Model railroader also has passion for the real thing

Published on October 11, 2011

Clifton man has a piece of railway history in his own backyard

Topics : **Nova Scotia Community College** , **Truro Model Railroaders Association** , **Canadian National Railway** , **Canada** , **Bible Hill** , **Newfoundland**

CLIFTON – Model train lovers have been known to be enthusiastic about their hobby, but Andrew Blackburn takes his love of the rail to a whole new level.

Not only has the Clifton resident been involved with the Truro Model Railroaders Association for the past 30 years, he actually has real train cars sitting on rail sections in his backyard.

"I have a piece of it," he said, of Canada's rail history.

"Still stuck with the real-life train, although I still go to all the model railway shows. And this is where you still have contact with people who have that same interest, because there are still some people in the club who are very interested in trains."

Blackburn's love for trains and railway memorabilia began as young boy while growing up in Bible Hill.

"We could hear them and see them from our yard," he said.

Blackburn's father had also worked for the railway and oft times when the two were in town together,they would stop by the Truro train station or visit the maintenance shops.

Sometimes Blackburn would be invited onboard for a little ride, and throughout it all, he gathered cherished memories that would carry over into adulthood.

"I guess you just started to see what the railway was all about at that time as a child and, you know, you kind of grew to like it."

In the 1980s, the Canadian National Railway (CNR) began modernizing its equipment and selling off outdated and surplus items.

Included among that inventory, were the railway cabooses, which became redundant after legislation was passed that eliminated the need to have cabooses attached to the rear of their freight trains.

The popularity by collectors soon became evident and cabooses, which had started out selling for $6,500, soon rose to $9,500.

Blackburn paid $8,500 for his caboose, plus another $2,500 to have it delivered to his backyard, where it sits on a short section of rail he had constructed there.

That caboose dates to the 1970s, when metal cabooses replaced the former wooden models. He also has a former passenger car, built in 1955 and, the last sleeper car constructed by CN for the Newfie Bullet run, which ceased operating in 1969.

After passenger rail activity was shut down in Newfoundland, Blackburn said the sleeper car was transformed into a business car for management to tour lines and upon which to conduct sales trips.

Blackburn has numerous other train-related items in his possession, to the point where his basement is a veritable rail museum.

"I've collected numerous artifacts just to remember what the railway was all about at one time and things that have gone by the wayside," he said.

His collection includes railway china, spittoons, conductors' jackets, coach seats, and almost everything imaginable, rail related.

He also has a few train models and although he has been a long-serving member of the Truro Model Railroaders Association, including serving in various executive capacities over the years.

"Everybody has a different outlook on model railroading," he said. "Some people really like doing scenery and the art of railway modeling. Other people like the cars and the engines, the exact models. Other people just like operating trains on a layout and running them like a real railroad and that type of thing. Everybody has their own little difference niche of the hobby."

For Blackburn, that passion comes with collecting the real thing.

Annual Train Show

– Truro Model Railroaders Association's 34th annual fall train show - Oct. 15, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

– Nova Scotia Community College, Truro campus, 36 Arthur St.

– Admission – adults $5, students $3, families $10, children under 6 free, if accompanied by a parent or supporter.

– Highlights include operating layouts in N and HO scales, as well as railroading sales and a variety of display tables.