

Rails & Rooms
A Timeless Canadian Journey
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Introduction

There are many ways to get from A to B, or from Halifax, Nova Scotia, to Victoria, British Columbia, for that matter. I've flown this expanse, driven most of it, ridden a motorcycle across much of it, and hiked for days along its lakesides and riverbanks. But it wasn't until I rode a train for 4,414 miles across every Canadian province that still has a track that I truly appreciated this country's size and diversity.

Our nation's love of rail travel has been a torrid and well-documented affair, spanning more than a century and a half. Canadian railway history can be traced through hundreds of separate companies to its birth in 1836, when the Champlain & St. Lawrence Railroad became the first public railway in the land. In 1850, Upper Canada had just sixty-six miles of railway track, but by 1943 there were more than forty-three thousand miles of route being operated by thirty-eight separate corporations. Between 1900 and 1916, railway mileage in Canada increased from seventeen thousand miles to more than forty thousand. (Incidentally, you may wonder about the use of imperial measurement in this book. Railways were built mile by mile, today's locomotives still show the driver speeds in miles per hour, and white mile markers picket their way along every rail corridor still in use - using imperial seems to make the most sense.)

In 1944, thanks to gas rationing and the movement of troops, Canadian railways carried 44 million passengers. The following year, more than 63 billion ton-miles of freight were moved by rail. The Canadian National Railway (CNR) alone had twenty-one thousand miles of track at that point, making it the world's largest railway system operating under one management (unless we include the lines run under various managements across the USSR). Meanwhile, the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) was the largest privately owned rail system in the world and can arguably lay claim to being the founder of Canadian tourism. For a while the cheapest and, oddly enough, the most efficient means of getting from Europe to the Far East was to take weeks or months to cross the country by train, then board a steamship on the west coast. The men and women of the Canadian railways made sure the train trip was an enjoyable experience (and a profitable one for the railways).

Though I certainly wasn't heading to the Orient, the romance of travelling this country's breadth from east to west by train had captured my imagination. I was lured much as those before me had been, but perhaps not by the same sales pitch. An 1887 CPR brochure titled *The New Highway to the East Across the Mountains, Prairies and Rivers of Canada* dangled a most exotic carrot for the would-be passenger:

"May I not tempt you, kind reader, to leave England for a few short weeks and journey with me across that broad land, the beauties and glories of which have only now been brought within our reach? There will be no hardships to endure, no difficulties to overcome, and no dangers or annoyances whatever. You shall see mighty rivers, vast forests, boundless plains, stupendous mountains and wonders innumerable ; and you shall see all in comfort, nay, in luxury. If you are a jaded tourist, sick of Old World scenes and smells, you will find everything here fresh and novel. If you are a sportsman, you will meet with unlimited opportunities and endless variety, and no one shall deny your right to hunt or fish at your own sweet will. If you are a mountain climber, you shall have cliffs and peaks and glaciers worthy of your alpenstock, and if you have lived in India, and tiger hunting has lost its zest, a Rocky Mountain grizzly bear will renew your interest in life."

Tiger hunting had never had any zest for me, but I wanted to see Canada from a passenger train window, in real time. I wanted to head west from one bordering ocean to the other, at a speed that would make changes in topography barely perceivable. But then, as hours rolled into days, I'd appreciate the grand geographical and cultural differences that both separate and unite our regions. A train, I thought, would provide a journey that would get me right into Canada, tunnelling through rock when it had to.

In his 1934 book, *English Journey*, British author J.B. Priestley wrote:

"When people moved slowly in their travel there was time to establish proper communications with what was strange, to absorb, to adjust oneself. Now that we are whizzed about the world, there is no time for absorbing and adjusting. Perhaps it is for this reason that the world that the traveller knows is beginning to

show less and less variety. By the time we can travel at four hundred miles an hour we shall probably move over a dead uniformity, so that the bit of reality we left at one end of a journey is twin to the bit of reality we step into at the other end. Indeed, by that time there will be movement, but, strictly speaking, no more travel."

I wanted to experience the many realities of Canada and enjoy the hospitality that each region could offer. I was also aware that our love affair with rail travel, as much as it still glows warmly and feeds on the fuel of nostalgia, might be a fleeting thing. Subsidized passenger trains threading their way across this land are not to be taken for granted.

Upon completing Canada's first transcontinental railroad, the grandfather of CPR, William Cornelius Van Horne, said: "If we can't export the scenery, we'll import the tourists." By 1900, the CPR had thriving hotels in Montreal, Quebec City, Banff, Lake Louise and Vancouver. At first these hotels were not the world-famous destinations they are for today's tourists; more often they were simply comfortable stopping-off points for those affluent travellers en route to the Orient.

Our trains, thank God and many a taxpayer, still live. We've spent more than a century proving there's a cheaper, faster way to get anywhere. But it's not always a better way, and people are still riding trains.

In 1977, the passenger services of both CN and Canadian Pacific were entrusted to a new Crown corporation, VIA Rail. After more than seventy-five years as a government-owned railway, Canadian National was privatized in 1995 and continues to carry huge volumes of freight. CP is an international multi-billion-dollar enterprise, with more corporate operations than most of us would care to count.

Like the railways that bore and nurtured them, the Canadian railway hotels spin a story that is long and perplexing, involving all manner of politics, confounding economics, hundreds of companies and thousands of business deals. (During the course of writing this book another change took place, one that sees some of the hotel names being prefixed with the word Fairmont. However, in the interests of tradition and simplicity, I have used the hotel name that is familiar to most people.) My story doesn't simplify or explain this complex evolution; it is merely a personal account of a train journey that includes visits to some of the grand hotels that still provide rest and relaxation for travellers. This is the story of a month-long trip that took me gently across Canada, and occasionally through time.

* * *

1. Halifax to Moncton

Fog. It's what I expected, descending through dense cloud onto the wet runway at Halifax airport a little before 7 a.m. Fog, or mist if you prefer a more romantic word, is what most Canadians expect of the Atlantic coast. Typical Maritimes weather I thought, as I pulled my jacket out of the overhead luggage compartment and pushed my arms into it. Cool and foggy. When I got off the plane, though, the humidity and heat surprised me. It was typical for early September, according to Peggy, the friend who met me and drove me the half-hour or so to the downtown core.

I suggested I pay for the ride by buying breakfast, and being a local she suggested the Ardmores Tea Room. Named for a Lord Ardmores who once owned a sizable chunk of the town, and run by Tennyson Cormier and his wife, Norma, this small culinary fixture of Halifax opened just before I was born. Having gone without sleep for some thirty-odd hours, a huge plate of salt cod fish cakes, fried eggs and toast was not exactly what I had in mind. However, I was determined to get this journey off on the right foot by accepting whatever local hospitality was offered. I'm pleased I did.

With a pot of industrial-strength tea, this first meal set me up nicely for a month or so away from home comforts, and all for just a few dollars. Served with home-style hospitality amid chattering neighbourhood regulars, it proved to be a very warm welcome. The place has barely changed since the 1950s, and its popularity with locals may be due to the fact that tourists don't often find it and probably wouldn't be impressed by the architecture or the interior decor if they did.

