



Electric PCC came out late in 1945

STEEL CITY TRACTION

Pittsburgh's Embattled Mountain-Goating Trolleys Have a Remarkable Civic Record—and Run on the Button

“PITTSBURGH is undoubtedly the cockeyedest city in the United States. It must have been laid out by a mountain goat.” That’s what the late Ernie Pyle had to say, and few people traveled more about the country than Ernie.

“Most Pittsburghers are proud of their unique city,” he went on, “with its hills, cliffs, valleys, rivers, bridges, narrow streets and thousands—yes; probably hundreds of thousands of them.”

The hills are so rugged that some visitors refer to them as mountains. This topography is one big reason why the streetcar is still king of public transit in the Steel City, although the Pittsburgh Railways company does operate more buses than any other concern in the area.

Those hills provide thrills for the visitor, regardless of what mode of transportation he uses to get about town. But the average Pittsburgher merely reads his paper to and from work. It’s all a part of his uneven life.

Trolleys run over the tops of houses, over high breath-taking trestles that have no sides, through tunnels, over bridges past inclines and over rural appearing private rights-of-way, virtually right in the center of the city.

The Pittsburgh Railways Company thinks streetcars do the best job in transporting passengers in a setting like this,

but unsympathetic city officials are battling to force the company to junk all its car lines in favor of buses. They get much leverage for the fight by continually opposing fare raises that the company asks to compensate it for paying the nation’s top wages for streetcar and bus operators and to meet the well-known increasing cost of materials and equipment.

Pittsburgh, like every other major city, has seen a drop in mass transportation patronage in recent years. Most of this is due to the private auto and television, the latter cutting into evening traffic. Fares have gone up. The basic rate in Pittsburgh now is three checks for fifty cents, and pending is a rate revision which would boost the fares for the occasional rider, but provide a cut for the regular customer and the short rider.

The city has been contesting this move since early 1952. If finally approved, it will give Pittsburgh the most complicated fare system in the country, but it should encourage people to ride the trolleys more regularly.

For his 16 2/3 cents, the Pittsburgher usually gets a ride in a PCC car, the Steel City having 666 of them—second only to Chicago. Of these, 101 are air-cooled. Frequency of service is such that there are usually seats for everyone during the non-rush hours, and even then it’s rare that patrons are packed in like cough



By LES NOLAN



PITTSBURGH RAILWAYS Company's first streamlined all-electric PCC came out late in 1945

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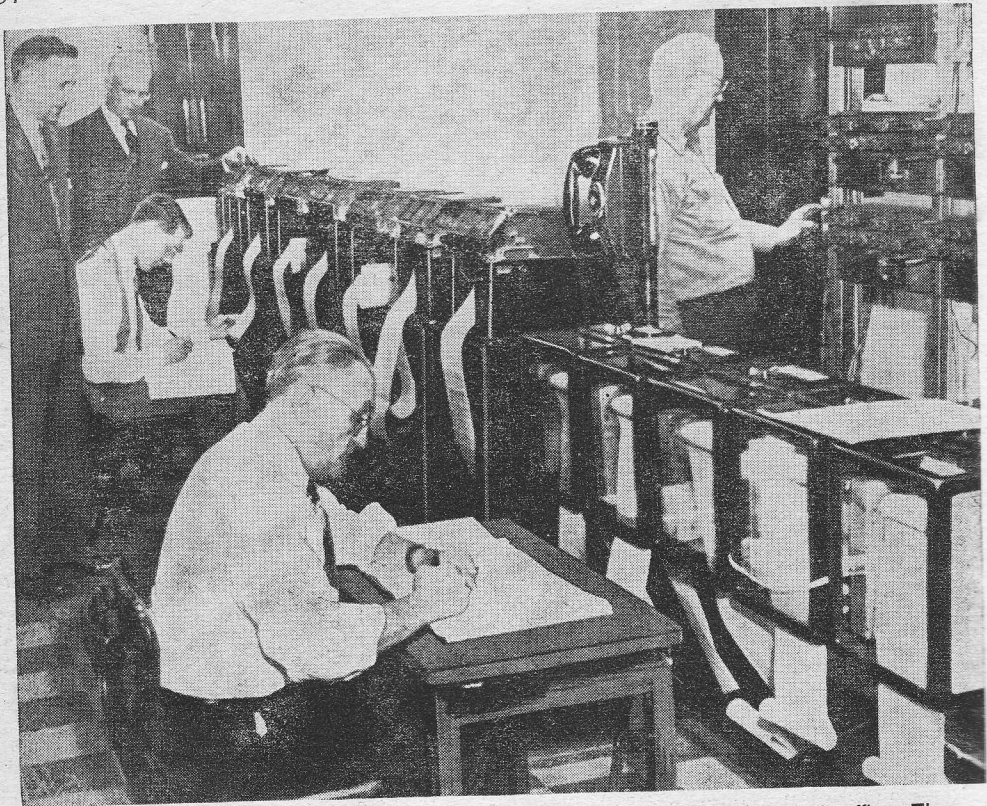
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PITTSBURGH'S pulse is taken every second by these machines in the dispatcher's office. They check trolleys at outer terminals and also record when street cars pass vital check points

