

# Hot metal train linked Armco Steel operations

It was known by several names -- the hot line or hot metal line, the ladle-car line, the thermos bottle line and the Armco Railroad -- during about 63 years of service. It was a 12-mile freight railroad connecting New Miami and Middletown.

Officially, until 1991 it linked Armco's Hamilton plant and its Middletown works, hauling some of the hottest and heaviest cargo.

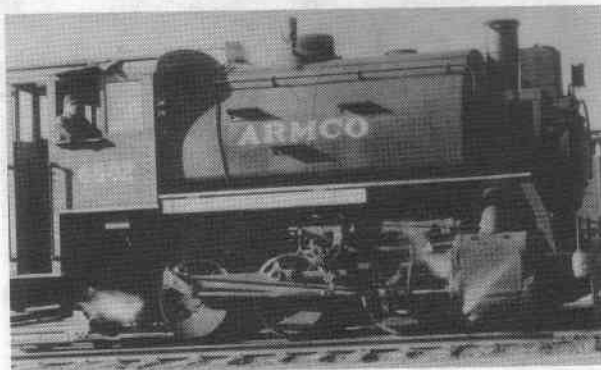
The \$1.5 million project -- completed in 117 working days -- included building 2.75 miles of new track between New Miami and Woodsdale and a sturdy bridge over the Great Miami River.

East of the river, it operated over the existing right-of-way of the former Louisville, Cincinnati & Dayton (see page 41). A viaduct was built over Big Four tracks and Yankee Road to provide entry to Armco Steel's Middletown Works.

Hamilton Coke & Iron Co. and its predecessors had been operating coke ovens and blast furnaces at New Miami (then called Coke Otto) since 1901. In 1927 it was acquired jointly by Koppers Co. of Pittsburgh and the American Rolling Mill Co. (Armco) of Middletown. Eventually, Armco acquired full control.

The railroad line, shared with the Baltimore & Ohio, opened June 25, 1928. It started with three hot-metal ladle cars, each with a capacity of 150 tons. The B&O also used the line to deliver ore and other materials to the steel mill.

The function of the "thermos bottle cars" was to transport white-hot molten iron from the 700-ton blast furnace at New Miami to Armco open hearth furnaces. In 1928, the Armco train was making four round trips a day.



Armco switcher 6502, date unknown

## Armco Hot Line mileage from New Miami

Miles	Location	Miles	Location
0	Middletown Jct.	8.9	North Excello
2.8	Woodsdale Jct.	9.5	Armco Jct.
3.4	Woodsdale	10.3	Armco Steel
4.4	Rockdale	11.2	Big Four
5.8	LeSourdsville		interchange
84	Excello		

By 1965, Armco operated 19 hot-metal cars, upgraded to a 200-ton capacity. Each 16-wheel unit measured 59.5-feet in length, and 13 feet 10.5 inches in height, hauling pig iron approaching 2,800 degrees.

A company publication said there were less than 700 of the unique cars in service in the country. The same source described them as "resembling an over-stuffed sausage on a spit." Earlier, a B&O magazine said "they look like land submarines."

The 900-foot Great Miami bridge near Woodsdale "required new engineering features that, so far as we know, have never been applied in bridge building," the B&O noted. P. G. Lang, the railroad's engineer of bridges, described the span's capacity as "equivalent to Cooper's E-90 loading."

Also new was the track into Armco. Lang said it included a plate girder viaduct of about 800 feet in length, plus a timber trestle of about 940 feet.

Armco's New Miami and Middletown complexes also required massive rail yards, including some special equipment.