Halifax is a good place to begin a cross-country railway journey. Millions have done it before me and Nova Scotia pops up in many railway history books. In 1720, horses pulled supplies on a short tramway to the French fortress at Louisbourg, then in 1818 a similar tramway hauled coal at Pictou. A regular rail track was laid eleven years later, using the first metal rails used in Canada, possibly in North America. In 1830 the Sydney Mines Railway opened, as did the two-mile Bridgeport Tramway. All told, the Maritimers were among the first Canadians on track for rail travel and apart from that, Halifax is about the farthest east I can climb aboard for such a trip. In 1988, CN abandoned the last part of the railway in Newfoundland, and on New Year's Eve, 1989, Prince Edward Island lost its rail service.

Breakfast over and back into the steamy heat of the morning, I begged a lift to the hotel I'd booked into, just across from the downtown waterfront. The Delta Halifax, which used to be the Canadian Pacific's Chateau Halifax, sits grey and squarely opposite docks No. 10 and 11, tucked behind a raised section of highway in the Scotia Square complex. It's built on the site of a Chinese laundry and whorehouse but sailors come and go, or at least came and went, and times have changed. From my respectable fourth-floor room looking to the east I saw part of the star-shaped Citadel up the hill to my right, and the Department of National Defence fuel docks over in Dartmouth across to my left. There was more to see, and I aimed to see it, but the fish cakes and me were in need of immediate, serious sleep.

After my nap, the hotel's retired assistant manager, José Castineiras, took me for lunch in a quiet back corner of the hotel dining room. Over bowls of wholesome chowder, pan-fried halibut and roasted Yukon Gold potatoes, he told me how the hotel hit its peak in the 1970s. It was *the* place to go in Halifax, apparently, and he passed me a fat binder stuffed with autographed photos that lined his office walls: Wayne Gretzky, Kenny Rogers, Clint Eastwood, k d lang and local star Anne Murray. He dealt closely with Pierre Trudeau during the prime minister's stay at the hotel. "When he heard I was from Cuba he tried to tell me what a good man he thought Castro was, so I told him to shut up," he recalled. Trudeau admired the manager's frankness and they immediately forged a firm, if brief, friendship. In 1995 President Clinton came to visit, occupying almost the whole of the second floor, and his felt pen signature on a basement wall next to the staff quarters is surrounded by stars and framed in protective plastic.

José, justly proud of the fame and business he helped to bring to the hotel with his gala banquets and themed promotions, such as Mexican Night, is one of those people who do not go gentle into that good retirement. He regaled me for hours with tales of ejecting she-males from washrooms, arresting guests who were "borrowing" TV sets or stuffing their luggage with CP's trademark orange towels. Popular with the theatre crowd, the hotel's Dick Turpin pub was so busy during the 1970s that waitresses bribed the cooks with pitchers of beer to get their

orders out on time. Success continued through to the 1990s, bringing the hotel more than a million dollars a year in profits.

We adjourned downstairs to Sam Slick's Bar, named for a character created by Thomas Haliburton, a Nova Scotia judge. Slick stood "as large as life and twice as natural," and his bar was a comfortable place to sit and sip with an eye on the time, since the walls were hung with dozens of clocks. José ended the session with an account of what must surely be a record in the hotel industry. Former prime minister Joe Clark and his wife were scheduled to check in to the hotel at 4:00 p.m. At one o'clock the ceiling of the reserved room collapsed, showering everything with a dusty white mess. José immediately sent one employee out to Eaton's to buy new carpeting, and another to a paint store. Within three hours they completely replastered and painted the room and fitted the new broadloom.

Perhaps the talk of how much could be accomplished in three hours reminded me how little I'd done in six, so after a fond farewell I set out to explore the town.

The immediate neighbourhood is one of those modern affairs designed more for tires than feet. I clambered over a concrete barrier or two, scampered between speeding vehicles and soon found myself on a cement walkway outside the waterfront casino, as big and grey as the sky above me. I wasn't sure what I'd find in Halifax or what I was looking for, but this wasn't it. Across a short stretch of water, though, I spied my first piece of legend: Halifax Pier. Apart from being the final resting place for one of Barrett's Privateers, courtesy of troubadour Stan Rogers, this is also where the schooner from the backside of a Canadian dime lives. Sadly, the famous *Bluenose II* was away at sea and tied up in its place was a nondescript boat.

I wandered the narrow old streets of the pier district, now loud and heavy with tourists, attracted to gift shops and cafés like the Privateer's Warehouse and the Old Red Store. I succumbed and bought what I always buy when I'm at the seaside, an icecream cone, and then I watched the oldest continuous-running saltwater ferry in North America ply its way between Halifax and Dartmouth, about a mile away.

Way off to my left, further into the harbour somewhere, sat Pier Number 1, where the "Death Ship" *Mackay-Bennett* docked in April, 1912, carrying victims of the *Titanic*. Halifax enjoyed, if that's the right word, a lot of tourist attention after Hollywood's coverage of that infamous maritime disaster. Not being one to ignore such hype, I went along to the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic, suitably installed on Lower Water Street, to see the *Titanic* exhibits. Void of movie glitz and uncluttered by pretty people, the surviving artifacts told a sorrowful tale.

I was also moved by the exhibits that recounted the Halifax Explosion of 1917, a tragic event that killed two thousand people and injured a further nine thousand. A French munitions ship, *Mont Blanc*, had arrived in port that December to join a convoy when it collided with another vessel, the steamship *Imo*. After fire broke out, the crews jumped ship and swam for the shore.

The explosion demolished the entire north end of Halifax, and many survivors made a temporary home in the citadel. A downtown church withstood the blast, but a broken window in the building remains, the profile of an unfortunate face blown into it. By necessity, Halifax soon learned to cope with more than the average population of blind and disabled citizens.

I left the museum and stumbled upon a wild bunch of Acadians, descendants of those first French American pioneers, hell-bent on having a festival in the parking lot, doing things that probably led to them being expelled from here by the British in 1755. Needless to say, I was soon waving a red, white and blue tricolour, complete with yellow star, and caught up in a swirl of noisy step-dancing, fiddle-playing and aromatic food booths.

It was all fun and games, but I realized my stay here was short. If I was to get to the true heart of Halifax, to the essence of what makes Atlantic culture so richly appealing to the rest of Canada, I ought to follow the call of a malty siren to a good hostelry and meet the locals. Minutes later I sat in a friendly bar in the cool basement of the Granite Pub, a thick, stone building on Barrington Street, not far from the railway station. Granite brews its own beer and hand-pulls it to the glass via an authentic British beer pump. As far as I was concerned, which was as far as I could see through the bottom of a pint glass laced with beer froth, this first day had been one hell of a success. The locals blessed and toasted my pending journey. Several times.

