

*Saturday Morning Post  
June 10, 1989*

# TRAIN TRIPS TO TORONTO

From time to time, my parents travelled by train to Toronto to visit relatives. My earliest memory of the train ride was looking out the coach window and watching the telegraph poles, the fences and landscape flying by my line of vision. This puzzled my young mind and I did not understand what was taking place. Then all of a sudden, the steam locomotive would lay down a smoke screen that completely blocked out all scenery. As I grew older, these mysteries gradually were understood. Perhaps all very young observers go through such an experience.

From our King Street home, a walk up George Street brought us to the Grand Trunk Railway Station. This was before the Canadian Northern and the C.P.R. came to Cobourg. At that time, George Street sported a level crossing over the tracks and the street continued to the north. The wooden building that served as a station, baggage room, restaurant, etc. was adjacent to and west of George Street. The mainline tracks came through on the north side of the building and another track siding was on the south side. It served the freight sheds and office located midway between George and Division Streets in much the same posi-

tion as the present brick station.

All trains stopped at Cobourg at that time. When passenger trains arrived, there was much hustle and bustle going on until the train departed. The baggage man would be busy unloading onto his wagon, then load up the baggage destined for other places. The express man would be most active with his parcels. The mail man had his mail bags to unload and re-load. The engine fireman would be back on the tender of the engine filling the tank with water from a large-size, overhead spout. The train passengers would rush to the station restaurant for a quick snack. It all made for a busy stop.

The steam locomotives of that time were not as powerful as the larger, later models of the 1920s. Once the train was ready to leave the station, with all passengers on board, the engine driver would have to put the train into reverse, then a quick pull ahead creating a jar or bump in making a start. Later, more powerful locomotives would pull the train away without this reverse and bump.

En route to Toronto, the train stopped at nearly every station. The unloading and loading routine would be repeated. These station delays made for a longer time required for the train to reach its

destination. We ask you to compare this old routine with the time present day passenger trains require for the journey. Now, fewer stops are made and we enjoy a faster train service.

When I was quite young, the Toronto Union Station was at Yonge and Front Streets. After arrival, on gaining the street, a street car was our next conveyance for the rest of our journey. Various street car routes brought cars to Union Station. Again, I could not understand why we had to wait until a certain street car came along. I always wanted to get on the first car.

At that time, street cars were much shorter than later models. Out front of the car and close to the rails, a large protruding grating was installed as a safety catcher in case someone got in the way. The seats were of the wicker type. The conductor came around carrying a small rectangular receptacle with a slot at the top, into which one deposited a ticket or a five cent piece. When the car was in motion, the movement also produced a form of rocking-horse effect, due to the shorter span of front and rear wheels. For a young lad, riding on a street car was something else.

Recently the writer had a ride on the commuter GO train into

Toronto. To do this I first drove to Oshawa, parked the car in the Go bus parking lot, purchased a ticket and rode on the GO bus to the Whitby train terminal. There I transferred to a waiting Go train. Those Go train double-deck coaches, with diamond-shaped ends are very comfortable to ride in. One had the choice of a seat on the lower deck, or in one of the smaller compartments at the ends located half-way up to the top deck, or on the top deck itself. The cars are very well designed.

A few years ago, on a visit to England, we spent several days, actually nights, at Billericay, some 30 miles east of London. On travelling into the city, we used the commuter trains that are powered by electric locomotives. Each car is divided into several compartments. There is no central aisle through the coach. Each compartment had its own doors. Two long seats occupy the full width of the coach and

passengers crowd into these compartments, sit, and face each others seat. On arrival at the London station, the whole train empties in no time and droves of passengers sweep down the wide platform to suddenly disappear into the maw of the underground system.

In Toronto, the coaches empty less quickly from wide doors at each end of the GO coach, file down several places to the concourse area below, then move on to the street, or to the subway, or to the tunnels that lead northward.

When one contemplates the changes that have taken place over a span of 80 years of memory, it all rather boggles the mind. We live in a world of change, constant change, and one must swing with the changes. I am looking forward to the next decade! Who knows, we may even get back to that good old time religion.

