

# Everett Hugh Woodbury



Some histories say Bertha May Curtis was adopted by Thomas Ward Curtis and Mary Ann (Day) Curtis. Maine State Vital Records record that on June 15, 1896, George Hugh Woodbury, age 23, married Bertha Miller, age 17. Miller was used here as her surname at birth, but no record of Miller ancestors exists. Their son, Everett Hugh Woodbury (1899-1945), was my grandfather.

Bertha and George were divorced in 1914 *after* she had married Fred Chase Cochrane (1889-1943), that marriage taking place in 1913 according to records in Kennebec County, Maine. For many years after her son, Everett, died in 1945, though, Bertha remained in touch with her daughter-in-law, Clarice, my grandmother. I have several examples of Bertha's distinctive handwriting in letters and on the fronts or backs of some photographs, and I have at least one picture of her.

Bertha and George also had a daughter, Marion Eva Woodbury (1903-1979), who married Franklin Clyde Cooper in 1923.

George Woodbury went on to marry Nellie Maude Sanborn Tuttle, and they had a son, Walter Woodbury, whom I never met. Bertha Miller/Curtis Woodbury Cochrane died an indigent in Amersbury, Massachusetts, in 1955.

*This chapter concerns the death of my grandfather, Everett Hugh Woodbury, in a spectacular accident at a railroad crossing in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1945.*

*The first newspaper clipping below is transcribed verbatim (with errors) from a long, two-part newspaper story and is followed by a transcription of a separate short clipping. No date appears on either clipping nor identity of the newspaper that is the source of either.*

*According to family history, Everett Woodbury's death occurred around 13 March 1945. The Lowell Sun clipping at the very bottom substantiates that it took place 21 March 1945.*

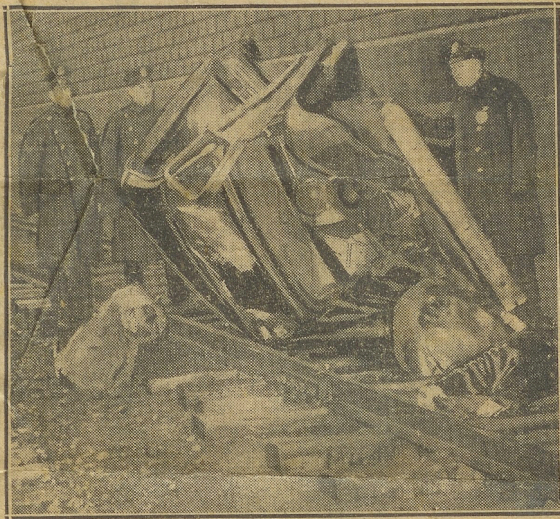
*(Can anyone tell me the road number of the Boston & Maine locomotive that struck my grandfather's truck?)*



*George Woodbury holding me on June 1, 1951, in front of his house in Belgrade, Maine*

# DIES AS TRAIN WRECKS TRUCK

Driver Is Killed as Crossing Gates  
Are Raised by Error and Traffic  
Proceeds in Path of Express



CRUMBLIED BY EXPRESS TRAIN

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[headline]

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[photo caption]

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His truck, sixth in line of a vehicular stream waved by accident across the grade crossing by Gate-Tender Bernard J. Gibbons, 60, of 22 Beech st., Cambridge, took the full impact of the speeding engine of the "Minute Man" on an express run from Chicago to Boston and was scattered into hundreds of

twisted pieces of metal and carried for nearly a half mile along the tracks.

Only by a fraction of an inch did a passenger car in which three persons were riding escape a similar fate. The unidentified driver managed to speed up his motor and pull into a zone of safety just before the express train came hurtling down the tracks on its fatal trip. A passenger car directly in back of Woodbury's truck managed to come to a stop a bare six inches from the train's path.

But the heavy, two-ton coal truck, caught directly in the centre tracks of the crossing was smashed to bits. The back end was tossed feather-like to the



eastbound tracks, 20 feet away, and bit by bit the rest of the battered truck was ripped and smashed along the half-mile stretch as the speeding train ground to a halt some 800 yards away from the crossing.

The driver was tossed from his cab to the cowcatcher and became wedged under the front end of the train's engine. It required an emergency crew nearly 30 minutes to cut him free, but doctors said he had died the instant the truck was smashed at the crossing by the speeding train.

