

Last motorman on defunct radial interested in railway museum



BILL FENTEN AND HIS WIFE, the former Suburban Railway. It is still in top working order. (H. Coles Photo)

The official opening of the Halton County Radial Railway museum on Sunday, June 25, holds more than passing interest for Bill Fenten and his wife.

Fenten was the motorman on the last passenger car of the old Toronto suburban Railway which left Guelph in the late summer of 1931, ending an important chapter in his life and an era of railroading.

If it hadn't been for the five years he spent working for the old radial railway which fanned out from Toronto, passing through Streetsville, Georgetown, Acton and Eden Mills, Bill Fenten would have:

- (1) Never met his wife;
- (2) Missed a lot of fun;
- (3) Never rescued a late night fisherman from Fairy Lake, plus a host of other things retired railway hands like to discuss among themselves.

Built in 1917

The old Toronto Suburban line was built in 1917 and it was planned to extend it as far as Kitchener. War and depression intervened.

Cars on the line depended on a power source of 1,500 volts to keep them going in the electric railway era. It still took about two hours to go from Toronto to Guelph on the line because there were 90 possible stops.

Charter trips on express vehicles on the same line made the same distance in a little over an hour.

Bill Fenten says it was difficult to reach top speed in the cars because the track rarely had straight stretches. Average speed on a run would not be any more than 25 to 40 miles per hour. It was possible to reach 60 miles per hour on the few straight stretches of road—and there was still power to spare.

Interviewed by the Free Press this week, Bill Fenten

remembers when they used to stop at the Blue Springs siding outside Acton, fish, and gather watercrress from the spring creek. But there were not many opportunities for pleasure. The trains ran on Government orders such as any railroad. They had to be accurate.

There were times when the trainmen pulled jokes on the would-be passengers, such as leaving amorous Georgetown swains standing on the Acton station platform, by running through five minutes early. And vice-versa for Acton swains in Georgetown.

"It was a good place to work", he recalls nostalgically. "There were a lot of good times and jokes with passengers."

One night when he was helping to repair the "big bridge," the span that bridged Fairy Lake, he and a companion decided to go fishing. Somehow his companion slipped into the waters of Fairy Lake and got caught in the weeds which grew abundantly at the spot.

"I had to pull him out of the water with the winch," he recalls with a grin.

Radial romance

It was through the radial line also that he met his wife, the former Mary Sagaskie of Acton. The radial romance began while Miss Sagaskie travelled home to Acton from Toronto, where she worked. It bloomed just like summer business on the radial. It wasn't long until they were married.

Summer was the busy time on the old radial line with large picnics being ferried to Eldorado Park, near Huttonville.

"We had to run multiple units," explained Bill Fenten. The railway was a subsidiary of the CNR so the cars were rented from the parent company and turned back at the end of the year.



Mr. Fenten when he worked on the old radial cars.

Ordinarily the average size train would be one motorized coach. Saturdays and Sundays this would be expanded to two to handle weekend traffic.

The motorman often had to do two jobs—motorman and conductor. Under this system Fenten developed a real rapport with passengers and crew and made friendships which still exist.

He remembers that the radial cars were controlled by a system which had to be held down to keep the car moving. If you lifted your hand up the car stopped.

The line also used to have freight runs which picked up produce along the route and delivered it in Toronto. Among contracts were those from Provincial Paper, Georgetown, Cooksville Brick, turnips from Eden Mills and coal from Acton.

There was a milk train once a day which picked up full cans and returned the empties. Milk from the Ontario Reformatory at Guelph was picked up and delivered to Ontario hospitals in Toronto.

Cars cause demise

The radial line became unprofitable when the number of motor cars increased and came within reach of the average man's pocketbook. The once flourishing business closed the stations and retired trains in 1931. Tracks were torn up a few years later.

The Acton station, situated just south of the Main-Church St. corner, was converted into a residence, as were many of the others along the route. Some of the 90 stops were merely passenger kiosks, erected for protection against the weather. These were either dismantled or left to the elements.

The road bed of the railway, unattended, soon became overgrown with weeds.