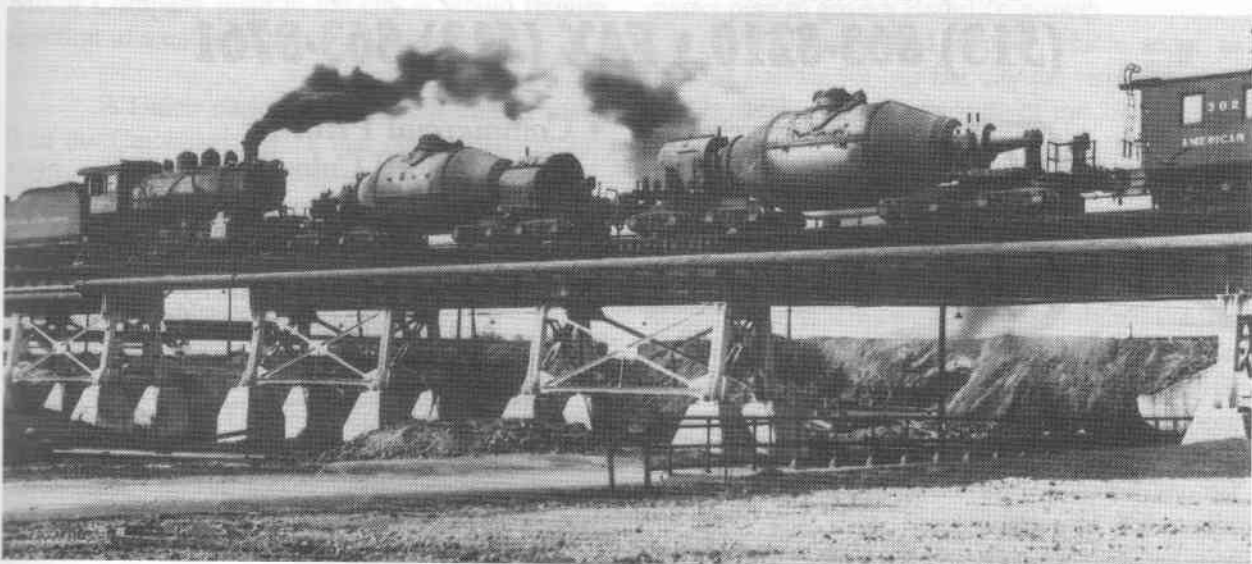
Raw materials came to the New Miami plant by rail in standard cars that were unloaded by "a patented movable car dumper, which has a capacity of 10 to 15 cars per hour," a newspaper explained in 1936.

"One feature of the car dumper is that it moves under its own power along the entire frontage of the ore yard, which is 460 feet long and 144 feet wide and has storage space for 260,000 tons of iron ore," the writer noted.

## Over-stuffed sausages on a spit or land submarines?



Above, a photo taken in about 1966 shows a diesel-powered Armco hot metal train on the bridge over the Great Miami River at Woodsdale. Below, in an earlier photo, a steam locomotive pushed two of the special cars and a caboose into Armco's Middletown plant.



## Fiery Trenton crossing crash took three lives

A spectacular collision, explosion and fire at a crossing in Trenton took the lives of three men Monday afternoon, Oct. 31, 1938. Although tragic, railroad and safety officials expressed relief that the death toll wasn't much higher, perhaps 100 or more people incinerated.

A 47-year-old truck driver from Cincinnati and two crewmen on a steam locomotive died. The Baltimore & Ohio employees were the engineer, age 55, a resident of Dayton, and the 46-year-old fireman from Hamilton, Virgil Belcher.

The site was the State Street (Ohio 73) crossing of the B&O Railroad on the east side of Trenton. There were flashing warning lights at the crossing, the busiest in the area.

The eastbound gasoline tank truck was traveling from a refinery in Hooven, Ohio, to Middletown and Dayton. The B&O's Great Lakes Limited, was northbound from Cincinnati to Detroit. It had stopped earlier in Hamilton.

When the high-speed train struck the truck about 3,000 gallons of flaming gasoline sprayed on the locomotive, tender and six passenger cars. In a moment, fire spread over an area as long as three football fields -- about 1,000 feet -- surrounding the crossing and the passenger train.

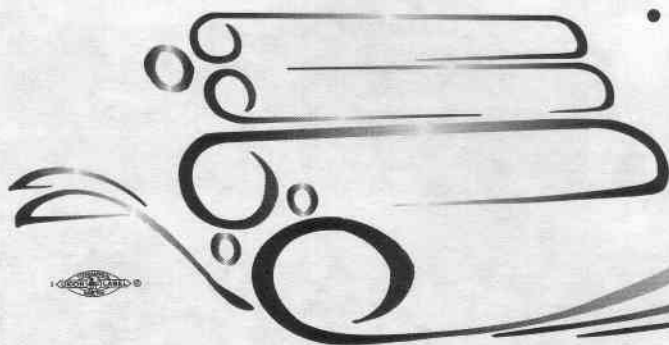
It took firemen more than 90 minutes to extinguish the blaze, which spread northeast from the crossing onto vacant land. If it had extended in other directions, it could have consumed businesses and residences.