The fatal accident, first on that grade crossing in more than two decades, was caused when the gatetender, Bernard Gibbons, raised the bars at the edge of the six-train tracks and signaled on a double line of automobile and truck traffic that had been halted only a few minutes before, at 5:56 p.m. to allow two trains, a westbound local and an eastbound freight train to proceed over the crossing.

The freight pulled suddenly into a siding just before it reached the Sherman st. crossing, Gibbons said, and the local train steamed slowly over the crossing and pulled up at a signal station where the conductor got off and entered the building to make a telephone report.

Believing the rail traffic ended, Gibbons said he raised the bars and signalled the trains [*original article says "trains" but clearly meant "traffic"*] over the crossing. "I became confused" he said, "I didn't hear the signal of the approaching express train. It just appeared . . . suddenly . . . and before I could lower the bars again the train was bearing down on the column of cars."

Gibbons said he was rooted to the spot and didn't see the fatal crash. "All I saw," he murmured, "was the train and the slowly moving line of vehicles. Then I heard a crash . . . I don't remember anything else."

### **Escapes Death**

By a strange quirk of fate Woodbury's helper, Michael Leahy of 11 Montgomery st., North Cambridge, nephew of Police Chief Timothy F. Leahy, escaped his driver's fate because he left the truck to accept a ride home from a friend only a few minutes before the crash.

Leahy, who usually rides to the company's garage on Richdale ave., only a few hundred yards from the accident scene, last night got off the truck at the corner of Rindge ave. and Sherman st. and waved his co-worker a "good night – see you tomorrow."

Police found three pairs of rubbers strewn along the tracks and believing the Leahy was also a victim of the crash searched the scene for more than three hours trying to find a trace of him. He collapsed on learning the fate of his driver.

A witness to the fatal crash was 10-year-old Albert Girouard of 134 Sherman st., whose house is directly across from the grade crossing. Albert told police he was sitting by his bedroom window looking over the tracks when the crash happened.

"I saw the bars go down and saw a long line of traffic halt," he said, "then I saw the bars go up again, and just at that minute I saw the 'Minute Man' approaching. I tried to shout, but it was no good. Five of the cars got over all right. The truck was caught right in the middle of the crossing and was hit directly on the cab. Half the truck was split apart and dumped to the side. I watched in horror as the rest of the truck was carried along the rails, dropping off bit by bit, until the engine was dropped near the Walden st. bridge."

Everett Hugh Woodbury, the victim, was identified at Watson's Mortuary,

Cambridge, by his employer. He was a native of Winthrop, Me., and had resided in Bangor, Me., for many years before coming to Cambridge to work two years ago. His wife still resides in Bangor. A son, Donald, is in the navy serving aboard a ship in the Pacific.

## TRUCK DRIVER DIES AS TRAIN HITS AUTO

Continued From First Page

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[From another clipping:]

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[From the *Lowell Sun*, March 22, 1945:]



### Killed as Gates Open Accidentally

CAMBRIDGE, March 22. (UP) — When a gate tender at a Cambridge crossing accidentally raised the gates last night, Everett H. Woodbury, 46, Cambridge truck driver, drove his coal truck into the path of a passenger train and was killed.

[End of quoted newspaper clippings.]

### *notes on the above*

I only found the foregoing lengthy article and smaller clippings in late 2003, when I was 53 years old, in some things my late father left behind, five years after his passing in 1998.

Nobody talked about my grandfather when I was a kid. I knew that he had left my grandmother in Livermore Falls, Maine, with five children, (Dad never mentioned living in Bangor), and he had worked in Cambridge during the war. It was clear that my grandmother resented him, and I thought it was for his dying that she was angry. I knew that he had been killed by a train somewhere, and somewhere along the way I was led to believe that my grandmother suspected he might have committed suicide-by-train.

That's all I had ever gleaned, and once I was grown I didn't inquire further. I had no idea that these newspaper clippings existed. In the mid-1990s, after Clarice, our grandmother, was gone, one of my cousins, Dan Kinney, began researching the family tree, tracing the wives of my father's brother, Donald, and turning up some missing first cousins in Indiana, whom Dan brought to Maine for a 1996 family reunion. But there was still no talk of Hugh, (Everett Hugh), our grandfather. Then my father died in 1998, and many of his old papers came to me. These newspaper clippings came from that collection.

