

ONE OF THE earliest locomotives in use in this province. Old Number 8, shown above was a wood-burner,

A Railroad Recalls

by J. E. CAMERON

When I was a small boy my father, who worked with the fuel department of the railway, occasionally took me with him and showed me the wonders that were to be seen. Some kind of locomotive drivers would take me in the engine and let me ring the bell. It was a real thrill and something of which to brag to the other boys.

My uncle was at least partially responsible for the railway being built on the Island when it was. At that time he was a Conservative Member of the Legislature and when the railway bill came to a vote the House was equally divided for and against. As chairman of the House committee, Donald Cameron cast the deciding vote.

At that time my father was prospecting for gold in Colorado but railroading must have been in the family blood for at that time he returned to the Island and accepted a position with the new line. As I recall Harry Houle and men named Rainie, Dicou and MacPherson were responsible for placing the ties and rails. The engines were imported from Great Britain. But, of course, that was before I was born.

However, my memory goes back to railroading days of the 1890s. At the start of that last decade of the past century Joseph Unsworth was superintendent and Harry Anderson was mechanical superintendent. Mr. Unsworth was affectionately known as the 'big fellow' and appeared to enjoy the unofficial title.

He liked to visit the various workshops, but objected to finding anyone loafing on the job. Unpleasant scenes were avoided because as he neared a shop a loud whistle could be heard calling, "here comes the big fellow". Because of this and many other things nearly everyone had a good word for him.

CHANGES MADE
When he died he was succeeded by Alex MacDonald, known to railroaders as "Black Alex". Shortly after this there was a change in the government at Ottawa and as was customary, then many staff changes were made. MacDonald reverted to his former post and George

Sharp appointed in his place. Harry Anderson was dismissed and W.S. Poole named mechanical superintendent. At the same time many others were dismissed but some were later reappointed.

Among locomotive engineers of that day I remember John Hunter, Nel Armour, David F. George, Harold Dan Cox, John MacDonald, John Munroe, Dan McKenna, Tom Stanley, Jim McKee and a Ryan, not George, but his father.

I believe railroading was at its peak then, but perhaps that is only the feeling of an old timer recalling the romance of an earlier era.

In those days the Island railway was of narrow gauge and all the coaches, box cars and flat cars were built in the shops in Charlottetown. All locomotive repairs were made here as well. However, when the gauge was standardized no more cars were built here and most of the general locomotive repairs were made in Moncton.

During the year 1912 Superintendent Sharpe and mechanical superintendent Poole retired with Horace MacEwen replacing Sharpe and Peter McQuaid replacing Poole, but with the title of master mechanic. MacEwen in turn was followed by T.B. Grady who was succeeded by Mr. MacNutt and on his retirement Ewen MacKinnon took over.

WORST WINTER
One of the worst winters I can recall was in 1905. I am the only member left of the crew which left Charlottetown with a snow plow, three locomotives and a number of cars. We arrived at Fredericton — a distance of only 25 miles — three weeks later.

Mr. Kelly was our conductor and the engineers were Herb Love, Anthony Flynn and Dan MacDonald. I was fireman with Dan; Tom Clark with Flynn and Walter Crosswell with Love. During the year 1900 the old Hillsborough Bridge was under construction. A man

named Heaney was contractor and one of his foremen was named Oulton. He was in charge of building the approaches. Starting from the edge of the channel, piles were driven into the mud in rows some distance apart, three rows abreast until the shore was reached.

Large timber was placed on top of the piles and a rail way track laid on the timbers. The earth fill required was taken from Leona's field, near St. Dunstan's University and pushed on flat cars ahead of the locomotive. On the first car was a pile arrangement with a long cable. As the lead car came to the end of the wooden approach the engine was uncoupled from the train and the plow showed the earth off the flat car dropping it down through the trestle work.

The work went on continuously. I was fireman on the night shift starting at 6 p.m. and knocking off at 4 a.m. One morning at four o'clock I noticed the body of a man on the track; he was badly twisted and laying near the Kensington Road crossing. We always stopped there to let the brakeman off, so he could turn the switch sending us out to the bridge.