The engineer and fireman, realizing a collision was unavoidable, jumped from the locomotive, but they didn't escape the flames. The engineer set the brakes before the crash. The heavily-damaged locomotive coasted to a stop about a quarter mile north of the crossing.

None of about 75 passengers and other crew members were injured. The all-steel bodies protected the interior. A few years earlier -- when wood coaches were still in use -- passengers would have faced the difficult choice of remaining in burning coaches or fleeing into the fire surrounding them.

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# Hamilton union station plan survived for decades

## *High Street underpass only part built*

Erection of Cincinnati Union Terminal between 1929 and 1933 rekindled a proposal for a union station in Hamilton.

Hamilton's two busy railroad depots -- separated by about six blocks -- had been built before the turn of the century. They had been considered inadequate for several decades.

The Baltimore & Ohio Depot is at South Fifth and Henry streets. The Pennsylvania Depot was on South Seventh Street near High Street.

The opening of the PRR station in 1888 aroused talk that Hamilton should have a central station, not two depots, to accommodate travelers who desired to switch trains in the city.

The one-station plan gained credence as the number of passenger trains passing through Hamilton rose to more than 70 each day.

In 1919 -- with the industrial demands of World War I and Hamilton obviously heading into a boom period -- the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce revived the union station idea. "The present station facilities would be inadequate to meet the demand which will undoubtedly arise in the future," the Journal stated.

April 1, 1919, Chamber officials met with B&O and PRR representatives at the Hamilton City Club. They agreed that Hamilton's impending growth -- spearheaded by the building of a Ford Motor Company plant in the city -- would require erection of a union station within two years.

A Union station -- on a much smaller scale than the Cincinnati edifice that opened March 31, 1933 -- was outlined in detail in Hamilton's extensive 1920 city plan (see page 86).

But nothing happened in the 1920s, and the concept seemed lost in the hustle and bustle of Hamilton's industrial expansion.

Also during the decade, Butler County roads were paved and automobiles became commonplace. Fewer people relied on the railroads and interurban lines to travel to Cincinnati, Dayton, Middletown and other nearby points.

The union station suggestion gained new momentum in 1929 when work started on the Cincinnati terminal that replaced five scattered depots. Interest faded when the Depression struck and the city had other priorities when federal relief money was handed out in the 1930s.

Looking for ways to save money, the B&O and PRR considered the possibility of combining freight and passenger stations and facilities in 1934.

"The present freight and passenger station facilities of either the Pennsylvania or B&O would accommodate the station requirements of both roads," the PRR concluded, "but their operation is such that they do not lend to a practical or economical operation for a coordination." The PRR also said "our study develops that there would be no economy in the actual station operation by any such coordination."

In 1945, the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce resurrected the possibility of a union station for B&O and Pennsy passenger trains. At that time, there were eight passengers daily on each railroad. World War II gas and tire rationing and other driving restrictions made rail travel much more practical than driving.

The proposal stayed alive for about five years, a period in which the city considered a new master plan to govern Hamilton growth.

"The antiquated depots which serve as railroad stations for our fair city are reminiscent of the Gay Nineties," an advocate of the 1949 master plan noted. "These ancient relics should be relegated to an historical museum and replaced with a creditable modern structure."

That city plan suggested a union terminal on North Fourth Street between Market and Dayton streets. That scheme would have combined the two railroad mainlines south of High Street. Tracks would have run along Fourth Street. The PRR tracks along Fifth Street would have been abandoned.

The 1949 proposal also included another old idea -- a High Street underpass for motor

vehicles to eliminate traffic problems caused by frequent trains, freight and passenger.

In the early 1950s, as the decline of passenger trains continued, talk of a union station also faded.

In the 1960s, part of the old plans captured the imagination of city leaders. That was the recommendation to combine the B&O and PRR lines through the center of Hamilton.

This time planners suggested they unite along Fifth Street, not Fourth Street. This would permit the building of a depressed High Street underpass between Fourth and Sixth streets.

The ceremonial groundbreaking for the underpass Thursday, Sept. 24, 1981, initiated the long-awaited process of curing Hamilton's No. 1 traffic headache.

For more than 64 years, civic leaders, planners and politicians periodically championed proposals to divert motor-vehicle traffic either over or under two busy railroad crossings on High Street at Fourth and Fifth streets on the eastern edge of downtown Hamilton.