I returned the next day to the south end of the city, to explore the train station, once connected by rails to neighbouring docks. Pier 21, a ten-minute walk from the train station, poured out thousands of immigrants and travellers from steamships. In July of 1928 alone, thirteen ships from Cunard and White Star docked here, carrying more than seven thousand passengers. Many jumped aboard a train and took off to Montreal or Quebec

City, or continued west to the prairies and beyond. About a million immigrants arrived in Canada through Pier 21 between 1928 and 1971, most of them from Europe. Many rode the track to various points west. The fare from Halifax to Vancouver, a posted distance of 3,475 miles, was \$23.85 in 1938, and still only \$55 twenty years later.

The huge building, once drafty and noisy, is now a polished museum, and one that easily lured me in. Inside is an immigrant's-eye view of the Canadian welcome - which was quite Spartan. Hard wooden benches and fenced-in areas were their first taste of the better life they had travelled so many miles to find. The entrance interview, often conducted with help of an interpreter, asked many probing questions: Can you read? By whom was the passage paid? And my favourite question: Have you or any of your family been mentally defective? Those who passed the exam were put aboard trains to all parts of the country. According to a former immigration official I met, Italians were among those let through most quickly, thanks to the smelly meats and cheeses they stowed in their baggage.

During the Second World War, 494,874 Canadians left for Europe from Pier 21. About 45,000 lost their lives and of those who returned, 55,000 came back injured. (When VE Day was announced, military revellers got so carried away that Halifax was all but trashed in a two-day riotous party.) This building has seen a nation's share of bittersweet memories, bewildered hellos and tearful goodbyes.

Aside from housing the museum, piers 21, 20 and 22 berth cruise ships. While I was there one of the biggest in the world, a monstrous white vessel called *Carnival Triumph*, docked and let its noisy human cargo spill out to shop at market stalls set up in the old warehouse next door. I dodged past a couple of kilted pipers who were blowing a Celtic welcome and slipped away to the peace of the old railway station.

The VIA Rail Station in Halifax stands near the foot of Hollis Street, a short block from the waterfront and across the road from a small park named in honour of Edward Cornwallis, the man who claims to have got here first in 1749. A monument dedicated to the early Ukrainian settlers, so many of whom first stepped on Canadian soil here, stands proudly in the park's centre. The station is simply one rectangular hall flanked by a few small offices and stores. It looks robust and handsome, built of stoned quarried in New Brunswick and brought here by rail cars in the 1920s.

Bedecked with coloured flags and plants, it's a cheerful enough place to wait for a train, and there's only one a day. I took out my camera and had barely snapped the first picture when a short, stocky man came up and showed more than casual interest. Bill Mont introduced himself with a firm handshake. He'd worked on the railway for many years and now ran a small auctioneering and flea market business from an office in the station.

His career began in 1941 when he was thirteen years old and spent his days picking up trash from around the station. Promotion to washroom-cleaning duties came soon after and before long he was a fully fledged redcap, hauling luggage for immigrants and tourists to and from the platform. He helped movie stars such as Alan Ladd disembark at Pier 21 and board trains heading to various cities in Quebec and Ontario.

After the war, thanks to a system of centralized transport, Halifax was a major port with a busy railway hub and upwards of eighty trains a day came and went along the old Intercolonial line, now run by CNR. The passenger trains often filled the lengthy platforms here with almost twenty cars. Bill has watched the decline of the railway system with sadness.

I noticed an old man in a green shirt and plaid pants wandering around the station, fishing pop bottles and cans out of the garbage bins. Bill saw me watching. "That's Harold Travis," he said. "He was stationmaster here for forty-odd years." Bill took me by the arm and pulled me over to meet him and we sat down together at one of the tables. Harold can't speak too well since suffering a stroke, but the bright blue eyes behind his gold-rimmed glasses make it clear he hears every question, and he's eager to answer. His mouth, beneath a neat, white mustache, twitches in frustration, but I can't decipher the sounds coming out of it. I soon realize that questions with numerical answers are easiest, so I ask when he started working here. His pale finger draws an invisible 1940 on the white tabletop between us. How many years did you work here? The finger draws fifty-one. His age, according to the finger, is seventy-five.

Harold was also in charge of the newsies, a long-gone breed of guys who boarded the train with a crate of newspapers and assorted items to sell to passengers. As a favour, Bill once worked a shift with a newsie. "It was horrendous. I was staggering through each carriage saying, 'Need a paper, wanna buy a deck o' cards?' Hardest job I ever did."

These days the railway station sees long periods of quiet, in between occasional trains. The space is often rented out for concerts or private parties, which is nothing new. Many Canadian railway stations have been used for social gatherings, weddings, and regular meeting places. Some, such as West Toronto Station Junction and CPR's Ponoka Station in Alberta, served as places of worship until those communities built proper churches.

Leaving Harold to hunt pop cans and Bill to organize his flea markets, I found the door connecting the station, via a short passageway, to the Nova Scotian, the railway hotel that opened next door in 1930.

For many years, the Nova Scotian was the only CN hotel that was profitable on a year-round basis. The navy brought lots of trade, but that's dropped off lately, replaced by business people and convention crowds.

Until the late 1970s, hotel staff did all the laundry for the trains, which amounted to four times the volume done for today's guests. The days when these large kitchens were kept busy providing food for railway passengers and the dining cars are gone, though the hotel still provides the train with a few supplies.

A covered walkway from Pier 21 led steamship passengers right to the Nova Scotian's door (and led many bridegrooms away to war in Europe after spending their honeymoon night at the hotel). The station has just a small café, so passengers looking for a more substantial meal visit the Promenade Lounge on the hotel's ground floor. I did just that and met Roy, a Halifax native and bartender here for close to forty years.

Roy can mix all kinds of cocktails and learned recipes for 150 while doing his six weeks' bartender training in the summer of 1963. His Caesar remains the most popular, but he poured me a pint of delicious brown ale from a local outfit, Garrison Brewing, and we talked. Conversation comes easily to Roy.

"Lots of people used to arrive here by rail," he said, "but not any more. The station had no bar of its own, and it was a big barn of a building, so during the sixties everyone came into the hotel for a drink, especially returning sailors."

That evening the bar was fairly quiet, although the hotel still accommodates a few VIA rail staff and airline employees. Roy said Halifax is a tourist destination, with lots of U.S. visitors who come to take pictures of Peggy's Cove, just forty-five minutes down the road, or head off in boats to steal a photo of a whale.

Roy told me of guests who expired while in residence, though I'm not supposed to write about it. I asked if the place was haunted and he mentioned something about the fifth floor, but then suddenly remembered he wasn't supposed to say things like that. Ghost stories are the bane of the hotel industry. For every guest who wants to walk the hallway or sleep in the room where the headless spectre appeared, there'll be another dozen who'll avoid the place like the plague and settle for a modern and spiritually clean motel. Ghosts, generally, are not as good for hotels as, say, movie stars or famous musicians.