In March, 2004, when I had a stopover in Boston while traveling alone to someplace farther, I used the information in the article about Hugh's death and took a taxi to find the railroad crossing in Cambridge described in the article. It's a phenomenon that won't happen often in anyone's lifetime; only a few blocks from the Harvard University campus, the neighborhood was virtually unchanged in 60 years.



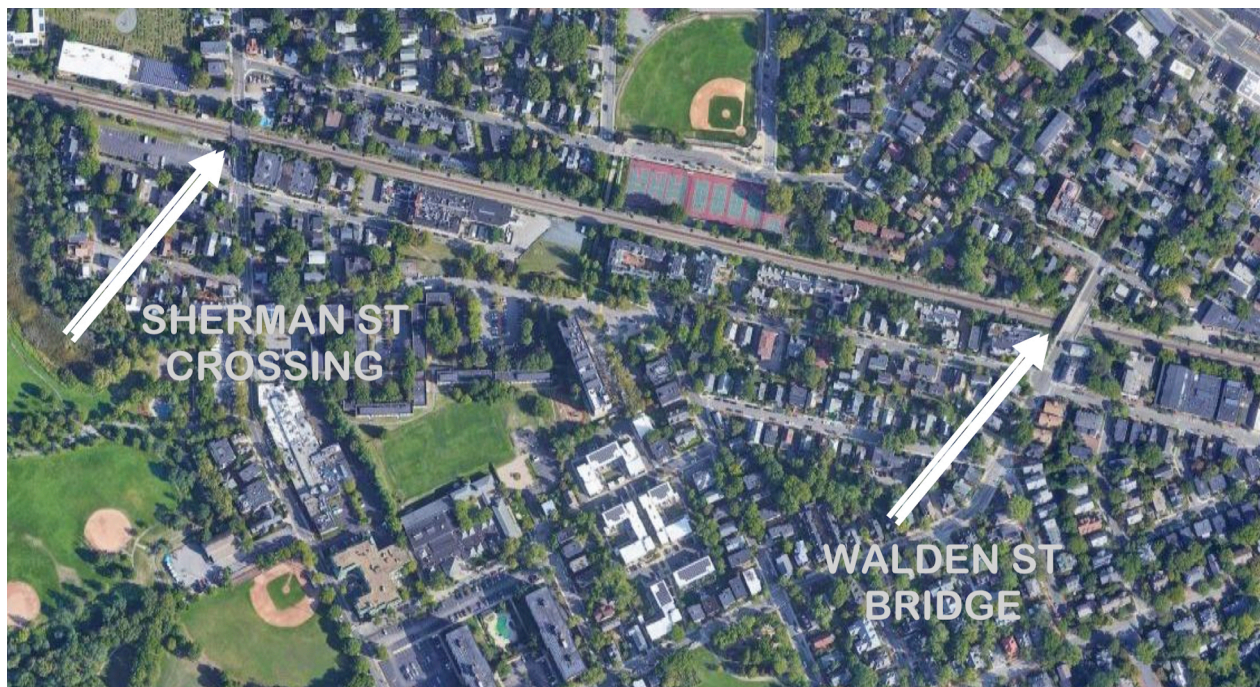
*Hugh, probably high school photo*



*Hugh pouring from a bottle to a glass  
at the Livermore Falls Record Foundry*

The taxi driver found Walden Street first and we crossed the short, high bridge over the tracks under which Hugh's truck cab came to rest.