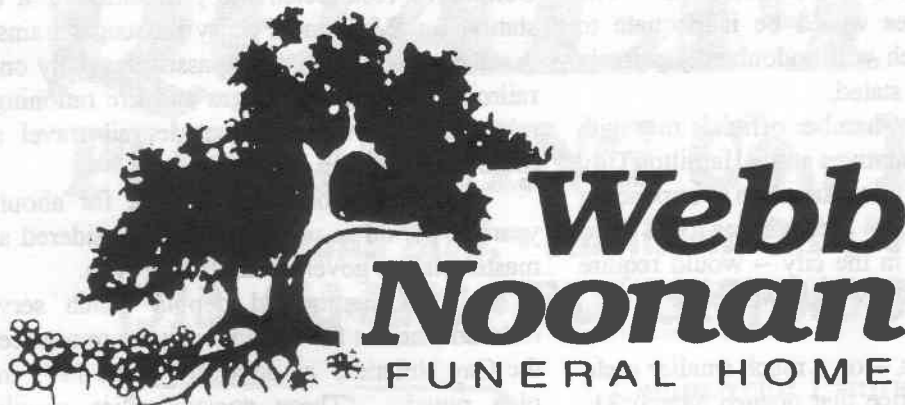
By the late 1970s, an average of more than 21,000 vehicles a day crossed the High Street tracks, which carried as many as 36 freight trains within a 24-hour period, plus several switching runs.

Part of the underpass opened nearly two years later. A ribbon-cutting ceremony was held Tuesday morning, Sept. 13, 1983, climaxed by a round trip through the depression by city officials.

At 2:25 that afternoon, eastbound traffic started through the two completed lanes while work continued on the other half of the project. Westbound High Street traffic was detoured to Dayton Street until the two other lanes were finished.

Completion of the roadway didn't mean the end of waiting for trains at the Fourth Street crossing. It wasn't until 10:15 a.m. Tuesday, Feb. 14, 1985, that a southbound Chessie train became the last to use the tracks and block High Street at Fourth Street.

The project's cost, including demolition of buildings, construction of the underpass, railroad relocation and railroad signalization, reached \$15 million.



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## Union Terminal, troop trains and POWs

# ***War-time railroad memories of a boy living in Hamilton***

The four years of World War II were full of fright and fear for a boy of six to 10 years of age. The complexities of war perplexed a 1941-1942 first grader -- whose imagination pictured the possibility of German or Japanese planes bombing Butler County or Axis troops marching down High Street in Hamilton.

Some of his scariest experiences between Dec. 7, 1941, and Sept. 2, 1945, were associated with railroads. The most fearful incidents, from a small person's perspective, were periodic trips to Union Terminal in Cincinnati to meet or send off an uncle in the U. S. Army.

The terminal was always crowded, actually extremely overcrowded. It seemed that all the people arriving and leaving, most in military uniforms, were in a hurry.

It was impossible, even for adults, to walk a straight line, or to move with much speed. The scene resembled human dodge ball played in a constantly changing maze.

When you're about four feet tall -- give or take a few inches -- weaving your way through the spacious concourse to a train gate terrified the boy.

It would be easy to become lost, or even crushed by the crowd, the boy recalls thinking each time he entered the busy terminal.

Passenger trains were constantly arriving and departing, but that had little effect on the mass of humanity. There were always too many people -- the vast majority much taller than a boy.

Whatever direction your intended course in the terminal, the number of civilian and military passengers, their family members and railroad employees appeared to multiply.

And, to a boy in elementary school, the chances for survival seemed to be lessening as the breathing room decreased.

In the boy's mind, the arrival or the departure gate always was near the end of the terminal.

Much later he learned that the rotunda at the entrance was 125 feet in length, and the concourse, the access to the trains, was 450 feet in

length. That's almost equal to the length of two football fields.

The walk through the terminal consumed hours, in the boy's mind, and was akin to navigating a labyrinth, or being forced into an endless tunnel or bottomless cave. By comparison, crossing a busy street seemed like a low-risk adventure.

Years later, when explaining his boyhood experience to younger generations, his tale was met with courteous skepticism.

The prevalent disbelief even suggested the possibility that he had exaggerated or imagined the terrorizing trips to the terminal. The doubts were erased in the 1970s when a Cincinnati newspaper published a photo taken during the 1945 Christmas season, less than four months after the end of the war.