About 1953 the group known as the Ontario Electric Railway Historical Association chose a site along the old road bed in Nassagaweya township for their electric railway museum. After 18 years of preparation they will have an official opening Sunday, June 25.

The Association has rolling stock on the property between the Third and Fourth Lines with track running through the half-mile strip. The old Rockwood station was purchased and is situated at the western half of the property, from where operations will be conducted.

Starting this Sunday, it will be almost as if the Toronto Suburban Railway had been resurrected on its own road bed. Veteran railwaymen, especially those with experience on the line such as Bill Fenten, will be keenly interested when the electric cars are running again in their own bed.

Perhaps the old radial cars were ahead of their time. Nowadays they'd be called GO trains.

The present collection at the Nassagaweya site is mainly composed of old TTC streetcars such as open side cars and cars similar to those that ran on the old Yonge carline. Three cars from the old Toronto Railway Company date back to the 1900-1920 era.

Included in the collection are inter-urban cars from London, Ont., and Montreal, Que. All of the cars will be fully operational over our three quarters of a mile of track. Presently, only three cars are inoperative.

Whiting "deplores" cancelled tax aids

In a speech in the House of Commons last week Halton MP Rud Whiting told the house he deplored the cancellation of the three per cent reduction in personal income tax.

Whiting said that in his visits to Halton on the weekend many people mentioned in conversation that the middle income group must continue to carry the chief burden of taxation.

"I think all members of the house deplore that the finance minister has seen fit not to continue this tax benefit beyond its expiry date. His reasoning is simply that there are many things that we as a country cannot afford and this is one of them."

Door not closed
Whiting indicated the minister had not closed the door and could review the tax situation before the end of the year. Whiting spoke

during a debate on John Turner's first budget.

Whiting dwelt on the reduction to 40 per cent in corporation tax and how it is expected to maintain the buoyancy of the economy.

"It is expected to defuse the threat to Canadian production as a result of protectionist moves by our trading partners, he said.

"The fast write-off of equipment and machinery is expected to maintain the buoyancy of our economy and stimulate further investment within the secondary manufacturing industry.

"The result of such stimulus on Halton, which houses a burgeoning secondary manufacturing sector, employing more than 18,000 people, can be of immense importance."

Influences prosperity
He cited Ford Motor Company of Canada Ltd. as a major beneficiary of the budget. He indicated the firm employed 7,000 people throughout the county and influenced the prosperity of the county.

"As a beneficiary, I would expect Ford to heed the advice given by the finance minister at his budget conference and get out and hustle, to grow, to compete and to build jobs for Canadians."

Whiting indicated Ford intended to be a viable Canadian enterprise and quoted the company's president as saying he intended to meet the import challenge and do it with our own resources. Every import sold in this country jeopardizes Canadian jobs and tax revenue.

Lower prices?
"In effect the budget protects a very large and important segment of Canada's manufacturing industry. It protects jobs and it protects a loss of corporate tax revenue," the MP said.

Whiting called for a decrease in prices of automobiles in view of the tax concessions. He quoted the Financial Post as saying, "It is now very much up to business, especially manufacturers to respond to the sizeable tax incentives with substantially more competitive prices."

Fall fair dates

Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food has published a booklet listing fall fair and agricultural society dates for 1972. Here are some in this area, also major attractions:

- Aberfoyle, Sept. 22, 23.
- Acton, Sept. 15, 16.
- Ancaster, Sept. 22 to 24.
- Arthur, Sept. 8, 9.
- Barrie, Aug. 24 to 27.
- Binbrook, Sept. 15, 16.
- Bolton, Sept. 23, 24.
- Brampton, Sept. 15, 16.
- Durham, Sept. 16, 17.
- Elmira, Sept. 1 to 4.
- Erin, Oct. 6 to 9.
- Fergus, Sept. 15, 16.
- Galt, Sept. 7 to 10.
- Georgetown, Sept. 30.
- Grand Valley, Sept. 23.
- Hanover, Aug. 31, Sept. 1, 2.
- Harriston, Sept. 21.
- Kitchener, Aug. 29 to Sept. 4.

