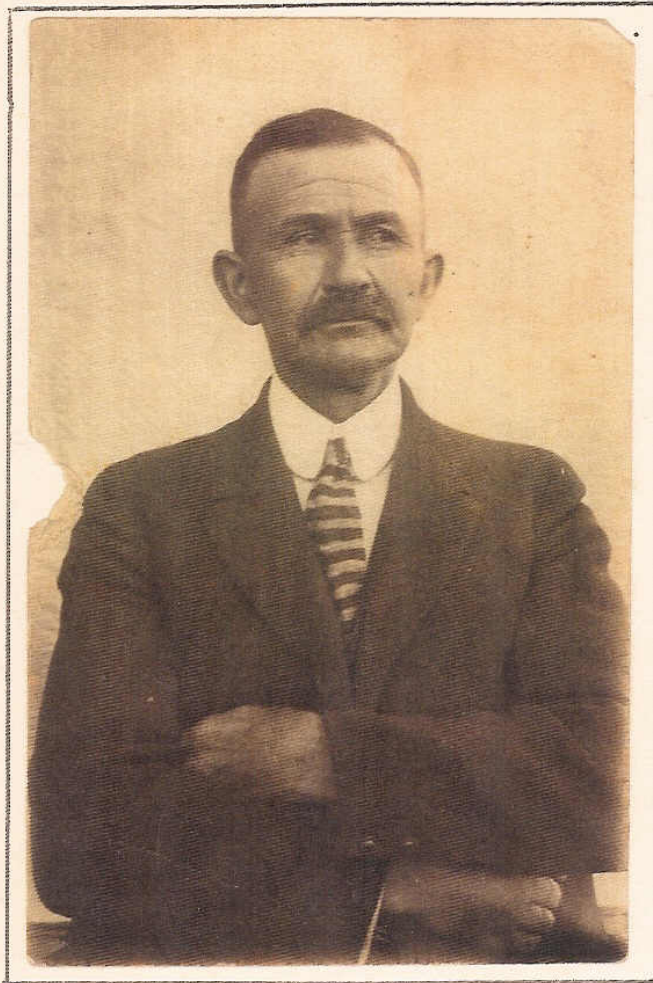


Heritage Connections

Héritage



...à Léon à Basile à...
de Saulnierville Station

by/par Lucille à Frank à Léon à Basile

La Station

Everyone in Saulnierville Station or surrounding areas of Lower Concessions, Bangor, Saulnierville, Lower Saulnierville, Comeauville worked for the Dominion Atlantic Railway or had a relative who worked for the D.A.R. On a Sunday night men would gather to wait for the train to take them to varied destinations along the line. Other relatives came to see their loved ones off for the week. The little station was overflowing and the men (and a few women cooks) would fill two passenger cars. Various groups were known as gangs. There was the painter gang, the bridge gang, the extra gang, the rail gang, the trolley gang. Carpenters were needed. It was a booming time. The railroad had to be plowed in the Winter.

There was great camaraderie among the men. There was good money and steady wages. The men were known to celebrate on their way home on a Friday night, with the train making short stops at the liquor stores in Digby and Weymouth. It was also an excuse to cash their cheques. Children gathered at the train station on a Friday night to wait for the train. They knew their father or relative would be in a good mood and may even have a few candies for them in their pockets or satchels.

Note; William à Philippe remembered driving plows all night to keep the rails cleared for the freight trains and passenger trains. He also remembered working on the memorial church in Grand-Pré. Denis à Léon also worked on the church and developing the Grand-Pré park. His gang prepared the base for the erection of 'Evangeline'. Frank and his gang painted the church and Grand-Pré station whenever needed. Their sleeping car would be parked on the siding in Grand-Pré for long periods of time. They were all proud of their links to the Park. Charles à Leslie and Frank à Léon remembered cleaning the wishing well, known as 'Evangeline's Well', a few times a year and bringing all the pennies home. Frank's children cleaned them and headed for the René à Eloi...the store.

Going back to the beginning, in 1869 the railroad extended from Halifax to Annapolis. Sod turning at Yarmouth in 1876 and Digby in 1874 was the start of the Western Counties Railroad. The first train travelled between Yarmouth and Digby in the Fall of 1879.

The section between Digby and Annapolis became known as the missing link. Travel between these two points was still by stage coach and ferry. The Bear River was the problem. Eventually on July 27, 1891, the first train travelled between Yarmouth and Halifax. The line became known as the Dominion Atlantic Railway in 1894. The head office was in London, England and the Canadian Office was in Kentville.

In 1911, the Dominion Atlantic Railway was loaned to the Canadian Pacific Railway but retained the name, DAR. Originally, for the building of the railroad, the engineers, contractors and skilled labourers came from Europe. The first engines, trains, rails and spikes came from Europe. Now local people were assigned to these tasks.

There was always pressure on the government to keep improving the lines and services around the province building more stations and roads. In Clare you needed better roads

La Station

from the stations to the main highway. The stations were Belliveau's Cove, Church Point Station, Little Brook Station, Saulnierville Station, Meteghan Station, and Hectanooga.

The line across the province was needed to connect the steam ship lines from Yarmouth to Boston and from Yarmouth to New York. This was a rapid way of transporting passengers and produce insuring freshness from Valley farmers to Halifax or Yarmouth or Boston or New York.

October 1, 1894, started a century of service between Yarmouth and Halifax. The D.A.R. was never a very profitable line although very convenient for passengers and businesses. It was certainly good for the local economy. The line being placed in the interior of the counties, it was not convenient to the mass population of the shore towns. Most local travellers were travelling on family passes. Local people didn't have the money to travel as tourists.

In Clare, the rail line was placed away from the shore as it would have disturbed too many homesteads, cutting across too many farm fields, probably encountering the same kind of resistance the Trans-Canada highway experienced later. Another reason for building through wood lots, the wood could be used to build road beds, bridges and to fire up the steam engines.

The distance between Halifax and Yarmouth was 216 miles and between Yarmouth and Boston, by boat, was 240 miles. Thousands of passengers and thousands of tons of merchandise passed through Saulnierville Station, back and forth annually. It was on its way to Halifax, Boston, New York and beyond.

Léon who died in May, 1956, did not live to see the line from Yarmouth to Halifax go from steam to diesel engines on July 1, 1956. Nor did many who devoted their lives to the great service provided by the rails, see the whole line demolished. Rails have been moved away, slippers line flower beds, and the route has become a place for recreational vehicles and hikers.