



RAILS OF TIME

Northern Ontario Railroad Museum and Heritage Centre
Capreol, Ontario

Volume 4, Issue 2

Fall 2001

In this issue:

Remembrance Day Display	2
New book on Sudbury electrics and diesels	2
Historical Profile: Fred (Whitepine) Thomson	3
President's Report	4

Great gift items now available

Some great new gift items have arrived at the NORMHC gift counter just in time for your Christmas shopping. Here are a few of the items:

- *Engineer plush bear* with a beanie bottom. 22.5 cm tall, black and white striped hat and overalls with a red shirt and scarf. \$10
 - *Mini locomotive bronze diecast keychains* in four different designs. \$2.50 each.
 - *Three-hole wooden train whistle*, 18 cm long. \$5
 - *Locomotive diecast banks*, bronze or silver colour. \$10
 - *Collectible diecast pencil sharpeners*, three different designs -- locomotive (bronze), caboose (red), kerosene lantern (red), \$3 each
- In addition to the new items, there are still mugs, coins, "spike" door knockers, "core sample" paper weights, and a good variety of books, magazines, videos and T-shirts



Unique gateway enhances heritage appearance

The new iron gateway to the museum, designed by Bob Michelutti and built by Gerry Gagnon, provides a distinctive welcome to the NORMHC.

Providing an attractive and unique entrance, the gateway was designed so that visitors could easily recognize the building as a museum while blending with the heritage appearance.

The bell in the centre of the main archway is from the Grand Trunk Rail-

road steam locomotive 701 and was donated by Eileen Thompson.

The Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation., through the Ontario 2000 Main Street Ontario program, provided funding for the project. A number of volunteers helped with the brickwork and electrical work on the gateway, and with the new flower beds along the front walk.

New Operations Coordinator joins NORMHC

By Susan MacArthur

I am very excited about my job opportunity as Museum Operations Coordinator with NORMHC. As a new resident to the Sudbury area this has given me the chance to get to know the Greater City and the various attractions that it has to offer. The people I have been able to net-

work with to date have also been terrific.

My experience as a Graphic Designer and Marketing Communications Coordinator in the corporate world plus my involvement with not-for-profit art councils, theatre groups and the MacLaren Art Gallery in Barrie will all be put to

(Continued on page 4)

Irish Regiment lends items to Remembrance Day Display

Susan MacArthur, NORMHC's new Museum Operations Coordinator is seen here with part of the museum's Remembrance Day Display. The display has been growing each year with the emphasis on newspaper articles and photographs of local veterans.

This year several items on display were on loan from the Irish Regiment of Canada, Regimental Museum at the Sudbury Armories including two uniforms, a field radio and gas mask from WW II, as well as a gun that was used in the Russian-Japanese War. This gun is one of only six of its type known to exist.

Another interesting addition this year was a collection of 1940 RAF air crew badges on loan from Jack Porter of Sudbury.



Dale Wilson's book on Sudbury electrics and diesels now available

Over a century of rail-related history is found in a new book, *Sudbury Electrics & Diesels*, by Dale Wilson.

In a look at a rare topic previously covered only in a few magazine articles, the book examines over 100 years of railway services for and by the nickel-copper mining companies in the Sudbury Region of northern Ontario. Included is in-

formation on International Nickel (INCO), Falconbridge, Mond, British America Nickel and others.

There are over 300 photographs as well as maps, diagrams and nine locomotive rosters in the 176-page hard cover book.

Dale Wilson is a retired Sudbury high school teacher who has been researching and writing on rail-related topics for over 40 years.

The book is now available at the museum for \$57.95, or ordered directly from Nickel Belt Rails, Box 483, Station "B", Sudbury, ON, P3E 4P6 (add \$6 for shipping and handling, payable by cheque or money order only).

In addition to this new book, Nickel Belt Rails has a several other titles of interest to railfans, historians, modellers and the general public.

Environmentally friendly Garden Tour hosted by NORMHC

The annual Garden Tour this year focussed on those gardens that were environmentally friendly in their approach to gardening.

