

Workin' on the railroad...

By the mid-1950s, the height of what is considered to be the "Golden Age" of the railways in North America, there were few families in Nova Scotia that did not have at least one member working for a railroad in some capacity.

Many of these railways were private corporations, and although they may no longer be in operation, their payrolls and employment records are not open to the public.

This brochure is intended as a guide for those who wish to trace their family genealogy through the ties to the railways.

Hopefully the family researcher will find many answers and break down those "brick walls" that can complicate the task.

The Nova Scotia Railway Heritage Society was established in 2002 to promote the preservation and educational use of the railway heritage of Nova Scotia and encourage the sharing of information among individuals and organizations having an interest in the history and development of the province's railways.

Membership is open to any individual or organization upon payment of nominal annual dues, and allows the member access to the society's on-line forum "Novarail" hosted by Yahoogroups.

Dues are income tax deductible, and gifts of money, documents or artifacts may also be eligible for an income tax receipt.

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Visit us on-line at:
<http://www.novasctiarailwayheritage.com>.

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Track Your Railway Ancestors



Getting Started

The government-owned Nova Scotia Railway (NSR) was not the first railroad in operation in Nova Scotia: the Albion Mines in Pictou County and coalmines in Cape Breton had their own small lines, but the NSR was the first to provide detailed records of who was employed on the line.

Construction of the line from Richmond (Halifax) to Truro and Windsor began in 1854, but it was not until 1859 that employee records were published in the *Journals of the House of Assembly*.

These journals are available at the Nova Scotia Archives & Records Management Services (NSARMS) building in Halifax, by inter-library loan, or on-line at www.Canadiana.org, but the years of interest to the genealogist are:

- 1859, Appendix 21 pages 369-375
- 1860, Pages 110-114
- 1862, Appendix 20 page 7
- 1863, Appendix 20 page 5
- 1864, Appendix 1 Part 2 page 10
- 1865, Appendix 6 page 35
- 1867, Appendix 11 page 35

Federal Records

The most complete set of employee records for the NSR was published in the *Sessional Papers* of 1868 (Appendix 26 pages 2-8), as the federal government began to assume control of the line and integrate it into the Intercolonial Railway.

Federal records are available on-line through Canadiana.org, but the *Sessional Papers* on record there from 1868-1900 are not available unless one is prepared to pay a \$400 annual subscription to the service. The *Sessional Papers*, published until 1923, can be read in book form at Dalhousie University's Kilham Library, or Acadia University, and may be available through inter-library loan as microfilm. Some of these records have been procured by the society.

The *Sessional Papers* of 1878 (Appendix 21 pages 2-13) contain the earliest complete record of all Intercolonial Railway employees.

The most informative documents are the Minister of Railways and Canals' reports of accidents:

- 1878 Return 78 pages 2-27 (years 1874-1877)
- 1882 Return 8 pages 44-57 (1881-1882)
- 1883 Return 8 pages 40-49 (1881-1882)
- 1884 Return 10 pages 42-53 (July 1882-June '83)
- 1885 Return 11 pages 44-53
- 1886 Return 13 pages 46-59 (July 1884-July 1885)
- 1887 Return 75d pages 9-12
- 1888 Return 8 pages 44-53 (July 1886-June 1887)
- 1889 Return 10 pages 52-63 (July '87-March '88)
- 1891 Return 10 pages 48-55 (July 1889-May 1890)

With search terms in both the on-line directory and census entries, be careful not to assume that a "fireman" was a railway employee. Firemen were also employed in municipal fire services, aboard ships, and at power stations. Engineers were also employed aboard ships, in large industrial buildings and could have been civil engineers rather than railway locomotive engineers. Other occupations of which to be aware are "shunter," "switcher" and "hostler" all of who were railway employees, as were "oilers," "wipers" and "call boys." "Operators" could have been railway telegraphers or telephone company employees.