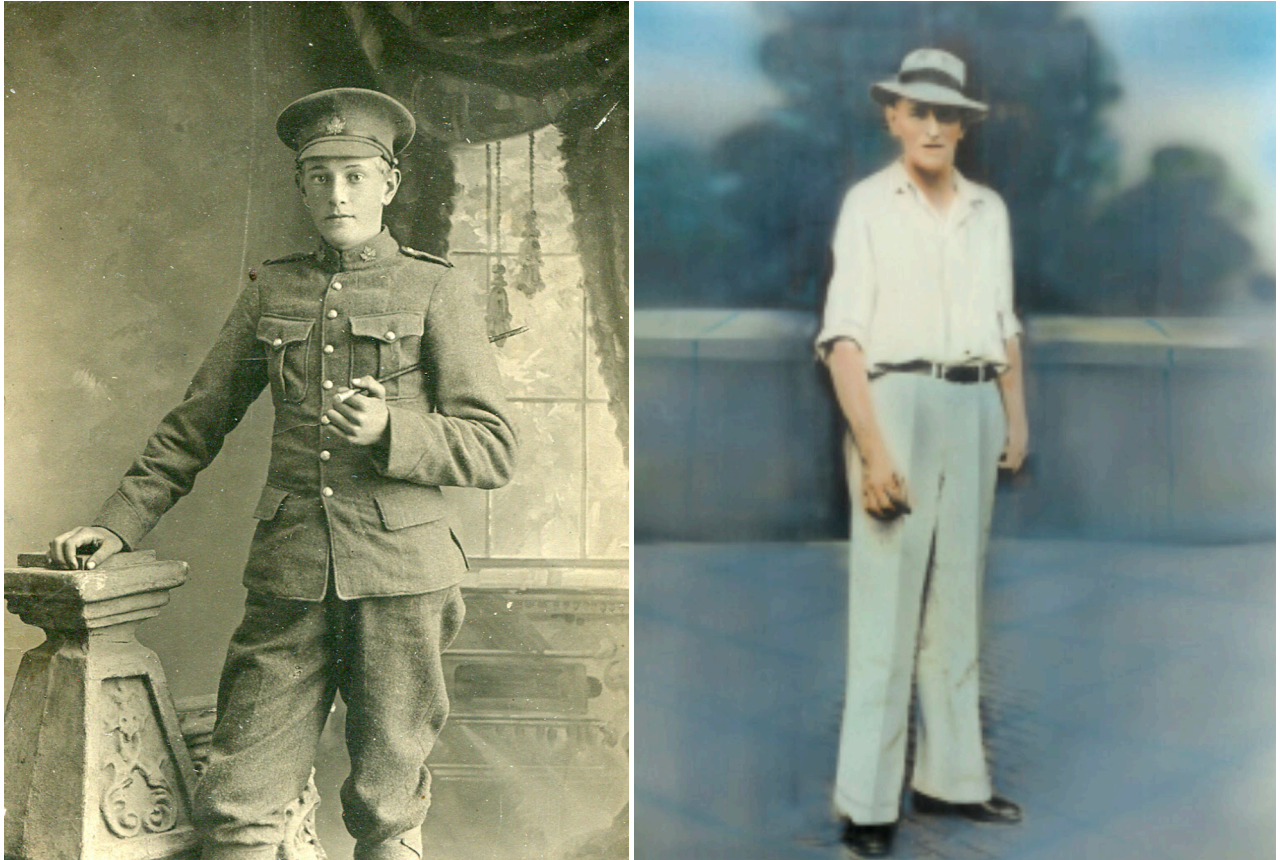
Then the taxi driver circled around and connected with Sherman Street. He waited for me while I explored the crossing and studied the site. Two sets of tracks still cross Sherman Street. Even though it was after dark, thanks to the streetlights the Walden Street bridge was clearly visible a half mile away, along with the brick building whose side appears in the newspaper photo. The houses around the crossing are all at least 60 years old and would have been the ones standing at the time of the wreck. Both Sherman Street and Walden Street are narrow, and the bridge is a short (60 to 80 foot) gondola-style bridge that very likely was the one there at the time of the wreck. Since the long article isn't dated (and the newspaper identification is missing), I mistakenly believed that the clipping was from 1944, so I thought I was standing on the site on about the 60th anniversary of the accident. That anniversary, in fact, came a year after I was there.



In the summer of 2004, using the internet, I researched the name Albert Girouard, the 10-year-old witness to the accident, and found two listings in Massachusetts by that name.



I wrote to both. I received one reply, from a woman responding for one of the two gentlemen but sent from a third address, so I don't know which one she represented, explaining that he was not the one in the article. I never heard from the other.



*Hugh as a WWI recruit (Canada) and in a later colorized photo*

Then, in Dan Kinney's genealogy, I discovered that I was off by a year in Hugh's date of death. I wrote to one aunt, my father's sister, Virginia, who lived in New Sharon, and she agreed that we should meet some day to talk, but she was perpetually busy and so we procrastinated — until she suddenly died in 2009. I've also found a certificate of age, signed in 1919 by Hugh's mother, (then Bertha Cochrane), on which she attests that his name is Hugh Everett Woodbury. It's pretty clear everywhere else that Everett is his true first name and that he preferred to go by Hugh.

