

Railway Coastal Museum History e-Bulletin: Volume XVIII

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The Norway of the New World: Tourism and the Railway

The tourist season is well underway once again in Newfoundland and Labrador, and the sight of people on Water Street with downtown maps in hand is common. And as any bartender will tell you, the number of people asking for recommendations on a good local beer is a sure sign that summer is here.

The provincial government's new tourism advertising campaign may seem like a fresh new take on Newfoundland and Labrador as a tourist destination, but it is the latest in a long line of advertising campaigns aimed at bringing tourists to the island.

From the very beginnings of the Railway in the late 1800's, it was recognized as an excellent tool for the promotion of tourism in Newfoundland. Finally, travelers could tour the entire island quickly and easily, and access the interior without having to hire guides and carry weeks worth of supplies.

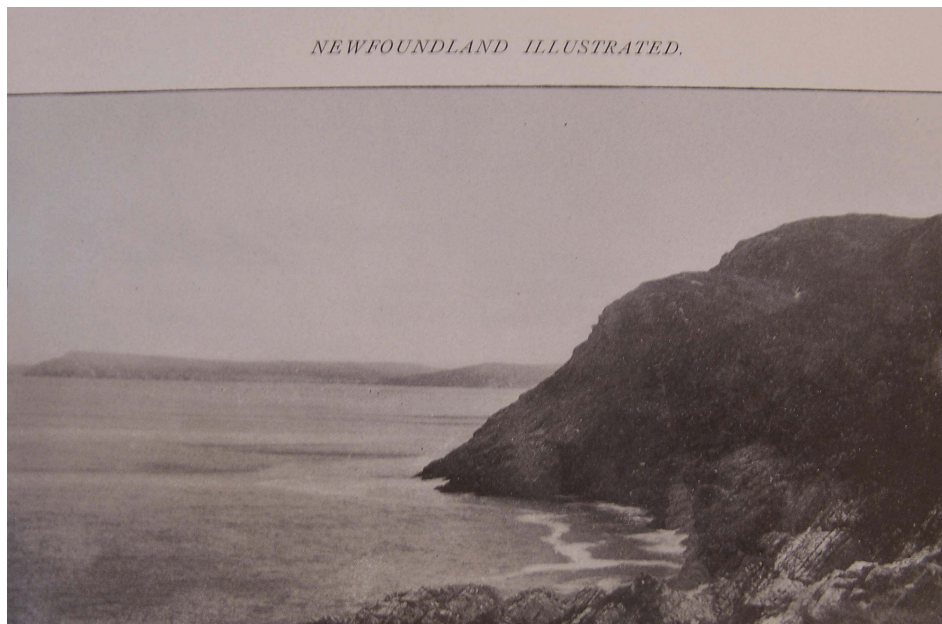
The Reid Newfoundland Company, as

operators of the Railway and Coastal Services, clearly had an interest in attracting visitors to

Newfoundland and Labrador. It would be the Reid's trains and coastal boats that would carry visitors to various locations around the island, and any increase in traffic could be a big boost to the financially precarious Railway.

At the turn of the century, the idea of the frontier adventure was a popular topic for books and magazines (think *Lure of the Labrador Wild*), and 'sportsmanship' (hunting and fishing) was enjoying immense popularity. It was quickly realized that Newfoundland and Labrador had huge potential for those seeking an outdoor experience.

Early attempts to attract tourists to the island centred around this idea. Brochures and booklets published by the Reid Newfoundland Company promoted Newfoundland as a haven for hunters and fishermen. Our forests were full of caribou and moose just waiting for the hunter's bullet, and streams were overflowing with salmon waiting to be taken.



This picture appeared in "The Newfoundland Illustrated" in 1894. Compare it to the billboard painted this year in Toronto (www.newfoundlandlabrador.com/About/BreathingRoom/FreshAir.aspx) and you can see that fresh air and rugged coastlines are still Newfoundland and Labrador's main attractions.

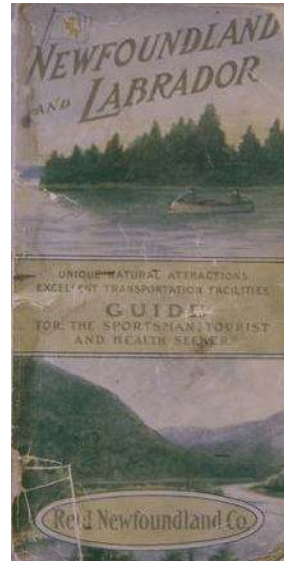
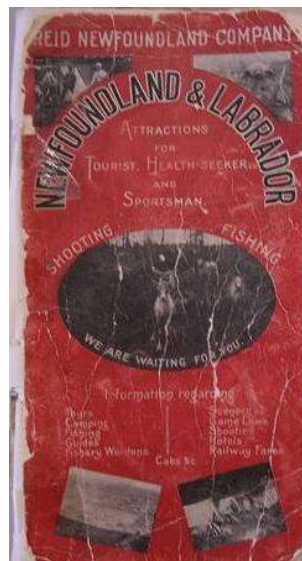
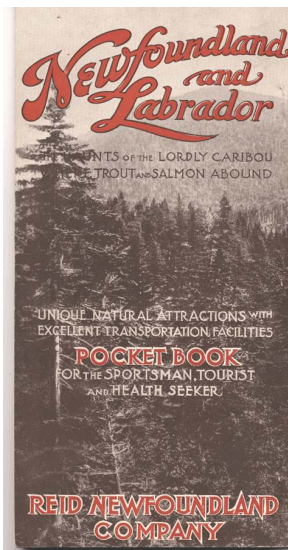
These tourism brochures (see below) were full of pictures of rivers and ponds, and the big fish taken from them. Caribou were photographed along the railway tracks, and the extensive hotels, cabins, and campgrounds were described.

Like today's tourist guides, they also contained information about how to travel to and within Newfoundland and Labrador, and gave the names and addresses of lodgings and guides who could be hired to ensure a pleasant trip.

When the transportation systems were taken over by the Newfoundland government in 1923, Herbert J. Russell, the new manager, realized the potential for tourism the island offered. In a speech he gave titled "Newfoundland: A Heaven for Tourists," he says that Newfoundland is known as "The Norway of the New World" because of its scenic beauty.

He outlines the many attractions of Newfoundland, tracing a visitor's trip from Port aux Basques to St. John's, and pointing out the various hunting and fishing locations along the way, as well as the major settlements. While his statement that the crossing from North Sydney "is usually a very smooth one" may be debatable, Russell's contributions to the Railway are not.

A good transportation system has always been vital to a healthy tourist trade (and vice versa), and the Newfoundland Railway and Coastal Services were the first system that truly opened up Newfoundland and Labrador to visitors. While that job may now be done by the Trans Canada Highway and the airline industry, it is an industry vital to economy of Newfoundland and Labrador, and an industry 150 years in the making.



Three tourist booklets published by the Reid Newfoundland Company.

**Do you have a story about tourism in Newfoundland and Labrador?
We'd love to hear it!**

Send your story to the Railway Coastal Museum!

We appreciate any feedback or questions you may have.

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