In December 1945, the boy -- by then a husky fifth grader -- had traveled with his family to Union Terminal to welcome home an uncle he hadn't seen in more than three years. Older and wiser, he was better able, physically and mentally, to handle the human gridlock, even if the crowd seemed as large as during previous visits.

Publication of the 1945 photo verified that his war-time memories weren't embellished or fabricated. Taken from a point overlooking the rotunda, the picture showed wall-to-wall people trying to move in or out of the terminal.

Still later, in relating the "terror of the terminal" during the war years, he gradually discovered others of about the same age who recalled the station as one of the scariest encounters of childhood.

As one person explained, "I never appreciated the beauty of Union Terminal until it was threatened with destruction. As a child, I thought of it as immense and frightening."

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Riding a train during World War II was both thrilling and frightening for the same boy. There were two similar trips in 1942.

One was a daylight round-trip, between Middletown and Cleveland, on the New York Central as his father sought medical advice at the Cleveland Clinic for severe side effects from treatment of a ruptured appendix. The other adventure, via Norfolk & Western from Union Terminal, was overnight to Camp Lee in Virginia for an uncle's graduation from officer candidate school.

On all four legs of the trips, seats were on a first-come, first-serve basis until filled. At age seven, the boy was small enough to fit under the seats of two family members. That's where he slept during the overnight journey and napped on the daylight trains.

Actually, there wasn't anything else to do. With passengers greatly outnumbering seats, the aisles and other open areas were jammed with people. It was impossible to explore other cars.

On the return trip from Virginia, the discomfort multiplied within an hour or two. First there were long waits for the small restroom. Next, in the over-heated coach, the supply of paper cups at the drinking fountain ran out. Finally, there was no water in the machine for the sweaty passengers.

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Everyone in Hamilton was a train watcher during World War II. There was no choice. Trains were everywhere. Steam whistles -- sounding signals and warnings -- seemed constant.

Through freight and passenger trains delayed vehicle and pedestrian traffic at the city's numerous crossings. Adding to the annoyance were switching operations at dozens of Hamilton war industries. "Those damned trains" was a familiar adult complaint from 1941 until 1945.

For a boy aging from six to 10 years, it was exciting. The closest he came to a tank, anti-aircraft gun or a gun turret for a battleship was when he saw such evidence of war pass through Hamilton on flatcars on the B&O or Pennsylvania railroads.

If lucky, he'd see a troop train, a series of stark coaches -- some which had been in storage since an earlier world war -- filled with smiling, friendly young faces.

For a boy, it was a thrill to seem them. For adults, he noticed, it was an emotional experience. Almost everyone -- regardless of age -- waved and smiled back at the nameless soldiers, sailors and marines. Others cheered.

For some adults, the troop train brought tears as they thought of loved ones possibly riding a similar train to an uncertain future, or those who wouldn't return home via the rails.

Some troop trains stopped in Hamilton, usually to take on coal and water for the steam locomotive. Others also paused for pre-arranged deliveries of food and beverage. Often there were appreciative people with cans or boxes of homemade candies, cookies and confections for the passengers.

On the other extreme were occasional prisoner of war trains.

According to the boy's memory, every POW train was westbound, and they stopped along Sycamore Street between South Second and South Fourth streets. Much later, the boy would discover that they had been headed over the B&O line through Indianapolis to POW compounds to the west, including Camp Butler at Springfield, Ill.

There were no cheers for the German prisoners when their trains halted in Hamilton. Instead, the atmosphere was somber and relatively quiet, except for train noises.

Local people who somehow learned of the unscheduled arrivals came to stare at the enemy. Little was said. No one tried to approach the cars.

Mostly by watching movie newsreels and listening to the radio, the boy expected to see something of a cross between an indestructible Superman and a blood-thirsty Count Dracula.

Instead, Hitler's soldiers looked human. Some even smiled, a few waved to the curious Hamiltonians who gathered on sidewalks along the tracks.

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In retrospect, in adulthood the boy realized that much of what he understood then about World War II depended on his 1941-1945 railroad experiences and observations.

On his train trips and at Hamilton depots and Cincinnati Union Terminal, he witnessed the full range of emotions, from tearful sendoffs to happy homecomings.

Also at the Hamilton depots, he marveled at a system that loaded and unloaded from every passenger train dozens of bags of mail, most of it to and from men and women in the armed services. Often an arriving pouch contained a V-Mail from his uncle in North Africa and later Italy.