ACCIDENTS
Someone in the group identified the body, and if my memory serves me his name was MacEachern. Police were notified and an undertaker gathered the remains in a basket. We never learned the facts, but it was believed he had tried to climb between two cars and fell to the tracks as a train was moving. The body was such a sight I was unable to eat my breakfast when I got home.

Another accident occurred during construction of the pillars on which the bridge rested. A man named Ambey Atkins was the night watchman and one morning he was missing. His body was never found and to this day no one knows what really happened. At the time it was believed he had fallen into the mould around the pillar into which cement was being poured. While we were working at the Charlottetown side the piles and timbers were being made

ready for the fill on the Southport side of the river. Piles were placed leading to Murray Harbour and a locomotive ferried over to the landing at the approach.

Later we were transported across in a small boat which landed us at the end of the trestle. Narrow planks were placed over the timbers and we had to walk on these to the embankment. It was easy for us young fellows but not so simple for some of the older chaps one of whom was an engineer we called Sandy.

He was normally a jolly Irishman but he flatly refused to walk the plank and started to crawl over on his hands and knees. We told him this was not allowed by special order of Mr. Heaney. Said Sandy, "I don't give a damn for either Heaney or Oulton I won't walk on that thing".

We generally had steam up on the locomotive before Sandy arrived and since we all carried our dinner with us would put the dinner pails on top of the boiler to be sure of a good hot meal at noon. One of the group was a firm believer in a vegetable diet and maintained it was a sure way to good health. He may have been right, but personally I believe the most enjoyable way to follow a vegetable diet is to let the cow eat

them and then enjoy a nice roast beef dinner later.

Speaking of diets reminds me of an earlier paragraph when I spoke of getting to Fredericton. During those three weeks we never slept in a bed and were often short of food; sometimes we survived only through the courtesy of the snow shovellers who came from the district.

A HOT BREAK

On one occasion when we were fighting our way through Walt's cutting a man named Keefe, who lived in the vicinity, brought us a hot dinner of corned beef and cabbage. I have always thought that was about the nicest thing anyone could have done. He had a conscience and I believe it was Mark Twain who once said "conscience takes up more room than all the other follies".

We always after had a lot of respect for Mr. Keefe. Thoughtfulness is always appreciated, but never more so than when your stomach is empty.

People used to ask "how do you manage to get water and coal for the locomotive?" We had two men on the tender tank and they simply shovelled snow into the tank. The heat melted it and the water injected into the boiler provided Murray. By the way, snow water was what we drank and used to make our tea.

The coal problem was not so simple. It had to be taken out of railway cars at different stations and hauled over the banks of snow.

When the engine stalled snow had to be cleared from under the wheels so the locomotive could be backed up, or as it was commonly said, "kick out". After kicking out we would back up for a distance sufficient to get a good run for the next attack.

Even with that driving power we seldom dented the snow bank for more than the length of the locomotive. When we did that we sat and waited for the shovellers to dig us out again while we grabbed a nap. The cutting was so deep there were steps made up the side and six men passed the snow from one to another higher up till it reached the top. All telegraph poles were buried out of sight.

In those days we had no rotary plows; only small locomotives and wedge plows. But even so a rotary plow would have been of no value in such a cutting since there was no room to displace the snow.

Occasionally amusing things happened. I remember one day

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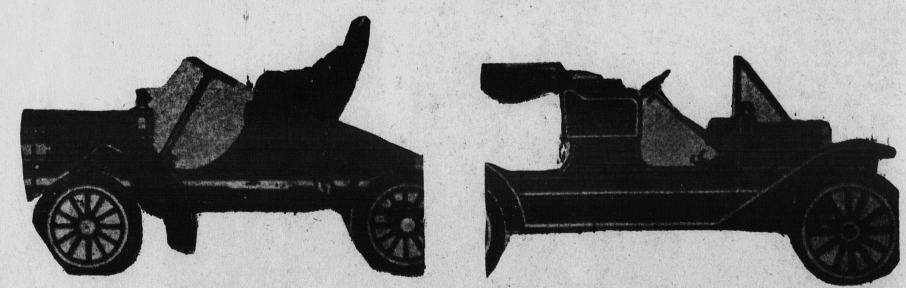
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