Country star Faith Hill, for instance, stayed here when she came to surprise her man, Tim McGraw, by joining him on stage during a concert. A fashionable band of teen idols, the Backstreet Boyz, took over the eleventh floor with their entourage of security personnel, but they caused no more trouble than the Duke of Windsor, who stayed there previously. The best rooms include the Crown suite on the eleventh floor with its living room, dining room, kitchen and two bedrooms, and the Vice Regal suite with similar amenities on the fifth floor.

The Lord Nelson is this city's other major railway hotel, opened on October 22, 1928, the day after Trafalgar Day. Built as a joint enterprise between eight local businessmen and the CPR, which at that point ran the Dominion Atlantic Railway, it cost \$1.5 million. Montreal architect Kenneth Campbell designed it in the Georgian style with a Nova Scotia granite base, Bedford limestone and Bluenose-faced brick. Several renovations, including the addition of towers in 1967 and 1973, have somewhat wiped the original Georgian smile off the hotel's face.

The time came for me to leave Roy to shake his stainless cocktail jug for someone else, while I wandered back through town to my own modest room at the Delta Halifax. A good night's sleep was in order. I was about to make the real start of my rail journey, and that probably meant the real end of large, comfy beds.

* * *

For some odd reason, I didn't want to leave Halifax. My hotel bedsheets clung to me as a fretful mother would, but I eventually broke free, packed my bags, and checked out. Crossing the street through a thick, humid mist, I bade a quick farewell to the pier and the old part of town. Poking about between buildings and docks I

made my way carefully down narrow wet steps to water level. Call me romantic, but I wanted to do what so many other trans-Canadian travellers have done before me: take a splash of the Atlantic to pour into the Pacific at my journey's end. I soon had an empty film canister filled, sealed and tucked safely into a pocket.

I caught a cab to the train station just before noon and saw another huge cruise ship, the *Norwegian Night*, dwarfing the pier buildings a couple of hundred yards away. Entering the station, I heard an announcement in English and French over the PA system, but I couldn't make out either version. The hall, as an acoustic engineer would say, is full of active surfaces, or echoey, as the rest of us would say. I checked in two pieces of luggage for VIA train No. 15, scheduled to leave for Moncton at 1:30 p.m. With more than half an hour to spend, I sat and watched people go up to the counter to buy tickets. The travellers were a real assortment, and most seemed to be locals, some travelling light with just the clothes on their backs and others with enough luggage to rupture an elephant. I saw more than one tearful farewell, a few bilingual goodbyes and lots of hugging.

A few people stood around, unsure of their roles in this pageant. I think the only way to spend time at a train station, or a bus depot or airport, is on your own. Free of the need to make promises of writing or calling or keeping in touch, unencumbered by the guesswork of when to give that final hug, or whether to kiss on the cheek or the lips. Not worrying about whether to whisper "I love you" as you finally break away. Goodbyes are stressful, so not having to say one here in Halifax lightened my load, leaving me free to watch others leap or fall through their emotional hoops.

I turned towards the platform doorway, just in time to be caught by my friend Peggy, who'd brought her mother along to meet me and say goodbye. I thanked them for their Halifax hospitality and made a quick dash through the hoops: firm hug, cheek kiss, promise to keep in touch. Then I strode out of the station into the pale sunlight and relative quiet of the platform.

Walking the length of the train, I took a quick inventory of what made up this first vehicle of my journey: the signature park car, with its bar lounge and upstairs dome observation room, three sleepers, a coach, a dining car, another park car, three more coaches and right behind the locomotive, as always, the baggage car.

When I finally got to the front, past big yellow locomotives No. 6432 and 6458, I saw the engineer taking a break. His name was Jim and he was sitting on the side of the track. He said it was "too bloody hot" to get in the cab just yet, so I sat down next to him and we chatted. A railroader for twenty-seven years, he told me how the three-thousand-horsepower diesel-electric engines would take about 4 1/2 hours to haul us all to Moncton, at an average speed of 75 miles per hour, which he hoped would get some air going through his cab windows and cool things down. On a passenger train, the engineer makes sure the luggage is safely stowed in the baggage car and that the locomotives have whatever fuel they need. Meanwhile, the service crew, supervised by a service manager, looks after all the passengers and makes sure they get on board and into their allocated seats or cabins. The engineer is eventually told that all are aboard, that doors are shut, and that he can move off. It's a loose team but it works. Jim said he tended to keep to himself, but he was friendly enough with me.



Jim, about to climb into the cab and drive 6432 all the way from Halifax to Moncton, “too bloody hot” or not.

Walking farther up the line to take a photo of my long rail journey's first train, I stopped to examine the railroad ties. Wooden. These things have barely changed in over a hundred years. The average Canadian railroad tie is eight feet long by eight inches wide and about six inches deep, and they're laid a foot to sixteen inches apart. I dug out a pocket calculator to do some quick math. A hundred ties equal about 166 feet, which puts about 3,168 of them in each linear mile of track. I reckoned I had to cross more than 600,000 to reach Moncton. I also reckoned that wandering about jabbing numbers into a small calculator can make you miss your train, so I jogged back more than a hundred yards, or 180 ties, to a service attendant. He helped me into car No. 8100, about halfway along the train, and I walked a few steps down the aisle to find my seat.

The carriage was uncrowded and comfortable, with lots of room to spread my stuff on adjacent seats or stow it on the baggage rack above me. It wasn't at all like the inaugural train of these parts. One bright May morning in 1875 more than a thousand excited people were crammed like cattle into open cars for the Western Counties Railway's first run from Yarmouth to Pitman's. Having organized the Intercolonial Railway in 1867 and assumed ownership of the railways in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, the government of Canada soon realized these railways would never be a commercial success. They did create employment, however, and helped establish villages and towns along the route. Canadian National's extremely busy main line would later follow much of the Intercolonial's route.

I listened for the fabled "All aboard!" call from the conductor, but, sadly, it never came. This is partly because there is no conductor these days; most of his duties went to the service manager. Bang on time, we pulled out of the station, and my trans-Canadian journey was underway. Within minutes, as we hugged the shoreline of Bedford Basin, rain streaked the windows and the sky turned the colour of an old bruise. Feeling fidgety, I wandered the length of the train, checking out the dome car and greeting those passengers whose eyes I caught. Most were heading to Montreal or Toronto, and when I said I was bound for Victoria, the conversation faltered. After all, there are planes that go there. For these people the train is still a viable means of transportation, not just some lumbering curio from a bygone era. This train, VIA No. 15, known as *The Ocean*, is the longest-running train in Canada, having operated continuously over the same 840-mile route from Halifax to Montreal since July 3, 1904. It was apparent, though, from the looks and comments, that normal people don't use a train to get across the whole country.

I ended up in a vestibule between cars, talking to David, the service attendant. He told me he loved his job, and chatting to passengers and taking care of them came easily, "Though it's not a career," he said, adding that he had plans for university at some point. There's a definite sense of family about the service crew, and he referred to each of them affectionately, telling me where they were from, how long they'd been with VIA, who smoked and who didn't.

