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## ACROSS THE ISLAND

### Rotary Opened Rail Line In '23

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I TALKED here this week with Walter O'Brien about the 10 day battle staged by the Island's first rotary plow to clear the Borden-Charlottetown-Summerside line in March 1923. That was the winter of the Big Snow - a story I wrote on it two years ago started this column on the yesteryear trend - and wedge plows from the Island augmented with a "bucking plow" from the mainland had failed to make much impression on the mountainous drifts. So a huge rotary was sent here to clear the rail line.

The plow was good, but there were complications. The thing was so wide, the crew had to stop at almost every siding and station to strip protruding parts off it, and then bolt them back on again when the station was passed. In some cases, Walter tells me, the shears - they were about two feet square - had to be removed, but at others the entire side plate - it was 10 to 12 feet long and one and one-half feet wide - had to be taken off, and this kept several men busy for about one and one-half hours, as they had to remove the bolts and carry the big wing beyond the station where it would be bolted back to the plow. A few stations had enough clearance to let the plow pass without any stripping.

IT WAS a terribly cold job with no heat inside the plow, except when one could get close to the steam boiler in the middle - and the snow and cold winds beat in through open spots. The snow drifting in from the rotors was terrible, Mr. O'Brien told me, and the workmen stood at times in snow half-way to the knees.

Others taken on the plow at Borden were Everett Nicholson and Russel Deighan. The man in charge, Mr. MacPherson and the rest of the men - there were three engines from Moncton - were from the mainland. I was unable to get MacPherson's first name, but he was in charge of the widening of the railway east of Charlottetown later, I am told.

### Snow Shovelled Into Engines

THE WATER in the engines was used up quickly in the heavy going, and 18 men were hired to shovel snow into the three engines as they walked along the tops of the banks which towered high above the snorting steam monsters. They kept shovelling as needed until the snowfighters reached Summerside, he recalls.

"We ate in the cook car and slept when we had a chance, with our clothes on, at times we'd take turns relieving the firemen and the firemen would spell the engine drivers so they could get food and rest." It was a long, grim wearisome battle, he recalls.

“TEN DAYS after leaving Borden we removed the side plates of the Rotary plow at St. Dunstan’s for the last time,” he recalls. They left the plow in Charlottetown and returned to Borden the next day by train.

Scores, and at times hundreds of people lined the top of the huge banks to watch the rotary plow in action. An unusually large crowd poured out of the Kensington churches at noon one Sunday to stare at the monster - it was about two freight cars long - but they got almost covered with snow when the huge rotors bit into the banks as the plow lurched ahead.

LOOKING BACK Mr. O’Brien recalls that the last snow shovelling was not completed at Borden that year until June fifth. Telegraph poles were buried deep at many spots along the line, and the snow was still in some of the huge cuttings until well on into the summer, Mr. O’Brien recalled this week. The big piles of snow in the yard at Borden had to be hauled away on flat cars as there was no place to shovel it, he told me.

Highway snowploughs came into use here much later. There was some effort in the days before the war, but they were confined for the most part to the streets and the outskirts of centres like Charlottetown and Summerside.

### Highway Plowing History Reviewed

ABANDONED DURING the war years, the first serious attempt to revive highway plowing was made in 1947 with 23 plows in operation. There were 24 the following year, I learned this week from a chart in the office of Deputy Minister Gordon White and there are 136 plows in operation at the present time. Tracing the growth of the winter plowing effort, there were 48 plows in 1953, there were 81 four years later, 103 in 1958 and there were 125 in 1961.

Former Highways Minister Dougald MacKinnon told me this week he recalls that the late I. B. MacMillan, a former deputy minister of highways, told him in the early days of road plowing “every road on the Island will be opened in a few years, and you may as well make up your mind to it.” The tax on gasoline will go along way toward paying for the work, he had said. Mr. MacKinnon told me this week he had thought at first the expense would be completely out of keeping with the financial resources of the province.

OPERATING SNOW plows was a rugged operation in the early years when the lack of heaters in the cabs was one of the problems. There were no cabs on the early machines.

There were manifold heaters for cars here as early as the early 1930’s, Allison MacLeod told me this week, the old Fords and the 490 Chevys had them, he said. They were tin affairs, with no fan, that coralled the heat coming off the manifold, and it was piped or directed back into the front seat through an opening made for the purpose.

Prior to that it was “warm gauntlets and fur coats” for cold weather driving. There was no winter driving but late fall and early winter - cars ran well into January one year - was mighty cold. The early manifold heaters directed a stream of hot air into the front seat, but the cars were open and the chap sitting nearest to the heater was about the only one who got much benefit from it.

### Anti Freeze Provided Difficulties

THERE WAS no anti freeze in the early days and the cooling system had to be drained in cold weather when the engine was stopped for any length of time. It always had to be drained at night. A glycerin-glycol mixture was developed but it boiled away so quickly it was not practical.

Various mixtures were sold, apparently, before an effective coolant was developed but I enjoyed the story Allison told me about "Arctic Water". It sold about \$2 per gallon, to the best of his memory, but it was nothing more than a mixture of water and salt, he told me. The salt came through the pores of the engine and rusted the valve stems so they would stick, and necessitate a motor job. It really ruined the motors, he said. Straight kerosene was used and I recall that a neighbour used stove oil for several winters.

A car he has on his sales floor now has the coolant sealed in the motor and it lasts the lifetime of the car, Mr. MacLeod told me. All of the cars will be that way in three or four years, he predicts. And there in brief you have the story of the evolution of engine coolants.

### Road Rule Change Came May, 1924

THANKS TO Lem MacDonald, New Dominion and Percy Gay, Parkdale I finally am able to pin point the date the "Drive to the right" rule of the road became effective. It was May 1, 1924. Double checking the date, I found in the Patriot of April 28, 1924 that the City police were inspected and instructed with particular reference to the "drive to the right which becomes effective May 1". Stipendiary Magistrate Martin talked to the policemen and that would be K. J. Martin whose son K. M. Martin, succeeded him in the post and retired two years ago.

Reasons given by both men are interesting. Percy, who owns the Sunshine Dairy now, was driving a 27-year-old horse, Barney, for the late Harry Winchester, owner of the Charlottetown Condensed Milk Company, delivering milk door to door. Like all good delivery horses, the big red fellow would stop at every door where his driver left milk. But Barney had always stopped on the left side of the street, and every time Percy came from a house, he found Barney back on the left side of the street. It took about a month before he cured the horse of the habit.

### Collected Eggs For Egg Co-op

MR. MacDONALD made his first trip that day collecting eggs for the old P.E.I. Egg and Poultry Association which was managed by George Leightizer. Mr. MacDonald met his uncle, James MacDonald on the road. The uncle forgot the rule change and they met head on. But there was no damage as they were driving horses. Had it been cars, the story easily could have been different.

Reactions continue to come in on my reference to early automobiles, and several of the stories are awfully good. I'll bring them to you at the first opportunity.