drops, as is the case in most big population centers.

There are many who see in the Steel City's campaign for buses and opposition to fare increases a drive to put the privately owned Pittsburgh Railways Company into bankruptcy again and this time have the city buy it cheaply and operate it municipally.

This view was strengthened during the current fare battle, when Anne X. Alpern, city solicitor, expressed the view that the best thing that could happen to Pittsburgh would be for the local railways company to "disappear."

Of course, the record of public-owned transit systems in the U. S. hasn't been one of lower fares. Indeed, it has cost the citizens more because they have, usually unknowingly, had to dig down into their own pockets to make up the loss of taxes that the private system earned and from

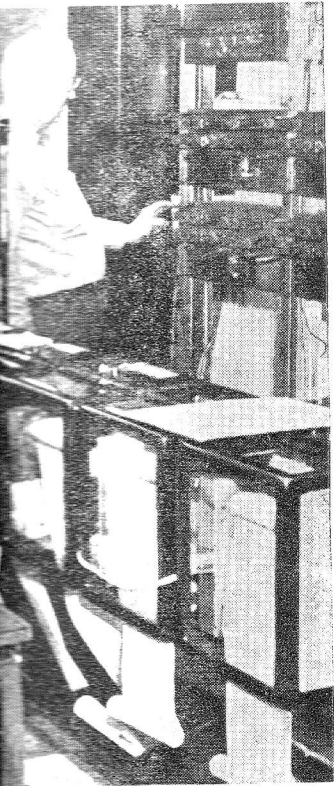
which the public system is exempt. In some cases, this adds up to more than a million dollars in fuel tax alone.

Regardless of the city's concerted efforts to force all-bus operation, and the railway company's stand that trolleys in most cases are best suited for Pittsburgh, the fact remains that this town isn't the streetcar center it once was.

The change has been fairly gradual, although speeded up within the last few years when economy often took precedence over service.

Actually thirty routes have been bussed or abandoned within the last few years, reducing trackage from 602 miles to 431. Now another road construction program threatens to wipe out West End lines, which include many miles of private right-of-way and make for fast schedules.

This is because the planners of a new bridge across the Monongahela River at



in the dispatcher's office. They cars pass vital check points

WASHINGTON - INTERURBAN cars were equipped with radio-telephone. The line is one track from Castle Shannon Junction onward