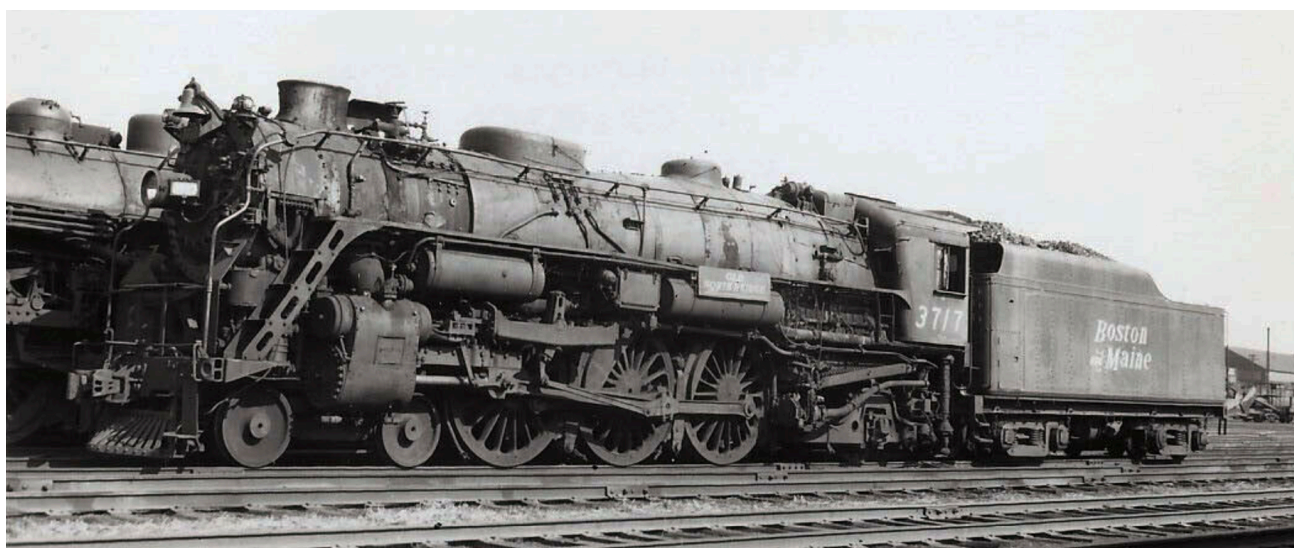
Since the United States remained neutral in World War I, until declaring war on Germany in April, 1917, Canada, already fighting on behalf of Great Britain, recruited aggressively in this country, seeking volunteers for its Canadian Expeditionary Force's American Legion, which by the end of the war consisted of five battalions. Hugh enlisted in the 237th Overseas Infantry Battalion, which was formed from recruits in New Brunswick and eastern Canada. His photo, posing in uniform, is in a frame labeled for a studio in Sussex, New Brunswick. The "American Legion" enlisted 2,746 U.S. citizens from October 30, 1915, until the last of its battalions disbanded on March 16, 1917. I have no record for when Hugh joined, nor of his motivation, nor whether he was sent to Europe, but he was not yet 18 when it was disbanded. The war ended with the Armistice of November 11, 1918.

I don't want to give the impression that my grandfather, Hugh, was a good parent and a good husband. With all the work of raising five children entirely on her shoulders, though — and I believe that was the case, my grandmother may have been an unpleasant wife. I do know, from documents and letters, that she divorced him in 1936 due to variations on the theme of negligence, abuse, cruelty, and infidelity.

With their father no longer in the role of parent to his five children, the youngest barely six years old at the time of the divorce, it's not a wonder to me that Clarice had an extremely hard time managing their three boys, Donald, Victor, and Wesley (whose story follows), not to mention any trouble she may have had with the girls, Dorothy and Virginia.

### *the coincidence*

But I haven't explained yet what, to me, is the most intriguing part of this story.



