

URTX #37004



Type: Refrigerator Car

Built: 1948

Length – 43' 5"

Width – 10' 1"

Height – 13' 10"

Weight – 61,500 lbs.



Jeremy Heilman photo

During the mid-1800s, the railroad revolutionized how transportation and shipping in America was handled. During the latter part of the 19th century, shipping livestock via rail to stockyards in cities was a revolutionary idea, sparking a growth in the meat industry. It soon became evident, however, that meat products could only be sold to the cities and communities close to the stockyards, due to warm temperatures and the meat spoiling.

The idea of refrigerated boxcars first came around 1880 with the idea that ice would be put on top of products inside. By the early 1900s, "reefer" cars were a common sight on American freight trains. Cars had ice bunkers at the ends of the car, with the perishable items placed inside the center compartment. Blocks of ice (weighing anywhere between 200 and 400 lbs.) were dropped into the bunkers of the car from small doors in the roof. These blocks were cut out of frozen lakes by ice companies and then brought to re-icing stations along the rail line, located every few hundred miles in major rail yards.



It was not only meat that was brought to market via reefer cars, but also vegetables, fruit, and flowers. Perishable foods and products could be brought across America for the first time, and along with preservatives and canning, fresh food from anywhere in the world can be enjoyed at any time of year, anywhere.

During the mid-1900s, the Union Refrigeration Transit Company owned a large percentage of the nation's new all-steel reefer cars, which were better insulated and could operate for longer distances. The URTX corporation often leased out these reefer cars to railroads across the country, and the cars often bore these roads' logos and lettering, but bore the URTX reporting mark.

The Milwaukee Road operated hundreds of steel URTX reefers across its massive Pacific-Indiana rail network. Car 37004 was a standard design for the time, but was quickly phased out in the 1970s due to improving technology and automated refrigerator systems in new, larger cars.

URTX went out of the railcar business in 1971, and donated several reefer cars to the East Troy Railroad Museum, along with office equipment and tools. Most of the reefer cars were sold to the Illinois Railway Museum, but 37004 remained at ETRM. It is currently used for parts storage and is inoperable awaiting restoration.