Later, while wandering towards the front of the train, I found the service manager in his office -- a group of four seats he'd taken over and spread his paperwork across.

His job is largely making sure the passengers are on board, happy and have paid for their tickets. His biggest problem that day was that he had to "break the train" at some point to pick up more sleeper cars. Although summer was on the wane, tourists were still flocking to Canada and wanted to ride the rails. These cars would eventually be added to VIA's famous train No. 1, *The Canadian*, on its run from Toronto to Vancouver.

We pulled into the first station, Truro, and I jumped down onto the platform to take a photo. It was cold and wet but I was enthusiastic. By the third station, Amherst, two-thirds of the way to Moncton, the enthusiasm had waned but the downpour hadn't. I huddled into a corner of the red sandstone station and watched as the engineers unhitched the last few cars, shunted a few hundred yards up the track to pick up a few sleeper cars, then rolled back to pick up the rear end again. The whole operation took less than ten minutes, which was enough time to set me on the way to moist hypothermia. I made a small bet with myself that engineer Jim had probably had his fill of cool, fresh air and that his cab window was now closed. Yes, *this* is Maritimes weather, I told myself.

Back aboard, I found the help-yourself means to make tea in a park car, and my world slowly came pulsing back to life, though the afternoon was still grey and dark. It stayed that way as we rolled past estuaries and tidal flats, and creeks and rivers heavy with mud - known to maritimers as guts -- and on towards Moncton, where

I'd spend the night. I was visiting Moncton not because of its fame as a railway hotel city, but so I could make a side trip down to St. Andrews, which does have a renowned hotel but no longer has a railroad to take me there.

Two minutes before scheduled arrival time, just as the rain stopped, we pulled into Moncton Station.

* * *

2. Moncton to St. Andrews

“Welcome to Moncton, New Brunswick!” I said to myself out loud, since no one else was there to say it as I reached the exit of the railway station. A huge parking lot that I suspected was rarely choked with vehicles surrounded me.

The bordering marshland of the Petitcodiac River, which fattens enough a few hundred yards behind the station to be called Petitcodiac Lake, was reclaimed by railway developers late last century, partly to accommodate extensive workshops and yards. A sizeable roundhouse boasting forty stalls was kept busy; the city provided repair and maintenance shops for all locomotives, passenger and freight cars for a region taking in Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, the whole of New Brunswick, and a good chunk of eastern Quebec. That was until the 1930s. Operational headquarters of the Intercolonial Railway, the nucleus of the Canadian Government Railways, were set up in Moncton, but much administration went west, to Ottawa and Montreal.

Known as the “downtown railway lands,” for obvious reasons, this expanse of almost 80 acres was redeveloped by CN in the 1960s, when it levelled the large, red brick railway station to make way for the modest building I now stood outside, as well as the parking lot, of course.

I waved to the only car in the lot, a white taxi. It whisked me down Main Street to a pair of large iron gates in a red brick wall, turned into a courtyard and stopped by the front entrance to my hotel, the Beauséjour.

Moncton was just recovering from a bout of Francophone Summit meetings, and a boxy, temporary wooden structure bridged the gap between the hotel and an adjacent building. Built along Hollywood lines of architecture, best seen from one side only, the framing had served as an atrium for summit delegates. A hotel worker told me it would soon be dismantled and given to the local farmers’ market.

At the check-in desk I was politely told not to drink the water as the whole city was suffering from “some biological thing.” Ice, should I require any, would be “imported.” As water doesn’t constitute a large part of my daily intake I wasn’t too worried, but I took the bottled stuff they offered me, in case I brushed my teeth or something.

I shivered myself into the fourth-floor room, cranked up the heating, and took a quick look at the view: a small clock tower a couple of blocks down Main Street, the grey and red roofs of a few neighbouring buildings, and a glimpse of the sluggish, dark green river beyond. A local attraction, according to a brochure in my room, is the tidal bore, which even merits its own little downtown park from which to witness the phenomenon. The Bay of Fundy has the biggest tides in the world, and Moncton’s river water, being within tidal reach, is pushed back upstream twice a day as the mighty ocean shoves its way inland. I promised myself I’d see this natural wonder and the next show was scheduled for ten minutes past eleven that same night.

After a hot shower and a change into dry clothes I returned the thermostat to a sensible setting and wandered downstairs to the third floor, noticing a tidy little swimming pool. The still, pale blue water looked inviting but I’d been wet enough for one day. Beside the pool was a well-equipped, though lonely, workout room. I wasn’t about to break its silence with my grunts and groans, nor moisten myself once more with perspiration, so I let gravity pull me down another flight where I discovered a pleasing exhibition of Francophone visual art in a mezzanine gallery. Why they had to label visual art as Francophone I wasn’t sure, but guessed it was something to do with the recent conference, or politics and government funding in general. I spent a few minutes admiring the oil paintings and sculptures, then took the stairs down to the lobby. Making my way through a raucous crowd of New Brunswick Federation of Labour conventioners, freshly released, presumably, from a day of being locked up in meetings, I armed myself with a downtown walking map from a rack by the back door, and went out into the courtyard.

The Beauséjour forms part of a complex called Assumption Plaza, incorporating a few small shops and offices. I made my way through the hallways and finished up on a wet Main Street. It was suspiciously quiet for eight o’clock on a Saturday evening, but perhaps threatening skies, or something remarkable on TV, were keeping people indoors.

I bumped into a young man on the sidewalk, leaving his job at the liquor store, and after seeking his advice on where to eat we got into conversation. It turned out he’d spent the previous summer working as a security guard at the Algonquin Hotel, the next stop on my journey. He gave such a glowing account of the place and raved about playing golf on its famous course for free that I almost began to wish I was heading there to work

for a season, and not just spend a night under its hallowed roof. As we parted, I promised to try his restaurant recommendations, but not before I'd explored the length of Main Street, which parallels the riverbank and forms a tidy border to the southern edge of downtown.

Moncton is refreshing in the low-key way it fosters bilingualism. I heard French and English everywhere I went, and locals flipped back and forth between the two with ease. Although my French is on the poor side of lousy, I spoke a few words and did a little shopping without hassle or being made to feel stupid. I soon learned, however, that many people had endured more than enough of the Francophone Summit. This was not because of any language issue, but because of the paranoid, American-style security that came with it. One man told me he was standing on the roof of his downtown business premises, enjoying a cigarette as he did three or four times a day, when his cell phone rang and a sharp voice told him to "Get the hell off that roof *right now!*"

As darkness fell, I arrived at the Pumphouse, the recommended brew pub on Orange Street, carrying a small thirst and a huge appetite. I ordered the acclaimed smoked turkey wood-oven pizza and a pint of cream ale, and was promptly satisfied by both.

Perhaps the evening was set up by the New Brunswick tourism authorities, but the people in that pub could have given a merry horde of Friendly Manitobans a cheerful run for their money. I was soon hauled into the conversation at a nearby table and found myself sitting next to a very large man named Wade. He was bursting with nervous energy, his left foot bouncing rapidly on the floor, and he quivered all over, like an idling bus waiting for someone to climb aboard.