Five Capreol gardens (Michelutti's, Langis' Rodriguez', Chappell's, and Larsen's) and two gardens in Valley East (Kirwan's and Desjardins Herb Farm) were on the tour. Next year several new gardens in the Valley East area will be included.

At each location, information was given out on how to make gardens pesticide free, and how to recognize beneficial insects, and so improve our environment. Some infor-

mation sheets are still available. Call 858-3859 or 858-5050.

Judges from "Communities in Bloom" said they were very impressed with the gardens at the museum and the work that had been done in Capreol.

Several gardens in Capreol (Rodriguez, Newman, Del Papa and Burns) were nominated in this program, and the Del Papa garden on Beech Street tied for first in the northwestern section of the Greater City of Greater Sudbury.

Many compliments for NORMHC gardens

A number of volunteers have worked on the museum grounds this year, but two in particular deserve a special 'Thank You' for their efforts. **Roland Pigeon**, a retired CN employee, and **Sylvie Plouffe**, have worked throughout the summer rototilling, re-seeding, aerating, fertilizing and watering. The many compliments the museum received on the grounds and gardens this year are thanks to their dedication.

Historical Profile: *Fred (Whitepine) Thomson*

"What's in a name?" Many people have nicknames and the stories behind how they got them are often fascinating.

Fred Thomson, of Capreol, has been known as 'Whitepine' for years. He's a tall, slim, white-haired man and the nickname could have stemmed from his appearance. But that is not the case. Mabel Patterson, Fred's niece, recently wrote a letter to the *Dunchurch News* and sent a copy to the Northern Ontario Railroad Museum and Heritage Centre explaining how her uncle got his unique name.

Fred Thomson was a 17-year-old working in a lumber camp in the bush back in the 1930s. In a stand of birch stood a huge white pine tree, a "sky bound" tree that many of the lumberjacks had tried, but failed, to cut down. They had sawed it and driven wedges into it, but stubbornly it stayed put.

Young Fred asked to have a go at it and sure enough, down it came. Fred was as "proud as a strutting rooster". He admitted it might have been ready to fall down anyway, but he was given credit for felling it and has been known as 'Whitepine Thomson' ever since.

Fred was born in Dunchurch in 1918. After his stint as a logger, Fred moved on to police work in Copper Cliff from 1939 to 1942. He heard that you could earn more on the railway and went to Capreol to take the tests. He was hired on in August of 1942 and soon became a brakeman with CN.

Then the war intervened. Fred originally joined the army, but they needed flyers, so he transferred to the airforce only to find out that it was now so late in the war that the German airforce had been all but wiped out. Back he went to the

army.

"I guess I had a good voice 'cause they made me an instructor for basic training," Fred remembers. He taught a group of very well-educated Japanese men who were to be sent to the East as translators.

On his return to work with CN, Fred moved to Capreol and bought some land to build his home. He was promoted to conductor in March of 1951 and stayed with the



company until his retirement June 22, 1978.

A Train Order issued that day congratulated Fred on his retirement. "On this your pre-retirement run on the Canadian National Railways NOA may we the undersigned take this opportunity of thanking you for your cheerfulness and assistance. May we extend our sincere wishes for good health and a well-deserved retirement. ... Your fellow employees will look upon your perfect service record as an outstanding example of a job well done."

But there was more to Fred's life than the railroad. He married Ollie Wylie, from Ahmic Harbour in 1939 and between them, they raised three sons: Larry, Morley and Floyd. Larry and Morley went on to follow

in their father's footsteps at CN and Floyd played with the St. Louis Blues of the NHL. Fred and Ollie celebrated 59 years of marriage before her death several years ago. Fred was also active in the community, the church and as a volunteer for many organizations, including the town's store front police office, the Boy Scouts and the NORMHC.

He also proudly boasted of having the world's largest antler collection. His assortment of antlers and tusks came from all over the world, including Norway and the gold fields of the Klondike. Fred started collecting as a hobby in 1957. News travels fast on the railroad. People got to know about Fred's hobby and his collection grew as more and more people donated antlers, horns and tusks.

