

What are these MDT reefers and who owned them?

Some people have said that they have not heard of MDT reefers, our 2013 Division 7 car project. The Merchants Despatch Transportation Co., originated in 1855 with a connection to the American Express Company, guaranteeing delivery of perishable freight shipments within stated times. Initially the company's rolling stock was boxcars, but in 1878, many wooden ice bunker refrigerator cars were included. Within a few years, the MDTC fleet was almost entirely refrigerator cars, maintained, and many first built, at the company's sprawling Despatch Shops in East Rochester, New York.

Through much of its history, MDTC leased cars to railroads other than New York Central, and to a variety of private shippers, as well as managing its own fleet of thousands of cars. In the 1920's, reefers were built for the CCC&St.L, Rutland, and Nickel Plate Road. In the 1930's, ice bunker reefers were leased to the Reading, Lehigh Valley, CCC&St.L Michigan Central, and New York Central, as well as to more than 60 private companies, including Procter & Gamble. Between 1946 and 1953, reefers were leased to the NYCS, Bangor & Aroostook, and the DL&W.

MDTC operated 11,284 reefers in service in 1945, decreasing to 8,956 by 1953, and then increasing to 10,112 by 1965, reflecting the larger numbers of RBX cars. By the 1950's, the MDTC fleet also included insulated boxcars, auto-racks and other specialty cars, enabling the company to survive both Penn Central and Conrail mergers. However, MDTC reached the end of the line following the Conrail split between CSX and NS, going out of business in 2000.

The above information was taken from "Merchants Dispatch – Its history and Equipment" by Roger C. Hinman, 2011. Wooden reefers of lot 673, nos. 22000-22499, were built in 1927, and repainted by the East Rochester Shops in 1936. The 1943 ORER shows 2702 cars of 2,750 in series 20000-22749 in operation, and by 1953, 50 cars were still in service. Steel reefers of lot 742, nos. 6000-6499, were built in 1937 by MDT's East Rochester Shops. The 1943 ORER shows 1,117 steel cars of 2000 in series 6,000-7999 operating. By 1953, 883 cars remained in service.

Jim MacKnight