As a frank and seasoned employee of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Wade put me right on a few maritime things. First, I needn't bother going down the street to see the tidal bore because since they built a causeway the river had silted up and the bore is now just a ripple of its former self. No, he said emphatically, looking me square in the eye and ratching up his quivering to maximum, I'd be much better off staying put and helping them sing a few songs. So I did.

We filled the room with nautical ballads and I surprised the assembly with my rendition of "Barrett's Privateers," which I meant to sing in Halifax, but never mind. I met some wonderful characters, such as Shirley, who came in and, in a surprisingly chipper voice, told the group she'd been robbed again, for the third time that month. Sean, the pub's owner, had sage advice: "Shirl, ya gotta go home and ya gotta stay there!"

Good company was certainly a thief of time, and I left the place in the small hours of a warm, humid morning. Turning the corner onto Main Street, I was amazed to see that I was far from being the last one to call it a night. The road was a colourful, noisy torrent of cruising automobiles, their windows all down to let scores of parading pedestrians feel the throbbing music that poured forth. I sat on a bench outside a busy fast food restaurant to witness this nocturnal spectacle: Saturday night live, in downtown Moncton. Better by far, I suspected, than the small tidal bore I'd missed on the river. After watching for a few minutes, I became aware of someone sitting next to me, quite close. It was Kevin, a man I'd met briefly in the pub, and he said downtown was like this every weekend. We chatted for a while about food, drink, and nightlife. He leaned over and told me he was gay and wondered aloud if I was, too. I had to disappoint him in that department, and listened sympathetically as he mourned the wee size of Moncton's gay community. He knew he'd have a better chance of romance in a big city, but this was home, and he was staying. Then I stood up, thanked him for his company, wished him well, shook hands firmly and went back to the Beauséjour to sleep.

* * *

I couldn't reach St. Andrews by rail, as the passenger service had stopped running in December, 1994. The bus made only one daily return trip and wouldn't get me back in time for my next train, so I called a rental car office and was soon behind the wheel of a shiny blue, mid-sized GM product.

I drove along Highway 2, a toll road, with the windows rolled down, enjoying the rural splendour of New Brunswick countryside. Green pastures gleamed in the bright sunlight, late summer wildflowers swayed along the roadside, and birds flew back and forth high above rolling woodland. Had I turned down the volume of the FM rock station, I'm sure I would have heard Sunday morning church bells ring from each village I drove past.

I couldn't help thinking what a nice train ride this would have been, as surely it once was. The Saint Andrews and Quebec Rail Road was formed in 1836; soon after there was pressure to push the New England

railroad network through Maine, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia to an ice-free harbour to berth European shipping. These lines wove a crucial network for distributing Nova Scotia coal.

In June, 1889, a train arrived in Saint John from Montreal, marking the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway as a truly coast-to-coast line. By that time, Saint John had become a key player in the railway industry and local companies, such as Harris and Allan, were kept busy, employing around three hundred men to build top-notch rolling stock. The Prince of Wales (the future King Edward VII) used one of the firm's first carriages on his state visit to Canada in 1860.

During the early 1940s this was one of the busiest stretches of single-track rail on the continent, bringing thousands of troops here to catch their boat rides over to the war.

New Brunswick enjoys a lengthy railway history. Even the provincial Fires Act uses it as an anchor when it states "... a camp fire permit is not required by a person, who, for the purpose of obtaining warmth or cooking food, ignites a camp fire in or within one hundred metres of the centre of track of a railway." Tempted as I was to pull over, flick my Bic and roast a marshmallow or two, I drove on.

I arrived at St. Andrews in the full heat of midafternoon, after covering 161 miles and getting lost around St. George. The fault, I thought, was all mine, but the third person I asked for directions confirmed that the map I had was a poor one, though each of them was polite enough not to describe in for what it was.

Cruising into St. Andrews that warm Sunday afternoon was like entering another era. I should have packed a striped blazer, white slacks and a straw boater. With well-kept gardens and brilliant white paintwork on its clapboard houses, picket fences and five churches, this sweet little seaside town founded by loyalists in 1783 is vintage postcard material. A few settlers dismantled their cabin homes in Castine, Maine, floated them across the bay on barges, and rebuilt them on lots where they stand to this day. The town has earned its designation as a National Historic District and clearly aims to keep it.

Finding the Algonquin Hotel proved easy enough, perched nobly as it is at the top of the hill overlooking the tidy network of streets and lanes leading down to the harbour and waterfront of Passamaquoddy Bay. And what a quaint pile it is, with steep-pitched red roofs and smart black-and-white Tudor-style walls, surrounded by a verdant spread of lawns and bright flower beds of red, yellow and blue. A fresh ocean breeze ruffled the leaves of the birch trees, but it was far from chilly.

Built in 1889 by the St. Andrews Land Company as an Atlantic resort for New England's and Canada's elite, and taken over by the CPR in 1900, the Algonquin has weathered the ebbs and flows of mixed fortune. One Saturday lunch time, on April 11, 1914, a spark from a roofer's brazier set fire to the place and destroyed much of it. The hotel reopened on June 15, 1915, with extensive additions and a plush new verandah (called the Passamaquoddy verandah, after the bay), now the hotel's main dining area.

For more than a century the hotel stayed open only from May to October, but since 1996 it has offered winter breaks and business retreats, largely for New Brunswickers and Elderhostel groups.

My room wasn't quite ready for me, so I took to the footpaths to explore the grounds. People sat on the shady verandah and the front lawn, and a few children splashed merrily in the outdoor pool, which the lifeguard told me was due to close for the season the following day. The tennis courts looked forlorn, but a couple of seniors amused themselves at the outdoor shuffleboard, and a three-hole putting green entertained a couple more guests.

A building dating from 1903, just across the front lawn, originally served as a games pavilion, but today there is a wooden "Casino" sign by its front door. Peering through a large window I saw chairs and tables set up for a meeting or conference, with not a gambling device or croupier in sight. I later learned from an employee that earlier this century *casino* was a term used for a place where visitors could play cards and board games, but with nothing more at stake than fun and, perhaps, pride.

Wandering around the back of the hotel I noticed another sign beckoning me into a small gym, cool and dark with pink venetian blinds at the windows and a hot tub next door. Across the hall, the Lads and Lassies Family Hair Salon and Tanning Bed was just as quiet. A couple of sleek vinyl chairs were ready, but no one was getting trimmed or tanned while I was there.

A large, handsome building, put up in 1917 just behind the hotel, provides accommodation for some of the 250 staff, including several teenagers who sat beside it on the grass that afternoon, giggling over their magazines and cans of pop.

