



## Mississippi Valley Public Service (MVPS) Car 56

Seventy-six years after it last carried passengers, and after a nomadic Wisconsin afterlife that took it from La Crosse, to Waukesha, to East Troy and to the Port Washington area, Mississippi Valley Public Service car 56 returned to East Troy in 2022 for restoration and operation.

Car 56 is a 46-seat, 19-ton streetcar, one of seven identical cars (numbered 51-57) manufactured by the St. Louis Car Company in 1916 for the Wisconsin Railway, Light & Power Company, which operated the streetcar systems in La Crosse, WI and across the Mississippi River in Winona, MN. In 1926, the company changed its name to the Mississippi Valley Public Service Company.

At its peak, the La Crosse streetcar system had three routes, which covered much of the city and its north side. However, by the mid-1930s, only one route – the North Side Line – remained. Cars 51-57 were relatively modern and spacious for their time, and they were the only streetcars still being operated when the North Side Line was replaced with buses on November 11, 1945.

Three days after their retirement, the electrical equipment and trucks were removed from the cars, and six of the seven were sold to a local farmer for \$25 each. For the next 20 years, the farmer, and later his son, used them as storage sheds and for other farm purposes. “At least two of the cars became homes for peacocks and pheasants which my father raised. The remaining cars were used to store farm equipment and other material,” the farmer’s son recalled in a 1985 interview.

By 1965, the cars’ roofs had failed, and five of the six were scrapped. Car 56, however, remained at the farm until a streetcar fan from Milwaukee bought it in 1970, intending to restore it. Unfortunately, the fan died before much work took place, and his family donated the car to the East Troy Railroad Museum. A few years later, the Museum traded the car to one of its former volunteers, who planned to continue the restoration at his home near Port Washington, but the demands of his business, and later his failing health, kept him from resuming the work.

In 2020, a Museum volunteer remembered the car and re-connected with the former volunteer, who donated the car back to the Museum in 2022. Although the car was stored outdoors under tarps for 20 years, inspections showed that the car is complete and restorable, with the frame and steel sides solid and in good condition. Today the car is tucked away in one of the East Troy Railroad Museum’s storage barns, waiting its turn in the restoration line.

Fundraising for the project has already begun.

## Mississippi Valley Public Service (MVPS) Car 56



MVPS 56 at La Crosse, July 19, 1940 (Victor Vinzent DuBrutz photo, Bob Harris collection).

### Vital Statistics:

Length – 42' 0"  
Width – 8' 9"  
Height – 11' 3.5"  
Weight – 38,900 lbs.  
Construction – Steel  
Gauge – Standard (4' 8.5")  
Roof Type – AR  
Ended – Double-Ended

Seats – 46 passengers  
#Wheels/Conf. – 8 (B-B)  
Trucks – St. Louis 106  
Brakes – Straight Air  
Motors – WH 307CV (2)  
Control – K-51A  
Voltage – 600 VDC

### Ownership History:

Wisconsin Railway, Light & Power #56 – 1916-1926  
Mississippi Valley Public Service #56 – 1926-1945  
Private owner – 1945-1985  
East Troy Railroad Museum – 1985-1989  
Private owner – 1989-2022  
East Troy Railroad Museum – 2022-present

East Troy Railroad Museum  
P.O. Box 943  
East Troy, WI 53120  
(262) 642-3263  
[www.easttroyrr.org](http://www.easttroyrr.org)