- Listowel, Sept. 5, 6.
- London Western Fair, Sept. 8 to 16.
- Milton, Sept. 22, 23.
- Mount Forest, Sept. 12.
- Orangeville, Sept. 4.
- Ottawa Central Canada, Aug. 18 to 27.
- Rockton, Oct. 7 to 9.
- Woodbridge, Oct. 7 to 9.
- Canadian National Exhibition, Toronto, Aug. 16 to Sept. 4.
- Royal Winter Fair, Toronto, Nov. 10 to 18.
- International Plowing Match, Selbringville, Sept. 26 to 30.

Harold R. (Bunny) Hare

Harold R. (Bunny) Hare who was the first agricultural representative in Halton died suddenly at Oshawa Hospital Saturday, May 20.

He had lived at 213 Craydon Rd. in Whithy. Mr. Hare was the husband of Elizabeth Masters and the late Pearl Graham, father of Mrs. Bradford (Lorraine) of Niagara Falls New York, Mrs. Rsecroft (Jean) of Prescott and Dr. John Hare of Winnipeg and brother of Mrs. Knight of Grafton.

Mr. Hare was in his 85th year. Funeral service was held in Whithy and interment at Fairview Cemetery in Grafton.

First office
Mr. Hare opened the first agricultural office in Halton in 1914 and left in the fall of 1915 to go overseas. In May of 1919 he returned to Canada.

Choose it
from Canada's largest rental fleet of GM cars and GMC trucks.

& Charge it
Tilden honours most credit cards.

TILDEN
ANDREW MURRAY
MOTORS
45 Mountainview Road N.
E77-6P44
GEORGETOWN

Amazing new pollution control device.

Use it.



Keep Ontario beautiful.

Environment Ontario.

Hon. James A. C. Auld, Minister.
Everett Diggs, Deputy Minister.

NOTICE

Re: July 1st Holiday
Most Acton Retail Stores
will be Closed
Saturday, July 1st

Retail section of
Acton Chamber of Commerce

It's LESSOR LESSOR from at Wilton Motor Sales

1965 INTERNATIONAL 3/4 ton Pick-up, V-8, 4 speed, heavy duty. Lic. B57148	775
1969 GMC 3/4 Ton Pick-up, 6 cylinder, standard transmission. Lic. Y42167	1975
1971 IMPERIAL Le Baron, loaded, Lic. N8661	6275
1965 CADILLAC Convertible. Lic. N7083	1095
1969 PONTIAC LAURENTIAN 4 door sedan fully equipped. Lic. N4275	1877
1971 FIRENZA SL demonstrator. Just look at the price. Lic. N10253	1975
1969 VIVA 4 dr. Sedan, 4 cyl. std. transmission. Lic. N7171	995
1969 CHEVELLE SS 2 door hardtop, 350 four speed. Lic. 781455	1975
1969 GMC I T, 5 speed transmission, V-8. Lic. 39257V	2175
1968 CHEVROLET Station Wagon, as is. Lic. 96282X	1375
1963 VALIANT V200, 6 cylinder, automatic, power steering, radio. Lic. N8901	695
1968 BEAUMONT SS, 2 door hardtop. Lic. N5860	1995
1966 CHRYSLER Windsor, 4 door hardtop. Loaded, really clean. Lic. L94254	975
1960 BUICK 2 door hardtop. As is. Lic. N8736	27.50
1964 STUDEBAKER. As is. Lic. 910729	125
1968 MERCURY Montego MX St. Wgn. loaded, low mileage. Lic. X38445	1965
1969 CORVETTE Convertible. Lic. L94298	4995
1971 FIREBIRD fully equipped, 19,600 miles. Lic. N7271	3275
1969 FORD Custom 2 door hardtop. Lic. N75917	1975
1967 CHEVROLET Bel Air 4 door. Lic. 712519	1375
1971 Buick Skylark Custom, 2 door hardtop. Loaded. Demo. Was 4801. Lic. N9755	3445

Wilton Motor Sales

Streetsville 824-3950

876-2365
388 Main St.
Milton, Ont.