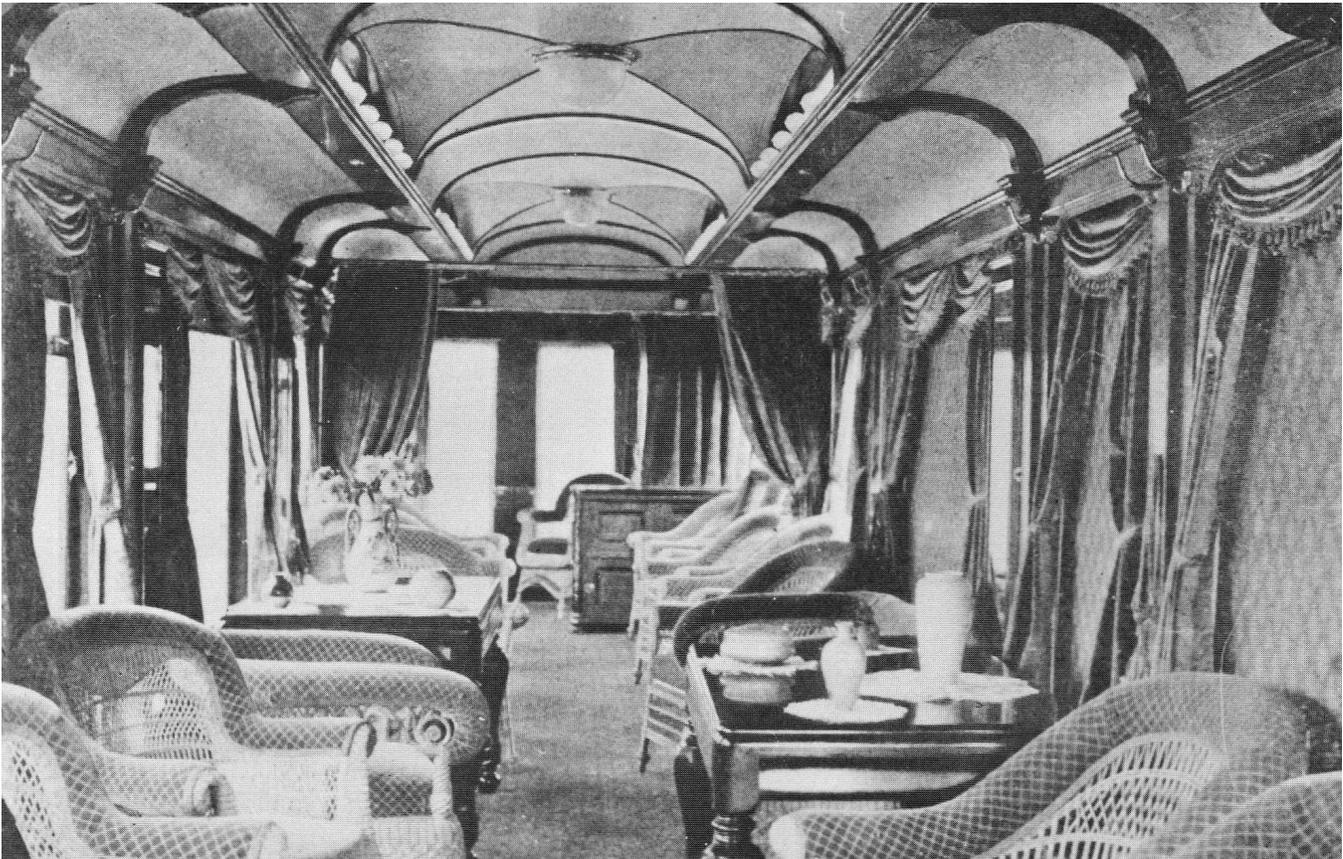
(By Jim Shulman for the Berkshire Eagle 1- 25-2020)

Most Berkshire Baby Boomers remember the Holly K and Coachlite Restaurants once located at 1485 West Housatonic Street in Pittsfield. These eateries had an interesting history with several owners and different names over a fifty plus year period they served food. Before becoming restaurants the original main structure had actually been a trolley car owned by the Berkshire Street Railway, the only streetcar company with routes reaching into four States. This trolley, named The Berkshire Hills, was built for the Berkshire Street Railway in 1902 by the Wason Manufacturing Co. of Springfield, MA. The Berkshire Street Railway (BSR) was the only streetcar company in the country that served four States. Headquartered in Pittsfield, the BSR included routes to Bennington, VT, Hoosick Falls, NY and Canaan, CT. The Berkshire Hills car was built as an upscale coach or “parlor car” for chartered trips or special excursions to and from these locales.



