

## Aroostook Jct.



CPR Station

## Some History of Aroostook Junction and the CPR

As told by Joyce Farnham in 2002

by Robert LaFrance

This is a newspaper story written in October 2002 after an interview with Joyce Farnham, now 87 in the year 2013, who several years before had retired from the CPR after decades of work for the company, much of it in Aroostook, or as it was then, Aroostook Junction.

In the days when this village was known as Aroostook Junction and the trains were running, the railroad provided many jobs both on the trains and at the station. The area around that station was almost a little town of railroad buildings including 'tenements' - apartment buildings or duplexes where train workers and their families lived, a section shack, the roundhouse (engine repair shop) and turntable across the tracks from the station, freight sheds, scale house where they weighed the railway cars, small buildings at the sidings, even a CPR hotel.

"It was quite a settlement," remembered Joyce Farnham who, after over four decades working for the railway, now lives, with her husband Charles, on Warren Street in Perth-Andover. "Canada Customs used to have an office in the upper end of the Aroostook railway station. John Pickard worked there for years. It probably closed in the 1970s.

"There were many buildings down near the station. There was the CPR Hotel and all the company houses. Four double tenements, bungalows - one for the road master and one for the assistant superintendent, one for the local foreman. Their offices were in the end of the hotel, which was below the station. Beyond them were two more double tenements.

"Our house was one of two built in 1919. The house next to mum and dad was the first Catholic Church in Aroostook. They had the services upstairs and it was mighty small. Len Parent was conductor on the railway and lived there in the house. They had a big garage. There was a tennis court nearby."

At its peak in the 1950s and 1960s Aroostook railway station employed two assistant agents, three operators who by the 1960s didn't use telegraph any more but a

dispatcher's phone, two machine clerks, an agent, biller, and others.

The daughter of long time CPR employee and Aroostook station agent Bud Jewett, Joyce Farnham grew up alongside the railway in a house built in 1919 near the station. It was only natural that in December 1943 she applied for a job with the railway and was hired to work in Presque Isle.

"I worked as an operator in Presque Isle where there were a lot of potato houses along what's now Academy Street. I started 'learning the wire' (studying Morse code and telegraphy) and got listed as an operator but didn't really work at that job. I bypassed the operator's job somehow, because they were short of help during the war.

"I had to go out at night and seal the potato cars - you did everything in those days. Then the first operator's job I had was on the second shift in Aroostook, from 4 p.m. to midnight, then 2 p.m. to 10 p.m. but you didn't always get through at ten. I remember one Easter Sunday morning I was just going home when the sun was coming up."

## STOKING THE COAL FURNACE

"In those days at Aroostook station, the night operator had to tend the coal furnace in the basement. You didn't have any electric heat, you didn't have stairs going down from the office, you had to go outdoors, outside the building for a little ways, and then go down into the basement to stoke the furnace. In Presque Isle you had the pot-belly stove; we had those in most all the other stations, Fort Fairfield and so on. You put the coal in there.

"It used to be quite a life, never a dull moment. You never had time to stop and worry about what you're going to do next.

"I did vacation and sick relief work until 1964 and I didn't work until 1974 when I went back to relieve the machine clerk, then I did vacation relief and I was relieving Weddy (Weldon) Mockler when he passed away down in Maine. He was the biller at Aroostook; that was in July 1976. I bid and got his job and then in 1981 they started making the cuts, cut out jobs in Fredericton and one of the clerks in Fredericton came up and bumped me in 1981. My union was the Brotherhood of Railroad and Airline Clerks. It had replaced the Order of Railroad Telegraphers.

"I worked as operator in Aroostook in 1955, was married in 1958, and my

daughter Jane was born in 1960. You only had six months off then (maternity leave) and if you didn't go back to work you had to resign. I had to withdraw my pension. It's awful the way they acted in those days.

"After I was bumped off my job I did just relief work until February 1987 when Harold McCrea died and I relieved him as a machine clerk. I had a lot of different titles and worked in a lot of different railway stations. As a machine clerk I used something called the Flex-writer and that was the worst thing...

"I don't know whatever happened to that machine - it was a long, narrow thing with a key, then the circuit would be busy or the circuit would be out so you'd have tapes (waiting to be sent) all over the place, and you'd have to send them before you could go home. It would take you endless ages sometimes, transmitting all that stuff. All the other reports that you didn't send on the dispatcher's phone you had to do it on these. It was a mighty lot of work because you had a lot of trains - the Presque Isle ones, Edmundston trains, trains going to McAdam. The CPR thought this Flex-writer was so much better but it was an awful headache."

In all Joyce Farnham worked in 16 railway stations - Presque Isle, Caribou, Houlton, Fort Fairfield, Aroostook, Edmundston, Grand Falls, Andover, Plaster Rock, Hartland, Woodstock, St. Stephen, Millville, Burtts Corner, Cumberland Bay and Otis, later Nackawic. Now the small building there is a tourist information booth.

Aroostook railway station closed for good on Dec. 31, 1989 after a life of 83 years and a decade of railway cutbacks. Of all those buildings, only the station itself remains in 2002.