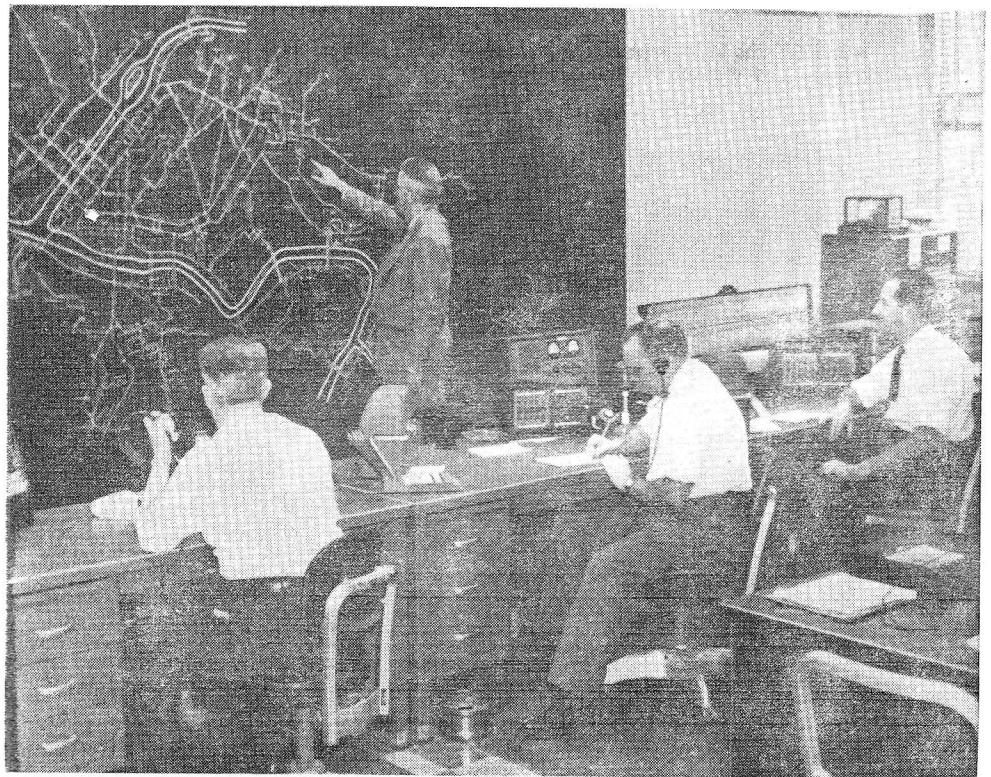
SPOTTING TROUBLE. System map in dispatcher's office, coupled with automatic recording devices, contributes to remarkable record. Cars make 95 percent of their stops right on the button

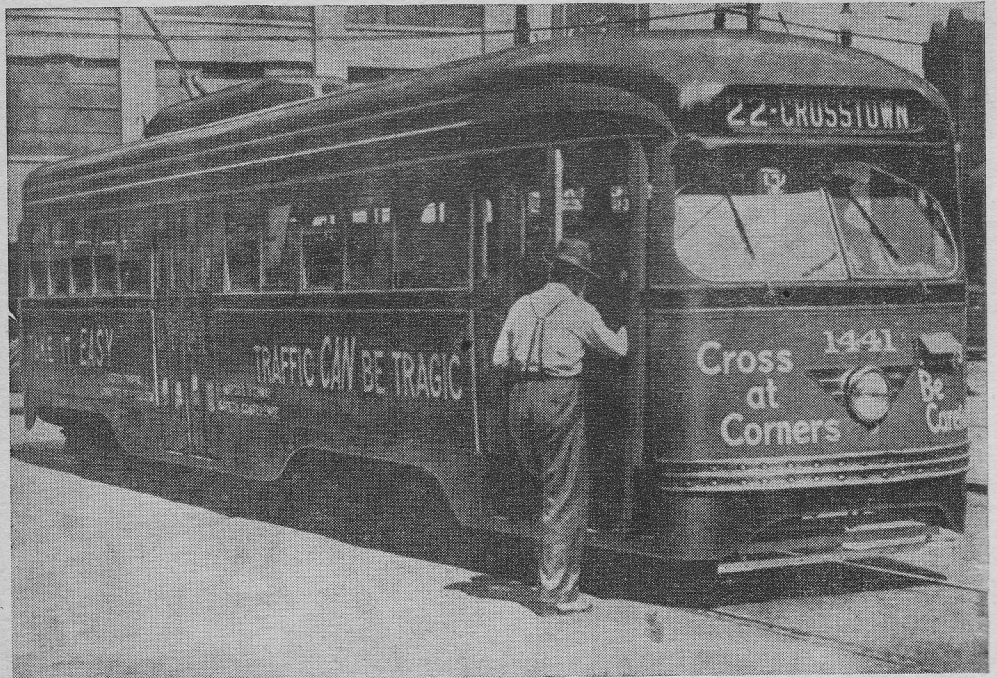
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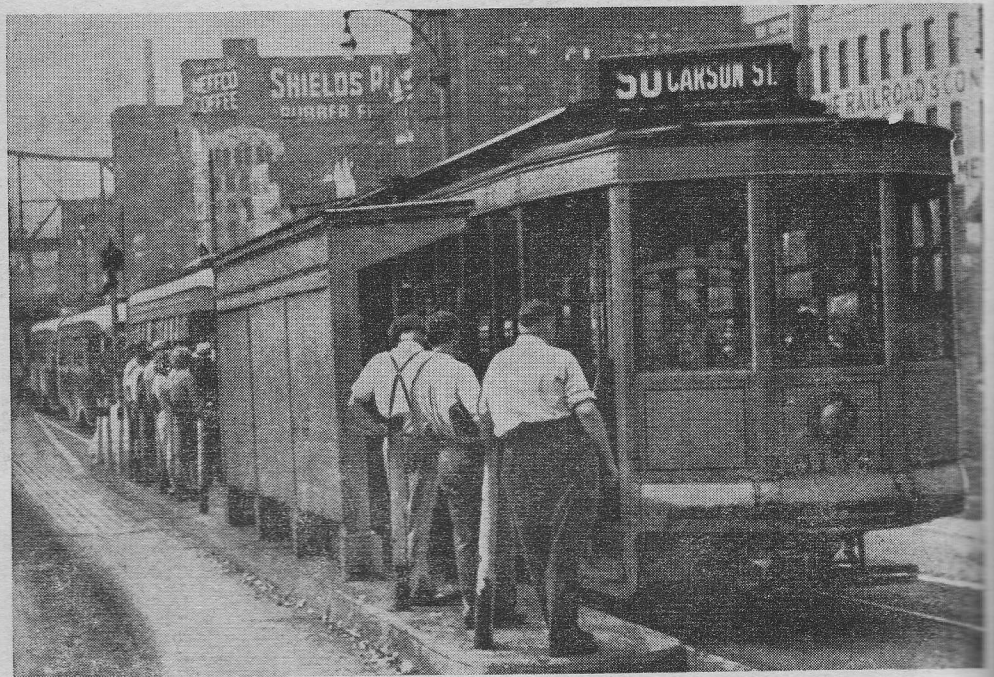
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22-CROSSTOWN cars operating in business district are painted bright colors to promote safety campaigns, civic projects, etc.

