

School is in Session

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As September progresses and everyone settles back into school routines, I thought it would be nice to look back on the school days of the “Shawnawdithit” and the coastal boat library!

The growth of the railway brought along with it the establishments of new settlements along Newfoundland’s interior. These settlements, such as Arnold’s Cove and Buchan’s Junction, were often small in size and did not have a school to service the children. The provincial government became concerned with the educational needs of these towns.

The solution to this was to create a “school on wheels.” The A.N.D Company donated the “Shawnawdithit” private car to the program. The car’s passenger area was refurbished into a schoolroom. The two rows of passenger seating were equipped with work tables, and a teacher’s desk headed one of the rows. A radio was added to the car, and a blackboard that would swing down from the ceiling at the front of the car was built in as well. The “Shawnawdithit” was then stocked with all the necessary textbooks, maps, and diagrams that would be found in a regular schoolhouse.

The car also had room for its live-in teacher, the first being Frank Moores. Moores was provided with his own bathroom and kitchen, though the teacher often ate dinner with the families in the towns the car serviced. By all accounts it was a lovely space.

The school car made its maiden trip in October 1936 and ran until 1942. The “Shawnawdithit” had a pre-determined schedule that it would follow during the school year, from September to June. This schedule would change from year to year with the population of the interior towns. The car would pull into a place and be put on a rail siding where it would stay for a specific amount of time. Upon its departure, it would leave behind work for the children to complete with the help of an adult, until the car’s return.

Originally the car tried its best to follow the provincial curriculums, but with the school car being absent from areas for prolonged periods of time, this was a challenge for the children and their parents. Eventually it was decided that the “school on wheels” would teach the correspondence curriculum that had been set up, and that when the teacher was in town he would help the children with their work and any problems they had.

The “Shawnawdithit” was setup to teach grades 1 – 8 but usually did not have many students past grade 4. Each location had between 6 – 15 students that would attend the school car from 9 till 4, with a recess in the morning and 1 – 1.5 hour lunch break. How neat would it have been to go to school in a train car? Especially when the car would have to be juggled along the track to make room for a freight

run – how exciting to go to school AND get a ride on the train!



(Pictured above Frank Moores and the "Shawnawdithit")

The train was not the only mobile service to help the education system in Newfoundland. The coastal boats provided a travelling library that was an important part of education in the province's coastal regions. The coastal boats brought boxes of books, often requested by teachers, to the people living in the coastal towns. When the townspeople were finished with the books, they would return them to the boats and get more!

As you get up early on Monday and get your kids and grandkids ready for school be thankful that their school is always in the same place, and that the books are there too!

If you have any stories about the school car or the travelling library service we would love to hear them!

Also, in preparation for next month's bulletin please send in any train or coastal boat ghost stories that you may know!

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