*B&M "Pacific" number 3717 in 1937, wheel arrangement 4-6-2*

The Minute Man Express was a Boston & Maine passenger train. The B&M had 25 modern "Berkshire" class steam locomotives (wheel arrangement 2-8-4) and ten modern "Pacific" class steam engines (wheel arrangement 4-6-2) on the roster at the time of the accident, all built by Lima Locomotive Works in Ohio. It is a fact that it was one of the ten "Pacific" engines which struck my grandfather's coal truck, and I would certainly like to find out which one, because four years after *his* father was killed, *my* father, by then two years out of the Coast Guard, traveled from Maine to Florida with a friend. There he met a young school teacher on the beach in Sarasota. Within a few months they were married, and then I was born there (in 1950). The young teacher, my mother, was from Lima, Ohio.

When I was a year and a half old and had been joined by a sister, Ann, our parents moved us to Maine to live briefly with our grandmother, Hugh's former wife, then to Lima, where my siblings and I grew up. Upon arriving in Lima, my father's first job was at Lima Locomotive Works, which was still building locomotives but under the name Baldwin-Lima-Hamilton Corporation. (Baldwin, another builder of locomotives, had merged with Lima.) I have a trove of photos and documents from there, some of which Dad acquired on the job and continued collecting and some that I have collected throughout my lifetime.

Dad also started me down the lifelong ambition to build a respectable model railroad.



Our first joint effort was a card-tabletop HO “layout” which he started when I was about five years old, set up in my parents’ bedroom. I recall sneaking into their room, at about age six, to run it myself, and I still have the plastic shell of a Burlington diesel, partially melted on top, evidence that I had played with the train on that little card table and failed to shut it down completely afterward. (I was later caught but forgiven.) He collected several model railroad pieces as I was growing up in Lima, all of which I still own, and while I was still young we built a large flat layout on two sheets of plywood laid up in an L-shape in the basement. In the meantime we dabbled in Lionel as well.

My father’s source for most HO equipment was Ralph Molder, owner of Molder’s Brake and Spring in Lima. At times, I visited the huge layout in Ralph’s basement. Does anyone else from Lima remember that shop or that model railroad?

When I was an older teenager, we finally returned to Maine. I finished high school in Farmington, (Sandy River & Rangeley Lakes country, with plenty of evidence still around then), left for college and the Army (ask me later about living in Monterey for a year just before John Allen died), and then came home, married Beth in 1975, had children, and dreamed of building the ultimate layout.

In 2000, we moved to our present home, which has the basement space I need, and which is almost completely cleared of the residue from moving. I’m forcing other things to allow me the time to secure and clear the area. And it was in the process of clearing the space that I turned up the newspaper clippings and photos which gave rise to most of the chapters in this book.

So I wonder: Did my father, early on, learn something about the locomotive that had struck his father? Did he then make an association with the girl on the beach and conclude that there was some “destiny” involved? Even if not – and yet what a profound coincidence that he found her — did his interest in model railroading somehow grow out of a morbid fascination with his father’s death?

My mother, still living when I discovered all of this information, didn’t know. None of us will now know what he knew or thought. But I would be most pleased of all to find, in someone’s recollection or in a record of that accident, the number on the side of that locomotive involved in that wreck. I have a list of all the nearly 7,000 locomotives built in Lima, what railroad purchased each one, the road numbers, and other specs. I have emailed and received replies from a couple of historians. One gentleman with the B&M Historical Society said it was either number 3717, 3718, or 3719 that was pulling that train. Another B&M historian says that number 3717 was consistently assigned to that run into Boston in 1945. Those numbers are among the ten Pacific-type (4-6-2) locomotives, numbers 3710 – 3719, built by Lima for high-speed passenger service on the B&M.

It is a further irony that, in the summer of 1976, I worked at the Museum of Science in Boston, and number 3713 was on static display in front of the museum at that time, the only one of that series not scrapped. (I knew it, of course, as a Lima locomotive then, but didn’t yet associate it with anything so personal.) As of 2023, Boston & Maine #3713 is being restored to service at the Steamtown National Historical Park in Scranton, Pennsylvania.

I also wrote to the current *Cambridge Chronicle* and the City of Cambridge asking about records of the Third District Court of East Cambridge, to see whether there might be identification of the number of that locomotive. The City kindly replied that the records were unavailable, but they did send me additional glossy photos of the twisted cab of the coal truck, taken the next day after it had been hauled off the tracks.

There this story rests, and so, it seems, must I.