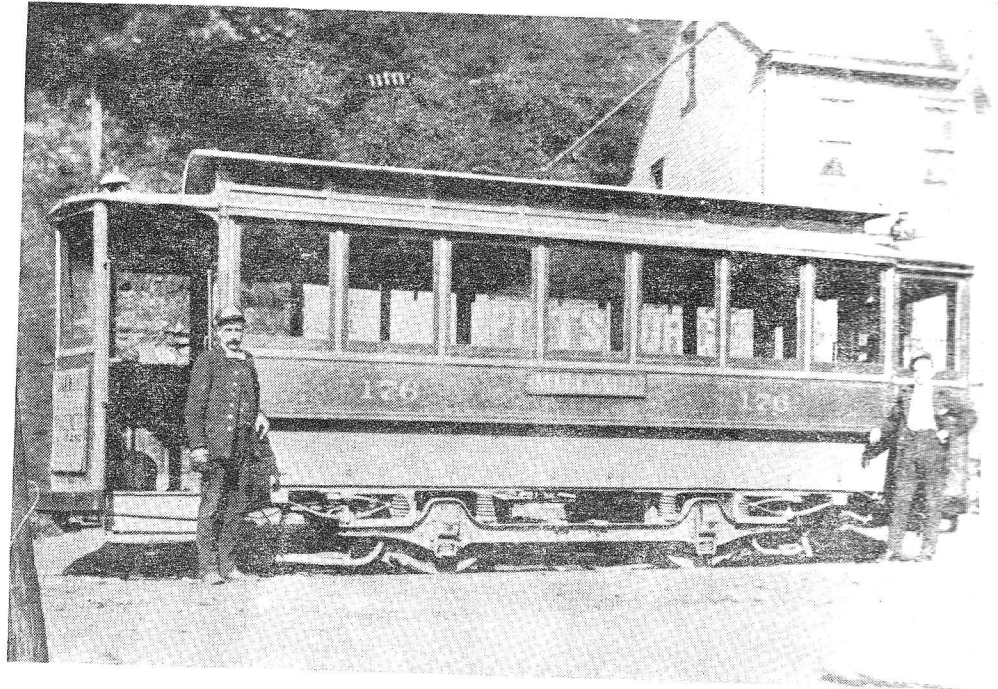
NONE OF the 5100 series run today, except the speeded-up 5149. This car came a cropper in rush downtown when fire broke out in 1947





