

The Guardian, Charlottetown, Mon., Jan. 25, 1971

ACROSS THE ISLAND

Island Storm Stories Colorful, Interesting

By NEIL A. MATHESON

SNOW STORM stories are really popular, I've found over the years. But this winter's snow seems to have added extra interest.

I have some further stories this week, thanks again to you good people who are willing to share your experiences with me for this column.

Two main stories come from H.E. Moore, a retired railroader who lives at 158 Weymouth Street, and B. Frank Tinney, formerly a senior research officer at the Experimental Farm, as it was known in those days.

Understandably Mr. Moore's story is about railroading, in this case snow fighting. With 18 years of service as locomotive fireman and engineer, he has many memories. Here are some of those he shared with me:

"I can recall the winter of 1905 when I was going to school, old West Kent, some of us would hurry home from school, don snow shoes and go out to the track between the Firtzroy Street crossing and what is now the Experimental Farm road crossing, to watch locomotives with snow plow, trying to open the track. It took them several days to get from the station to that point."

Experience Recalled In 1923

CONTINUING MR. MOORE recalls: That was a boyhood experience but Mr. Moore also recalls some of his own experiences when he was helping to open the track during the bad winter of 1923.

"On February 14, he says, "I left Charlottetown on an extra train, my fireman was Frank Puncher, the trainmen were William Davey, conductor, Fay Glover and John MacLaughlan. (Mr. Glover was Mrs. Matheson's brother). Mr. Moore notes that all three are deceased.

After arrival in Borden they "somehow got shifted from an extra train to a regular train, Nos. 211 and 212, between Borden and Tignish. We were on that run for several trips and arrived in Borden on Saturday, March 3rd."

Beautiful Sun, Looked Like Spring

MR. MOORE recalls that "March 4, Sunday, was a beautiful spring day, sun shining, water running and everyone thought spring had really come.

"We left Borden on Monday, March 5th, and finally arrived in Tignish on March 22nd, 17 days later.

By Monday evening they had reached O'Leary. "As we had considerable train trouble between Coleman and O'Leary", Mr. Moore recalls and "knowing that the worst snow was ahead of us, and it was storming badly, we decided to tie up there (at O'Leary) for the night.

“It stormed more or less for several days, with the result it was a week before we got away from there. We then made Piusville and were there for a few days, then Elmsdale and a couple of days there, then Alberton. We were there overnight and the following day made Tignish, March 22nd.”

Stuck On Wellington Hill

THEIR TROUBLES were still not over. They left Tignish the next day and got as far as Wellington Hill, got stuck there and remained there for the night. They got shoveled out and finally got to Summerside on the 24th.

“We then made several trips on the regular train and finally got back to Charlottetown on April 2nd.”

There are many individual storm dates that are interesting. I'll tell you about them later.

B. Frank Tinney, Charlottetown recalls that the really big storm in that year started on February 6.

He recalls that he and his father took a fat steer to Bob Silliphant's place in Hunter River on February 6, and the storm started that night. “We couldn't have taken the animals for well over a month”, he recalls had we not gotten him delivered that day. Mr. Silliphant was a drover. The Tinneys then lived on the Junction Road, known now as Pleasant Valley.

“I recall”, Mr. Tinney adds “that at that time practically every able bodied young man in the country was shoveling snow for about six weeks. It was a good way to make some money.

Meeting Snow Fighters Recalled

“I SEEM to recall that it was more than a month before they got a train from Charlottetown to Summerside right through,” he said. “They were working from both ends.” Mr. Tinney also recalls the meeting of the two snow-fighting crews and the two trains – one from Charlottetown, the other from the West – met about three-quarters of a mile on the Charlottetown side of Fredericton.

And he still can recall the sound of the two crews shouting ‘Hellos’ to each other as they met. The site would be about one and one-half miles from Frank's home, but the Tinneys could hear the sound across the snow clearly.

All along that line there was no such thing as seeing a telephone or telegraph pole, or anything like that. They were buried in snow.

‘Passing Places’ On Sides Of Roads

HE RECALLS also that people breaking the roads had to shovel “passing places” along the road. When you were driving in your sleighs you had to watch ahead and see that nobody was coming – else you had to pull off in one of those “passing places”.

There were two of these places along our farm, Mr. Tinney recalls. “If you didn't pull into one of these places, you would have to back up to one, you just couldn't turn around.”

The Tinney farmyard was protected from the North by a hardwood grove, so the snow drifted through the grove and settled on the lee side of it.

They had a “dug well” at Tinneys as most farm homes had in those days. The well was covered by a wooden building, but it was completely buried by the storm. The barns were close to 100 feet away and they had to carry water in pails to the animals.

First they had tried to shovel a path to the well, but the continuing storm (there was either snow or wind, or both) would quickly fill in the paths. There would be a straight six to seven feet of snow in the yard.

They’d fill the buckets at the well, carry them up the face of the snow bank, then down to the ground level as they reached the stable. The storm in all must have lasted five or six weeks, Mr. Tinney estimates.

Tunnel To House, Covers Well

“THE WELL was covered with a house, but the whole thing was completely covered over – there must have been nine to 10 feet of snow in that bank – so we dug 17 to 18 feet of tunnel into the well. We’d put an old door against the tunnel hole at night so it wouldn’t fill with snow.

“Eventually we had to get to the woods to get fuel. It would only be at the edge of the woods, we could not get into the deep woods,” Mr. Tinney recalls.

“ I recall the next winter cutting perhaps seven feet off stumps we had cut as short as we could the previous winter.”

Howard Rackham lived in Fredericton at the time. Mail for Elliots was put off the train in Fredericton and had to be taken to Elliots. Mr. Rackham had a big dog which he hitched to a hand sleigh and he carried the mail in this way. The “mail by dog sled” was the talk of the country at the time.

Mr Tinney also recalls hearing about snow fighters having sharp pointed iron or steel rods about 25 feet long they used in an effort to find the railway track before they started to dig for the track.

In Watt’s cutting and between Hunter River and Clyde River there were cuttings in which they had seven “lifts”. There would be several people shoveling from the track level until they would finally get the snow out of the cuttings and away from the face at the top.

My space is nearly gone, I fear, and I still have some really good stories left untold. That’s for the future.