

Railway past back to life

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The Sudbury Star

From the outside, it looks like a big, long box.

But step inside the newly built Boxcar House, and you will find pine flooring, a small bedroom, a writing table, icebox, woodstove, phonograph and a sink area.

That washousing for many railway employees across northeastern Ontario, including Capreol, 70 or 90 years ago.

"It was just a quick way to find housing for people," explained Stu Thomas, on the latest addition to the Northern Ontario Railroad Museum and Heritage Centre's Prescott Park off Bloor Street, which officially opened Tuesday.

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"It was up to them to furnish it. Over time, they would put in some insulation, some wallboard ... There are still all kinds of homes in town that got their start this way."

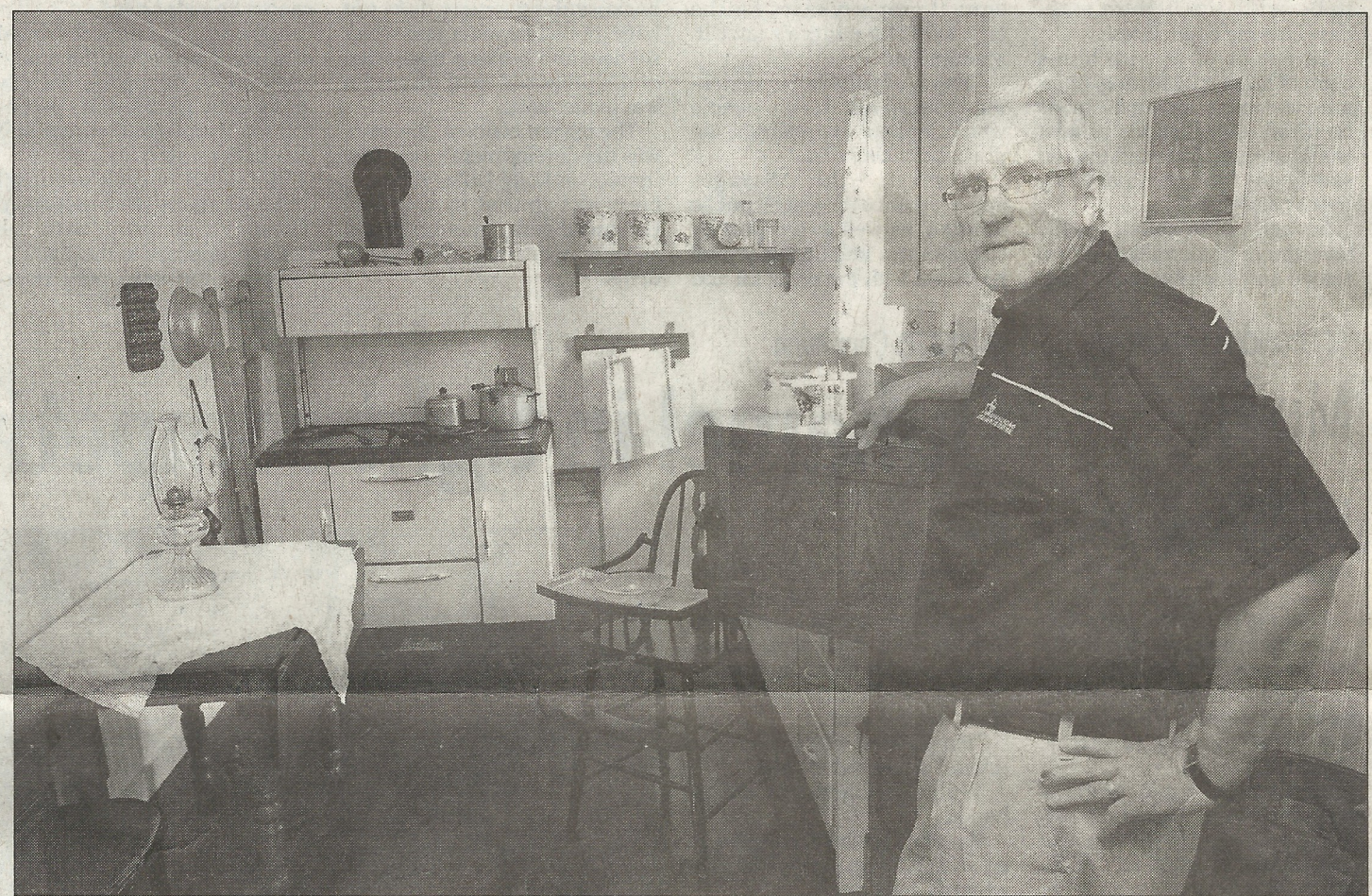
The 38x16-foot Boxcar House was three years in the making, explained Thomas, president of the museum and heritage centre's board of director.

Many museum and heritage centre volunteers, along with other Capreol residents, helped to restore the boxcar during three months this year, adding windows from a caboose in the front and a door. While the labour was free, \$5,000 worth of materials went into the restoration project.

Artifacts were added to the interior of the boxcar to give it the look and feel of a home back about 1915.

"We considered putting a couple of stove pipe holes in the roof (for the woodstove)," said Thomas. "You wouldn't have put plumbing in the olden days. You would have had to carry your water in back in those days."

Many of the boxcar homes



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Stu Thomas, president of the Northern Ontario Railroad Museum and Heritage Centre, gives a tour of a newly transformed boxcar house in Capreol on Tuesday. See video at www.thesudburystar.com.

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Mayor John Rodriguez

that were used in Capreol, in places such as the former Norman Township area in the town's north end and on Railway Avenue, became the base for homes that still stand today. Thomas said the boxcar homes were set up in railway communities all over the northeast and many still exist today.

"You have to know what you are looking for," he said.

Mayor John Rodriguez, a former Capreol resident, liked what he saw in the Boxcar

House.

"This boxcar was the original home back in Capreol's early days," he told the more than one dozen people on hand. "We have an opportunity to see how people lived back them ...

"It's important for our young citizens to be able to touch the past and see how their ancestors lived before they were born."

The Northern Ontario Railroad Museum and Heritage Centre is open 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

Tuesday to Sunday from June 1 to Aug. 31. It can be open by appointment for visits by organized groups such as students or tourists.

GOOD TIMES

Thomas, who is also a member of the Capreol Community Action Network (CAN), said the Prescott Park addition is another good piece of news for the railway community of about 3,750. The community has seen six new businesses open during the past 16 months.

This week, for example, Capreol Graphics opened its doors.

"It's a local enterprise which is trying to get started and also having a little art gallery developed so the local artists will have a place to show their wares," said

Thomas.

The other new businesses are a small Country Style located inside the gas station at the entrance to the downtown area, two drilling companies (Summit Drilling and Lane Exploration), an auto detailing business and Capreol Foodland.

All told, the six businesses employ more than 30, said Thomas.

The railway town's main employer remains CN Rail. Some 200-plus people work for the company.

Capreol Days, the town's annual mid-summer bash featuring a wide variety of events including a community-wide yard sale and a ball tournament, will be held the Aug. 1 weekend.

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