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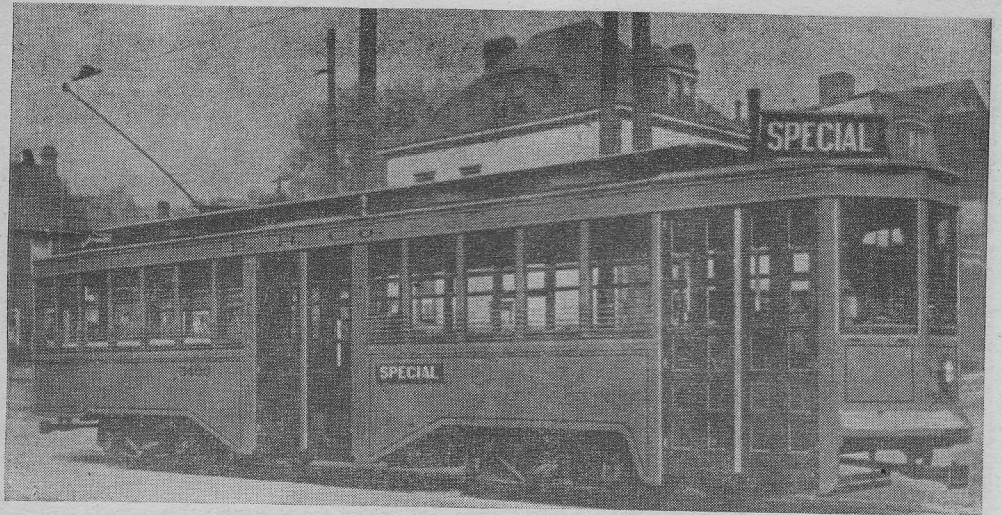
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AN ECHO from yesterday—car 176 covered East Ohio Street from Millvale to Pittsburgh, circa 1910. This line has now been bussed

WHEN THE century was young, Number 4 mountaingoated up steep Federal Street and Perrysville Avenue. Power came from conduit





SPEEDED UP 5400 series, originally built in late 'twenties, is still running tripper service

the Point, carrying all West End traffic, don't want car tracks on the bridge. If their plans succeed, the following lines would go: 27-Carnegie, 28-Heidelberg, 30-Crafton-Ingram, 31-Sheraden-Ingram, 34-Elliott, 25-Island Ave., and 26-West Park. The first four run extensively on private rights-of-way.

Perhaps no other municipal public transportation outfit does as much work behind the scenes to see that schedules are maintained and that delays are minimized. Streetcars make 95 percent of their stops right on the button.

Route foremen in radio-telephone trucks, checkers at busy intersections or key points, and automatic recording devices in dispatchers' offices all contribute to this fine record. Most intriguing, however, are the automatic recording devices. Trolleys passing a given point are recorded in the dispatcher's office. When a car fails to show up at one of these points within a minute or so of its scheduled time, a call goes to the route foreman.

The hills cause most of the delays. Not that the trolleys themselves are affected by anything less than gigantic snows, but in slippery weather trucks, buses and private autos get stuck on these hills by the thousands, clogging the tracks. So serious is this problem that the company main-

tains contracts with towing garages in the hillier areas that call for them to provide tow-truck service to truckers and motorists who get stalled in front of streetcars. Trolley operators also carry small containers of sand to help motorists.

Pittsburgh Railways came into existence in 1902. At this time some 200 local firms were in the transportation business. The company was the answer to the unification problem then, but the terms under which it absorbed the 200 firms—by lease and operating agreements—finally proved to be a millstone, forcing a bankruptcy soon after World War I. This bankruptcy lasted six years and was terminated by an agreement that called for the Philadelphia Company to reorganize the Pittsburgh setup.

The recession of 1938 again forced the main company into bankruptcy, where it remained until January 1, 1951, when it finally pried itself free of all underlying companies and severed its connection with the Philadelphia outfit.

