

# Hoboes And Boxcars Leave Concord Behind

By DEBORAH de PEYSTER

The boxcars served as a home to scavenging pigeons and wayward people.

Light filtered into the car through the open doors revealing a dusty orange blanket rolled up with a dirty quilt, one boot, a coverless pillow at the head of a cardboard pallet and empty beer cans. Strangely, a tube of toothpaste and toothbrush lay neatly near the bedroll.

Pigeons hovered in the area, squatted on the edge of the open car floor and swarmed on the ground picking through debris.

A crusty old man appeared from the overgrown path that runs along the boxcars behind House of Yee. He was stopped in his stumbling gait, and was asked what's going on. "Not much," he replied, his pink-tinted eyes blinking.

Then the questioner flashed his police badge and the hobo identified himself as "Harry."

Harry began backing away from the police officer, looking down the long line of empty railroad cars, and mumbling,

"We've got to get these trains moving, got to get them rolling."

He disappeared down the tracks and under the Bridge Street bridge.

Later, a few cars down from the spot where Harry was intercepted, his hideout was found; an empty boxcar with an equally empty pint of beer. The bottle was still cold.

Since July, the boxcars in large numbers have disappeared. According to Gloria Stone, a spokesman for Boston and Maine Railroad, the economy has improved and the cars have been taken from storage and repaired.

Concord was a dumping ground for boxcars awaiting repair in Billerica, Mass, she said.

The cars remaining in the Concord railroad yard are locked with heavy metal attachments. Ms. Stone said the locks were added in response to the vandalism experienced in the area.

The trains bring loaded boxcars to Concord, which then are sorted out and put on the tracks to their destination. They carry everything from grain, propane and oil, to paper for the cardboard containers used by Kentucky Fried Chicken.

But where there are empty boxcars, a "hangout" grows, said one veteran engineer.

The Concord railroad tracks and boxcars for the past several years in warm months were a gathering place for youths looking for a hangout and for people without a place to go, Concord police Investigative Services Director Bruce A. Russell said.

In April, 1976, the stabbed and beaten body of 19-year-old Michael Stitt of Laconia was found in the railroad yard behind the state liquor store warehouse.

In court testimony that followed the murder, Concord residents learned of the youth that "hung out" in the boxcars and railroad yard, taking drugs, sniffing glue, drinking, and getting into fights.

This summer, Concord fire officials reported several fires in the boxcars. No one was injured in the blazes that police officials speculated were often set for warmth or for cooking.

Engineer Arthur Lassonde of Concord said in his almost 30 years of railroad experience he learned that empty boxcars inevitably create a "hobo jungle."

He said he's seen some "transients under the (Bridge Street) bridge," but "you don't usually see the people, you see the evidence."

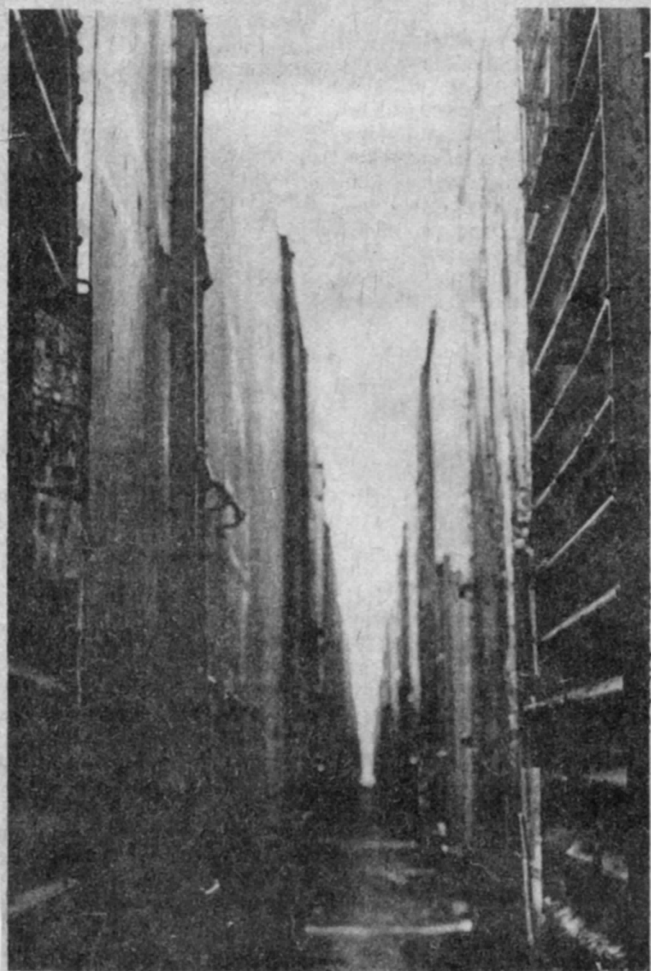
The evidence was pronounced during a July visit to the more than 100 boxcars behind the N.H. Liquor store warehouse and The House of Yee restaurant off Stickney Avenue.

Discarded pizza and fried chicken cartons littering several cars indicated fast food chains were popular among hoboes. Empty green produce cartons, milk cartons and piles of beer bottles and cans were scattered about the area.

Reading material from the National Lampoon to the Sunday New York Times was among the refuse.

On a return visit in late August, most of the cars were gone, the trash was diminishing, and Harry couldn't be found anywhere.

Only the pigeons remained



Boxcars To Nowhere