In 1961, Fred took a boxcar full of antlers to the Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto. He had a book where people could record their comments and can still recite quotes like "tremendous display," "long overdue," and "true Canadian." In 1967, he and his wife drove their antler-decorated car in the Centennial parade in Sudbury and won a trophy for the best decorated car. He also regularly displayed his exhibit in Capreol and Sudbury.

Although it eventually took up too much room and effort, Fred's collection of over 100 moose antlers, plus other antlers, tusks, and even black wolf heads is still being displayed each year. Peter Knapton, a taxidermist, has the display housed in his studio in the Parry Sound District. But it will remain known as the "Whitepine" collection.

Whitepine is 83 years old now, but still possesses the sense of humour, determination and cheerful disposition that his colleagues from CN admired.

President's Report

The NORMHC has once again benefited greatly from the continued and generous support from the various government agencies that provided financial assistance to hire staff.

Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) provided funding for four summer students: Tracy Blouin (Tour Guide), Sarah Courchesne (Educational Program Development), Sara Bowdidge (Research Assistant), and Kirsti Conron (Tour Guide). The Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation provided funding for Darren Janeczek (Computer Specialist and Web Site Developer). HRDC is currently providing funding for our Museum Operations Coordinator, Susan MacArthur, under a Job Creation Partnership Program (see article in this newsletter for further information).

As well as our hired staff, the NORMHC is receiving considerable assistance from numerous volunteers. Without these individuals the museum could not function. Thanks to the volunteers and staff together for making the NORMHC a place we can all be proud of,

and for providing a richer and more rewarding experience for our visitors.

A longer-term goal of the NORMHC Board is to investigate the potential for an expanded museum facility. The Board strongly believes that an expanded facility would result in the museum becoming a major attraction in the City of Greater Sudbury. The museum could then remain open year round and employ full-time staff. An expanded facility would also provide significant benefits to the City of Greater Sudbury and the Capreol area. The Board is therefore currently working towards securing the necessary funding to perform the feasibility and business plan study for the expansion of the NORMHC.

Although the NORMHC is currently closed for the winter season we will, with sufficient notification, open the facility by appointment. If you want to learn more about recent developments at the museum, you can look us up at our web site www3.sympatico.ca/normhc.

Bob Michelutti
President NORMHC

Susan MacArthur

(Continued from page 1)

good use towards the projects that I have been hired to complete.

During my eight-month contract between HRDC and NORMHC (Sept. to April) I have two primary assignments. The first is to create an *Operations Manual* that will be used as a "living document" for the Museum to be updated as needed. This will become the book of reference for anything and everything about

the Museum and will be used by all staff (paid and volunteer) and Board Members.

The second project is to put together a *Volunteer Resource Guide*. Along with identifying volunteers who can help with a variety of jobs and events it will also identify the important role of volunteers and the issues pertaining to them.

I hope to be able to list **your name** in this Guide! My hours at the museum are Monday to Friday from 8 am to 4 pm so I hope you will drop by and introduce yourself!

NORMHC to have booth At Toronto Model Railway Show

Thanks to Board Member Dale Wilson, the NORMHC will have a booth at the 2002 Model Railway Show in Toronto.

The show runs Saturday, March 23 (11 am to 5 pm) and Sunday, March 24 (10 am to 5 pm) at the Toronto Congress Centre, 650 Dixon Road.

Exhibits at the show will feature operating layouts, all scales, operating steam, railway heritage, manufacturers, demonstrations, clinics, vendors tables and more.

If you are at the show, stop by the NORMHC booth and say hello.

Rails of Time is produced twice a year by the Northern Ontario Railroad Museum and Heritage Centre, 26 Bloor St., P.O. Box 370, Capreol, Ontario, P0M 1H0,
Telephone: 705-858-5050
Fax: 705-858-4539

Newsletter Committee Members:

Pam Radunsky, Carol Hume, Nicole O'Neil, John Goodwin

Museum Hours

May 2001 to Labour Day 2001 from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. (Closed Mondays)
All other times by appointment.