**The Berkshire Hills, a 1902 trolley car built in Springfield MA for the Berkshire Street Railway, traversed routes in four states before being converted into a popular diner.**

When it was built this coach cost \$20,000, weighed 13 tons and was 45 feet 8 inches long. It was painted white with gold lettering and gold stripes. Trolley fans have described it as the most exquisite parlor car ever built. The interior was fashioned with rich polished mahogany woodwork, curved and beveled glass and fancy light fixtures. The windows were adorned with opulent blue curtains embroidered in gold and lined with a cream satin material. Twenty-eight upholstered wicker seats and several ornate tables graced the interior.



**The Berkshire Hills car construction and décor has been described as the most exquisite parlor car for its time in 1902.**

The advent of World War I brought an end to local parlor car service, and the Berkshire Hills car was placed in storage in 1922. In 1930 this majestic coach was sold for the mere sum of \$300.00 to someone who wanted to take it to the top of the Mohawk Trail to convert it into a restaurant. The buyer later backed out of the deal when he realized how costly it would be to bring it up Route 2 and to try to navigate the Hairpin turn.

For the next couple of years the Berkshire Hills car stayed in the East Street barn at Newell Street that was then housing the new bus fleet. The last of the BSR trolley cars ran in 1932 and shortly thereafter all the cars were stripped of useable and recyclable parts. The wooden frames were then burned at Berkshire Park on Rte. 8 in Lanesboro.

The Berkshire Hills car was the only trolley saved, and the BSR was able to sell it to a local grocer, Snowden Almstead. This once exquisite parlor car was towed out to West Housatonic Street where its motor, wheels, running gear and electrical parts were removed and sold, and the beautiful coach was converted into a diner. Almstead operated it for 27 years under the name of the Berkshire Hills Diner (and as Bert and Snook's for a few years).



**In 1933 the Berkshire Hills car was towed to West Housatonic Street where it became the Berkshire Hills Diner, the first of many restaurants later popular to Baby Boomers.**

In 1959 the diner was sold to Edwin Johnson who five years earlier had built a 16-room motel next to the diner. The motel was named Holly K for Johnson's daughters, Holly and Kerstin. The diner, renamed the Holly K Restaurant, was enlarged and remodeled and became popular for parties, dancing, bands and good food during the 1960s. The remodeling pretty much masked the old trolley car.



**The Holly K motel was built next to the diner that became the Holly K Restaurant in 1959, Perry's Restaurant in 1969 and the Coachlite Restaurant from 1972-1986.**

In late 1969 John and Florence Perry ran it as Perry's Restaurant until 1972 when Sally Bock and son, Paul, took it over and opened it as the Coachlite. Paul and his wife, Patti, operated the popular eatery for 14 years before selling it in 1986. Over the next four years the Coachlite was a restaurant for another year, a pet shop for two years and then a restaurant again for a few years before it sat vacant. Its' restaurant days ended in 1993 when John Fontaine, Jr. acquired the building for Fontaine Auction Gallery and Antique Center.

In March 1994 four months after Fontaine's purchase, a furnace fire destroyed the building and caused considerable damage to the original Berkshire Hills trolley's frame. The charred body of the trolley was then donated to the Seashore Trolley Museum in Kennebunkport Maine. The historic 118-year parlor car has been in storage for 25 years with the hope of restoration to its original glory. Estimates for the project have been as high as \$1 million and donors have not yet come forth.

(Photos from Jim Shulman's Collection)

*Jim Shulman, a Pittsfield native living in Ohio, is the author of "Berkshire Memories: A Baby Boomer Looks Back at Growing Up in Pittsfield." If you have a memory of a Berkshire baby-boom landmark, business or event you'd like to share or read about, please write Jim at [jesjmskali@aol.com](mailto:jesjmskali@aol.com)*