

WIARTON — There are good steamers and bad steamers, says train memorabilia collector Elgin Bennett.

And the engineer had a lot to do with how a steam engine would run back in the days when they did.

Those days are gone now, laments Bennett.

Even the switch to diesel by the late 1950s didn't save the railways.

Their runs are slowly but surely being killed off, Bennett, an old railway hand himself, said in a recent interview.

Bennett has recently retired from his real estate business and has more time to devote to his large collection of rare and unusual railway accessories.

His biggest selection is of switchmen's lamps. They hang from every possible inch of ceiling space in a special room in his basement.

Crowded on various shelves are railway spikes, spontoons, platform bells, old oil cans and telegraph equipment.

The oldest piece in his collection is an 1865 engineer's brass torch.

A pair of lipped scissors, used to trim seal oil lamp wicks, is from about the same era. The lip was supposed to catch the wick in case it fell on the floor and started a fire.

Bennett has collected his pieces from across the country - From traders magazines, word of mouth . . .

He wouldn't say exactly how long he's been collecting, being a little coy about his age - Jack Benny style - "Let's leave it at 39!"

But he worked on the Canadian Pacific Railway from 1925 to 1932 at various jobs . . . "So let them figure it out for themselves," he said.

Engineers were in charge of making sure the steam locomotive ran just right.

They could make life rather uncomfortable for the firemen or even dangerous.

A model of Canadian Pacific st

Firemen, muscles bulging, worked steady feeding the hungry engines with shovel after shovel of coal. But engineers had the power to either shorten or lengthen the stroke of the valve motion. That in turn governed the flow of steam to the cylinders, and of course the amount of coal needed.

If things weren't done just right, a draft could be created which could draw a fireman

into his own fire, Bennett said.

Bennett's had his share of railway experience, having worked as a timekeeper, a breakman and finally in the round house.

The roundhouse was where the trains were kept alive before taking off for their next run. "If you didn't keep them under steam, they died," he said. And it would take a

eam locomotive No. 1247 in Elgin Bennett's co

few hours to bring them back to life.

Bennett's father worked the railway all his life. So Bennett guessed the railway is in his blood.

He left the railway during the depression because he didn't seem much future in the business. "They were cutting back all the time," he said.

And he never could muster up the same interest in trains

once the diesel took over.

"Steam is something that is living. They're temperamental. There aren't any two alike," he said with affection.

Besides his wide array of train accessories, Bennett has a few old train models.

Outside in his garage is kept a Great Western English train model with a left hand drive. He's not sure of its age.

But his Canadian Pacific

llection

1247, 4-6-0 model, built by the late Hugh Sipes of Ben Allen, was put together between 1933 and 1947.

Bennett said he's quit collecting bits and pieces of railway history.

They take a lot of looking after. And besides, he said, "it's like pulling teeth to get anything today."

And nobody wants to part with anything.

Vol 19 Pg 67