- 1892 Return 9 pages 64-73 (July 1890-April 1893)
 - 1893 Return 9 pages 72-77 (July 1891-February 1892)
 - 1894 Return 10 pages 90-95 (March 1892-March 1893)
 - 1895 Return 10 pages 92-95 (July 1893-June 1894)
 - 1897 Return 10 pages 66-71 (July 1895-June 1895) & pages 96-99 (July 1894-March 1895)
 - 1898 Return 10 pages 88-93 (July 1896-June 1897)
 - 1899 Return 10 pages 86-89 (December 1897-June '98)
 - 1900 Return 10 pages 96-103 (July 1898-June 1899)
- The Auditor General also produced some comprehensive employee records for the Intercolonial, published in the *Sessional Papers* of:

- 1894 (1892-93) pages 295-358
- 1895 Return 1 pages 92-118
- 1896 (Part R) pages 113-140
- 1897 (Part R) pages 153-260
- 1898 (Part R) pages 167-286
- 1899 Return 1 pages 166-287
- 1900 Return 1 pages 173-290

Directories

Provincial and city directories provide a thorough catalogue of railway employees, and the Nova Scotia Railway Heritage Society has initiated a project to cull railway employees from these directories. Copies are available for viewing at various shows and events. The 1907 *McAlpine's* listing is on display at: <http://www.novascotiawheritage.com/1907RailwayWorkers.htm>. Other databases are being created as part of a continuing society project.

The Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management Service offers a complete series of directories beginning with *Nugent's Business Directory for the City of Halifax for 1858-59* (1858) and the first *McAlpine's Halifax City Directory* (1868). A list is available on-line at: <http://www.gov.ns.ca/nsam/genealogy/directories/>. Directories are also available on-line from the National Archives & Library of Canada at: <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/databases/canadiandirectories/001075-100-01-e.php>

Select Nova Scotia directories from the drop-down menu. This search can be assisted by including "railway" or "railroad" in the search terms, along with the initials of the railway.

Other sources

• Another useful on-line record is the Intercolonial Railway's Provident Fund at <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/databases/black-porters/index-e.html>. This link is misleading, because not all the employees listed were African-Canadian porters. These are records of a pension scheme, not employment records, and as the Provident Fund was a voluntary pension scheme, some employees may not have joined it.

• Many railway employees went to war in 1914-1918, even though as part of an essential service to the effort on the home front, they were not obliged to do so. Attestation papers can often record the occupations of these employees, and they can be searched on-line at: <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/databases/cfindex-e.html>.

• Nova Scotia Vital Statistics on-line is helpful because marriage and death records frequently listed the subject's occupation: <https://www.novascotiageo.nealogy.com/>. Deaths of railway employees that occurred while they were on the job do not necessarily appear in these records, but NSARMS does make coroner's inquest reports available. By knowing the date of a death, or railway accident, an ancestor may be located in this fashion.

• Federal censuses began in 1871, but only incomplete records are available. The 1881 census is available at the Church of Latter Day Saints Family Search website: http://www.familysearch.org/Eng/Search/frameSet_search.asp. Be sure to select the Canada 1881 census from the left-hand menu.

The 1901 and 1911 censuses are on-line at Automated Genealogy: <http://automatedgenealogy.com/index.html>. Use the split screen image to access areas of the census that record the occupation of the person enumerated.

• Railway company seniority lists may also be available from many of the society's member museums, like the Halifax & Southwestern Museum in Lunenburg, the Sydney & Louisbourg Railway Museum in Sydney, and the Orangedale Railway Station Museum in Cape Breton.

• The Canadian Pacific Railway does not make its employee records public. This includes records for the Dominion Atlantic Railway. Despite this, many of those listed in the various privately published directories made sure it was known that they worked for the CPR, DAR or any other railroad, rather than the often-loathed Intercolonial. For more on the Archives collection, licensing opportunities, or to purchase reproductions, please send a detailed request to archives@cpr.ca or call (514) 395-5135.