

Ed

The cover picture on the July-August, 1987 issue of Branchline took me back to Beachburg of 1923 when I was eight years of age because, if I am not mistaken such an engine pulled the mixed train which went from Ottawa to Pembroke every Monday, Wednesday and Friday, returning from Pembroke to Ottawa on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday.

The family was the strongest force in those days and every family attended church services at least once each Sunday. But throughout the week the railroad station was the center of activity. Beachburg station was the busiest between Ottawa and Pembroke. There was a siding approximately one mile in length and the second siding used for loading carloads of hay, grain and the cattle, horses and sheep that were ready for market.

Aside from the mixed trains, there was a local passenger train to Ottawa around 8:00 a.m. and returning to Pembroke around 6:30 p.m. The main freight train to the West, #401, went through mid afternoon shortly after school classes were over. When it did, my friend the late Gordon Johnston and I were always there to lie flat and face down about 60 or 70 feet from the track for the thrill of being near the train that went through at full speed. The East bound freight #402 went through in the middle of the night and was of no interest to us except on those clear frosty winter nights when we could hear it coming and working very hard for at least half an hour. The transcontinental passenger train #1 went to the West at 11:30 p.m. and #2 to the East about 4:30 a.m. Our two closest friends Horace Boyce' and Cecil Lewis' fathers worked for the CNR and were not allowed near the station.

My father had a small General Store but his main business was to sell hay and oats to the lumber mills and shanties along the former Booth railway to Parry Sound, the main CN and CP transcontinental lines as far as the Lake of the Woods and across Northern Quebec. He made a point of visiting each of his customers each year to make sure they were getting hay of good quality. This often meant riding to places like the G.M. French Lumber Company of Mink Lake on the van or caboose of #401 and back on #402. These trips increased my obsession with railroads. On Saturday morning the mixed arrived about 8:00 a.m. and after loading and unloading weigh freight at the station quickly moved to the first siding where it sat until all shunting was completed, thus leaving the main line free for through traffic. Eventually the engine crew became our friends, allowed us to shovel coal and to stoke the furnaces. One morning the train was made up for departure and the whole crew went into the station to have lunch together.

The stage was set. Gordon said to me "I'll act as brakemen if you will act as engineer". We quickly converted this thought into action, I took the engineer's seat, Gordon lifted the bar of the coupler and gave the proper signal. He then joined me in the cab. Steam power was something special it responded quickly and quietly and was very much alive. The crew saw the engine moving off with us in control but decided

to stay in the station so as not to frighten us and cause some real damage. We went down the first siding past the stock yards, came to a full stop, changed the Johnson bar into the reverse position and returned sedately. When Gordon had us properly coupled to the train again I joined him on the ground, the crew burst out of the station and Gordon and I headed for home.

Shortly afterwards Mr. Gerald, the Station Agent went to see Reverend John Hurst, the Methodist Minister and asked him to preach a sermon about our escapade the following morning. Mr. Hurst replied that he didn't do that sort of thing very well but that his friend Tommy Woods, the preacher in the Presbyterian Church was quite expert on projects like that. And thus it came that Gordon and I were suitably chastised. For a long time we were scorned by the good people who saw to it that we never went near the station again.

Today we have become an adversarial society, we would be brought to court, appear before a judge and there would be at least three lawyers to represent the Crown, Gordon and myself. We would have psychiatric consultations, the judge would be advised by social workers and we would stand a good chance of being sent to Reformatory where we would get enough education to direct us into a life of crime.

Somehow I think our reprimand was faster, more effective and altogether more sensible.

(I wish to thank my long time secretary Verna McClelland for her help in getting this article together.)

W.E. Collins