I crossed Carleton Street, leaving the hotel property, to a white cottage called Pansy Patch that featured a peculiar turret on its low roof. It's a bed and breakfast home that includes a restaurant and art gallery, so I opened the little gate, stepped up to the hefty front door and knocked. Theresa, an employee, showed me around and pointed out a long oak mantle carved with a verse from the sixteenth-century English poet Edmund Spenser:

*"Now faire betyde who here abyde and merrie may they be
And faire befalle who in this halle repaire in courtesie.
From morne till nighte be it darke or bright we banish droll and dree.
Come sit beside our hearth tis wide for gentle companie."*

The woman responsible for the building and meticulous decoration of Pansy Patch in 1911 was Kate Reed, an Ontario-born aesthete and artist. She was commissioned to refurbish the grand CPR Hotels and scoured Europe for the desired antiques, paintings and furniture. (She also decorated the royal train coach that carried the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall across Canada in 1901.)

More rooms awaited guests in the cottage next door, built in 1856. The whole place is delightfully twee -- ideal, I think, for someone like my mother, who would sip her tea until the faeries came home.



The Algonquin at St Andrews. Cute as a baby's button

Almost two thousand people call St. Andrews home. You can still buy a building lot here for less than most of us would pay for a new car. A local RCMP officer claims it also has the lowest crime rate in Canada, which merely adds to the appeal.

Genteel and subdued as it may appear on its tweedy surface, the town stands ready and able for tourism with more than five hundred rooms available for visitors, half of them in The Algonquin. I eventually checked into a comfortable ground-floor suite opposite the ice and laundry room, which reminded me I had some laundry to do. I put my underwear on top of the ice machine to dry -- partly because I hadn't the required coins for the dryer and partly because I wanted to test the low crime-rate claim, but mostly because I'm cheap.

Roaming the hotel, eerily peaceful though numerous guests milled about the place, I came upon the library, a dignified spot that's brassy and lacy, where guests are encouraged to enjoy a lunch or beverage surrounded by books and bathed in a golden beam or two of late afternoon sunshine. The hotel is certainly a restful place, sitting on the vacation spectrum at the opposite end to Club Med. I continued, through a long and airy hallway, past glass cases of artifacts and press clippings that detailed the hotel's history, and down a few steps to the "arcade level" to find The Right Whale Brew Pub and Restaurant. It was empty, but looked like it might be cheerful if the timing was right.

The Algonquin alone was worth the drive to St. Andrews, but after a light meal of tea, fresh fruit and lemongrass soda water, I set off for the other good reason I'd come here: the vacation home of William Cornelius Van Horne.

A large, robust man of Dutch-German descent with ice-blue eyes, Van Horne worked as general manager of the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad when George Stephen, first president of the CPR, went looking for someone special to push a railway over the Canadian Shield, to the north and west of Lake Superior. Van Horne came highly recommended and due to his "great mental and physical power" commanded a salary of fifteen thousand dollars a year, astronomical for that period.

Not yet forty years old, Van Horne began work on the first day of 1882, promising to build five hundred miles of track across the prairies before the end of summer. He shunned adjectives and spoke in short, punchy sentences, leaving behind such aphorisms as "The biggest things are always the easiest to do because there is no competition."

A ruthless railway general, Van Horne controlled an army of five thousand men and seventeen hundred teams of horses, organizing the required supplies and accommodations. He described the desert to the east of Fort William as "two hundred miles of engineering impossibilities," but his crews laid track at the rate of three miles a day, forcing rails more than four hundred miles across Saskatchewan and adding at least a hundred miles of branch lines into the bargain. The railway penetrated the Rocky Mountains by the end of that first year.

He spent his winters in a sumptuous mansion bought in 1890 on the northwest corner of Stanley and Sherbrooke in Montreal's exclusive "Golden Square Mile." Summers, however, found him with his wife, daughter and son at an idyllic estate he purchased around the same time, on five-hundred-acre Ministers Island just off the northeast shore of the peninsula that forms St. Andrews. Van Horne would arrive by train, naturally, in his private car on the old St. Andrews & Quebec Railroad from McAdam to St. Andrews. Then, at low tide, he would take a horse and carriage to the island.

For some reason, I spent about five minutes singing what little I know of *Over the Sea to Skye*, on the drive from the hotel, across Mowat Drive and down Bar Road. On the eighth chorus I rattled onto a rough gravel parking lot by a rocky beach. There I met Marie Hansen, who works for the Ministers Island Advisory Committee that administers the estate for the province. Since 1993 it has offered guided public tours from June to October. About a dozen people in half as many vehicles were there to take the evening tour, and a couple of hikers showed up at the last minute, as Marie and her colleague collected the admission fee. No one is allowed to cross on foot so I offered the young women, holidaying from Scotland, a ride in my car.

No bridge or fabricated causeway extends to the island, and boaters have no formal access. The tall wooden poles of old herring traps rise out of the water at several points around the bay, but from a distance the island seems to be untouched, with hardly a trace of civilization except for the lane that leads up from the beach and disappears into a dense thicket.

Motorists are led the five or six hundred yards across the ocean floor in convoy at low tide, with a guide in the lead vehicle and another bringing up the rear. The seabed lies under twenty feet of water at extreme high tide, so the two-hour tours must be chaperoned and carefully timed.

Van Horne avidly smoked Cuban cigars and eventually had one named after him with his picture on the band, but no smoking is allowed anywhere on the whole island now, as it could take hours to get a fire truck here, depending on the tides.

The “summer cottage,” as he described it, named Covenhoven after his father, is a substantial home of some fifty rooms. It was built in three stages, beginning around 1890, from sandstone hewn just yards away on the shoreline.

At one time, there were twenty-two buildings on the property, including a farm, but now just half that many remain. About ten miles of carriage trails cover the island, but there’s barely a trace of the sweeping driveway that once brought Van Horne and his guests to the front of the house, around perfect lawns he forbade anyone to walk over. Gone, too, are the greenhouses where Van Horne grew enormous peaches, testing the flavour himself each day before offering them to visitors. The current garden is little more than roughly cut grass, with a few surviving bushes and flowering shrubs. Unchanged, however, is the magnificent view of the ocean stretching southwards to Maine.

Before electricity sparked its way across to the island in the 1950s, the homestead made its own power in a small shed in the backyard. A device dripped water onto carbide pellets to produce combustible gas that was stored and pressurized, then fed by pipe to the house. The water was drawn from a deep well by a tall, Dutch-style windmill that relinquished the job to a kerosene engine on windless days. An underground storage tank then piped it to various points around the estate, including a couple of fire hydrants.

A caretaker lived on the premises until the 1970s. Now it’s home to no one. Thanks to a new roof, which cost \$140,000 a few years ago, the place is dry, but longs for extensive restoration. The leaded windows of three-inch panes bow and bend with age, paint curls away from walls and ceilings, and patches of fallen plaster reveal the lathwork behind. In some rooms the original paint holds fast, including a decorative frieze that Van Horne, an accomplished painter, completed for his son’s third birthday on July 29, 1910. It shows a Dutch scene with children being chased by a dog and a farmer; boys are running one way and girls the other.