Behind the scenes, too, is the maintenance of equipment. Day-to-day maintenance is provided for cars at the nine operating car barns, while the mammoth shops at Homewood, covering many city blocks, do the heavy repairs. Scrapping—the inexorable bowing to Father Time—is done



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Steel City Traction

mostly at the car barn in Ingram. The big storage barn is located in Rankin.

While PCC cars provide all non-rush-hour service, business in the peak period still is brisk enough to bring about 100 of the 500 or so old deck-roof, yellow cars onto the streets. These older types of equipment are of many series. Many of them underwent a face-lifting job.

All the older cars are the center-door type, but the 4800 and 4900 series looked no more like the 5000, 5200, 5400 and 5500 originally than a PCC car.

In 1929 and 1930, they lost their big fenders, had another—pneumatic—door installed at the front, lost the conductor's seat in the center, although some 4900s still have a revamped conductor's seat. Leather straps were exchanged for porcelain, spring-type ones. Standee poles were installed, and the bell went from the roof, where it was operated by a hand rope, to the floor where a size fourteen brogan gives it an authoritative bang.

Stop lights appeared on the rear and many motorists found to their dismay that the cars were speedier. Being driven by a 50-horsepower motor instead of 35, they were capable of 41 miles an hour, the same as the PCC cars. They also got new and brighter headlights.

All 4800 and 4900 series cars were speeded up; some of the 4700 series got the same treatment, but that series has disappeared via scrapping of late; so did the 5000 up to 5054. Then the depression cut into the modernization program, and only 5149 of the 5100 type got the treatment. All 5200s, 5400s and 5500s were

speeded up and some 5200s, 4900s and 4700s were given plush, bucket-type seats. This cut down on seating capacity.

Here's the lineup of cars and the barns they now use:

Manchester barn (North Side)—13 Emsworth, 14 Avalon, 18 Woods Run, 19 Western Avenue, 22 Crosstown.

Keating barn (North Side)—6 Brighton Road, 7 Charles St., 8 Perrysville, 10 West View, 12 Evergreen, 15 Bellevue, 21 Fineview.

Ingram (West End)—25 Island Avenue, 26 West Park, 27 Carnegie, 28 Heidelberg, 30 Crafton, 31 Sheraden, 34 Elliott.

South Hills (South end of tunnel)—37 Shannon, 38 Mt. Lebanon, 39 Brookline, 40 Mt. Washington, 42 Dormont, 44 Knoxville, 49 Beltzhoover, shortened Charleroi, Washington routes.

Carrick (South Hills)—53 Carrick, 47 Carrick via tunnel (rush-hours only), 77/54 Carrick-Oakland (the longest route of the system).

Craft Avenue (Oakland)—64 East Pittsburgh, 66 Wilkinsburg, 67 Swissvale-Rankin Braddock, 68 McKeesport, 69 Squirrel Hill, 75 Wilkinsburg via Penn Avenue), 85 Bedform, 50 Carson St.

Highland Park (East End)—71 Negley, 73 Highland, 82 Lincoln.

Glenwood (Second Avenue)—55 East Pittsburgh, 56 McKeesport, 57 Glenwood, 58 Greenfield, 65 Lincoln Place, 98 Glassport.

Lawrenceville (Butler Street) 94 Sharpsburg, 5 Butler Street (rush-hour only), 96 Eastliberty-62nd Street, 1 Spring Garden, 4 Troy Hill, 5 Spring Hill.

Homewood (East End)—62 East Pittsburgh-Trafford, 87 Ardmore, 88 Frankstown, 76 Hamilton, 60 East Liberty-Homestead.

How long the Pittsburgh Railways can weather the current political storm no one knows, but everyone in Pittsburgh cares.

Coming Next Month

THE TRAIN THAT MAKES A THOUSAND STOPS—Bob Hegge, with his camera, rides the Cotton Belt supply train . . . NIGHT CHIEF—Peter Josserand lifts the lid on problems facing a chief dispatcher . . . BOOMERS, NORTHBOUND—true tale by "Haywire Mac" McClintock, author of "The Big Rock Candy Mountain" . . . A MEET ON FIVE-MILE TRESTLE—story by Don Waters, boomer nut-splitter and bigtime fiction writer. . . . LADY SWITCHTENDER—Ejler Jakobsson interviews a good-looking Pennsy girl, with photos