

[Page 15 - Working on the S&L Railroad Part One](#)ISSUE : [Issue 28](#)

Published by Ronald Caplan on 1981/6/1

running backwards--every time she'd hit the pier yard she'd go off and there'd be a big mess. She was too stiff for the curve. The rail was small and she was so big--she'd just spread everything out in the curve--instead of curving around, she spread it right out and she'd drop right on the tracks. Instead of going to the big? ger rail, the 100-pound rail, and the long? er turnout, and mak' easier curves first, before you got those engines--we'd have been better off. Some of the smaller ones that came in, what you'd call the Nigger Engines, they were pretty good,, they were pretty supple engines--but especially 101, oh boy. What a mess that thing made of this railroad. And then we got to put that thing back on again. Get the track on. Then an engine comes to give you a pull. Well, who's driv? ing? Maybe a driver with no coordination or something. Put a strap on him, or a cab? le- -next thing he'd' snap that thing the first time. Or you'd go to a fellow with experience--you're all set. He'll take that thing real slow and you'll see that engine moving just like the hand of a clock. Some fellows can do it. They knew their work. That was your biggest head-ache--who was driving. Get a guy who was kind of clumsy at the throttle--hey, look out. Because the cable would snap and the knuckles on her would be flying every-where--might get one in the head and kill you ?? . (I'm still trying to get a picture: here you are, it's the middle of winter, there's ice on the track, the wind is blow? ing, snow is drifting, there's carloads of coal off into the woods, there's a rail? road car there, somebody's perhaps hurt-- how was all this handled?) Well look, first thing you do is you get a crane to come down where the track is still good, and put the boom out, and if the car was half over or something, you'd get a hook on the bottom and you'd turn it upside down and dump the coal and take that car and put it over to one side. You have your auxiliary car there with rails and ties on it. Clean your track, and you put the ties down and the rails ahead, spike them down-- move your crane ahead. Come to the next car. Tip that car over, put it to the one side, tip the coal out of it. Build your track again. You have a ditch on both sides, so you have to stay on the roadbed. You keep building like that. You've got to block your crane, make sure she's safe. Then when you've got the traffic opened, a fine day, nothing much doing, go down with your crane again, take whatever trucks you want, and put those cars back on the road again. Then you take the train and your bucket and you load the coal into the good cars, pick up what coal you can, then take your cars back to the shop and repair them. (There must have been cars that spent half the winter in the snow.) Oh, yes. And boy, I saw some bad ones. On rainy nights, my god, boy. Cars everywhere. You wouldn't know where to start. You've got to keep cool. If you could work it at both ends, a place where you could get a crew on both ends come to meet each other-- you'd be faster. But on most of it, it's all one way--start on one end and go through it, all the gang work together. You have your grub car with you, and a cook--the auxiliary. Sometimes work all ?? night and all day.... And the big engines off the track--an aw? ful weight, you know. To get them on you'd have to, like I say, clear the snow away, and try to get some hot ashes out of the engine to melt the snow or melt the ice. Put your blocking on that,



crossways in front of your wheels--hardwood blocks about 18 inches long, 2-3 inches thick. You make a floor ahead of your engine. You'd have to get down to the tie. It wouldn't hold on the snow. The blocks would start sliding. Get right down to the bare ground if you could. Then try to get some sand out of the engine, or hot ashes. You build the engine up on the block--you start with a wedge--2-inch wedge, 3-inch wedge against your wheel--the wheel comes up on the wedge and runs onto your blocking. Then put another wedge in and build up the pile--get it up till you can get it back on the track--get her high enough. Better to leave that engine dead because she could spin the blocking out from under her--put a driver up just to stop her in case she's going too far when you get her up on the blocking. (All the wheels are up in the air now?) Yeah. You wouldn't have to come very high. You build her into the track with the other engine pulling her. Then when you get her alongside the rail, you put those replacers in--big humpback replacers, and nail them down. And she'd go up on that and she'd slip, slide down right on top of the rail. That wheel's on. Then she comes up, slides, and the next wheel's down. I started out under my father. Then when he retired, I became boss of the section crew, about 1945. Then about 1952 I became assistant roadmaster--that's for the whole railroad. I was a company official then. Then about 1966 I became roadmaster for the whole railroad--till 1978. I worked steady 51 years on the railway. S & L Part Two in Issue 29 Our thanks to Leo Evans for his help in preparing this article, and to Charles Gagnell for his guidance through the S & L Railway Museum at Louisbourg--where most of the photos were copied. The Grubstake "Your meal with us may just be the best you'll have on your vacation" (902) 73>2308 Dining Room?C • >cktail Lounge Main St., Louisbourg, Cape Breton '-.cs