All the paintings in the home are by Van Horne, with the exception of two: a rendition of the driving of the last spike at Craigellachie and a 1908 painting by Van Horne’s friend, George Mathews, showing the house and flower gardens. On at least one occasion, Van Horne completed an entire painting in one night, in order to tease his guests when they saw it the following morning. He apparently needed very little sleep, and from the seventeen bedrooms in the home he chose the one downstairs off the main entrance hall, even though there was no downstairs bathroom. His wife slept upstairs at the other end of the house, in a room with fitted closets and glassed-in compartments that kept her hats free of dust.

Adeline, Van Horne’s daughter, lived in the home until her death in 1941. The estate was later sold to a syndicate of ambitious Ohio businessmen. They aimed to set up a grand hunting lodge, but they soon discovered that there was very little game to aim at on the island. (Today, a herd of about seventy white-tailed deer roam the grounds.) Unfortunately, the syndicate made several garish renovations to the house before they left. Much of the original woodwork, lightly stained or oiled, received heavy coats of paint, some of which can only be described as bloody awful. To add insult to injury, an ugly bar was also installed, and although two of the bathrooms retain their original brass and porcelain fittings, the third appears cheaply modernized.

An American developer bought the estate in 1972 and it sat idle until an auction five years later, at which the province stepped in to save the day and around six hundred artifacts, but not before more than three hundred items had been sold to private collectors.

Our tour group walked across the garden to a hefty, two-storey circular bathhouse, draped in the remains of wild roses. A huge fire pit occupies the middle of the upper level, with chains overhead for suspending a copper flue. Downstairs, several wooden changing cubicles offer a little privacy from the windows around the building. Beach stone, quarried just below, was used to build the bathhouse, and the resulting rectangular hole, about twenty feet wide by thirty feet long, forms a saltwater swimming pool that fills twice a day. Lilacs and lupins border a pathway down to the pitted, red sandstone beach. This small quarry also supplied Van Horne’s headstone, which he chose himself before his death in 1915. He is buried at his birthplace, Joliet, Illinois.

Before leaving the island we were shown the remains of the farm that kept the house supplied with produce and dairy goods. The huge wooden barn is about 60 feet high and covers more than nine thousand square feet of land. It was one of the largest in the country when built in 1898 at a cost of around \$20,000. Unemployed shipbuilders were used for the construction and their craftsmanship, enforced and approved by their exacting boss, has stood the test of time beautifully.

Sunset warmed the hills to the northwest as we returned to the mainland, with less than an hour to spare before the tide swept back over the rocks and seaweed. I dropped off my hitchhiking passengers, whom I now knew as Fiona and Katrina, at their bed and breakfast place, and I returned to the Algonquin. Peeking into the laundry room, I gave the low crime-rate claim my seal of approval as I pulled my underwear from the top of the ice machine, warm and dry.

The next morning, at nine-thirty, I met the hotel's general manager, Andrew Turnbull. Employed by CP since 1982, he lives in a house on the hotel property and has seen a few changes since coming here in 1993. The addition of conference facilities aims to extend the season and increase room occupancy during the cooler months, he told me. The average stay for guests at the hotel is three days, and Turnbull admitted the Algonquin is favoured by an older, conservative crowd. The resort is recovering from a lean period during the early 1990s, and he believes a rosy future is teed up on the golf course.

The course has certainly gone a few rounds with the golfing elite -- the game's been played here since 1893. Three clubhouses occupy the course and the original, one-room cabin is claimed to be the oldest single-purpose clubhouse in Canada. The latest building is a plush restaurant and pro shop. The course offered eighteen holes, plus nine, but fifty acres of land were added and the celebrated Thomas McBroom recently designed a new, 6,900-yard, par seventy-two course. CP, as the largest owner-operator of golf courses in Canada, should know what they're doing.

A visit to this renowned turf was in order, so I jumped in the car and set off, according to the directions: "Turn right, head out and you can't miss it." Minutes later, well out of the parking lot, I realized that right and left are subjective terms. My right turned out to be wrong, and I was soon in the middle of the town, pulling up in front of a white cottage to ask an old lady sitting in a chair on her front stoop, brilliant as the morning sunshine in her orange cardigan, for directions. Talk is cheap but she didn't hear enough of it and had plenty to give in return. After chatting about how many times she played the course and how nice it all is but it's not the same and how she hopes to goodness they won't ruin it with all this new redesign and landscaping, I finally found out how to get there, and bid her farewell.

Asking for permission to roam at will across the manicured greenery, I was offered the use of a golf cart and a driver to go with it. Curtis was eighteen years old, and his duties included fetching golf carts for guests and caddying a bit. But he's not a golfer. Deep down he's a snowboarder with plans to move to Whistler Mountain in B.C. and live a life packed with a bit more excitement than he currently finds in St. Andrews. But first, he took me around the course and showed me the ancient clubhouse, which turned out to be a bit disappointing: a small, locked-up building, with a new-looking layer of cedar siding and fresh stain. Only the red-brick chimney stack on the roof appeared to be of any real age.

Curtis drove me around a few of the more picturesque and challenging holes, such as number twelve, a steep, terraced fairway, only a hundred and fifty yards long, but with a green right at the edge of the ocean. I'm not a golfer, and I could imagine losing a lot of balls around here and a fair bit of temper.

I left the Algonquin around noon to make my way back to Moncton, driving Highway 3 north through more wonderful farmland and rural scenery, and passing close by the village of McAdam, which surely deserves tribute. Named after Irish-born lumberman turned politician John McAdam, the village was a key railway centre for the first few decades of the twentieth century. The CPR built one of their impressive "chateau-style" stations here at the dawn of the twentieth century, using local granite. After additions made during 1910 and 1911, the building became one of the busiest in the province, boasting a seventeen-room hotel upstairs. A dining room on the ground floor required almost thirty young ladies from the area to serve the finest food and drink to guests. The station had the usual men's and women's waiting rooms, a busy lunch counter and -- being close to the Maine border -- a customs and immigration office. The station also had a police department and a small jail for those who earned it.

At one point, sixteen passenger trains came through McAdam every day, taking people to and from St. Stephen, St. Andrews, Saint John, Woodstock, Edmundston and Brownville Junction Maine, with long-distance

runs to Montreal and Boston. The CPR employed 650 McAdam residents in its heyday, but that went the way of all good things. The last passenger train left the station in 1981, as a lone bugler stood on the platform and played taps. By then, barely a handful of locals could name the railway as their employer. The station became a historic site and was featured on a stamp in 1988 as part of a series commemorating architectural heritage.

Highway 3 took me up to the Trans-Canada and my appetite chose the Fredericton exit soon afterwards, where I had a late, leisurely downtown lunch in a sidewalk café on Queen Street.

Swooping down off Highway 1 some hours later into the outskirts of Moncton, I ran into heavy traffic and started to get a little bit concerned as I had less than an hour to return the car and get to the station for the 6:10 p.m. train. Fortunately, the rush hour was more of a rush minute and traffic speed soon picked up again, giving me ample time to find the car rental office and meet a nice employee who willingly drove me down to the station.

* * *

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