

NEW FIDELITY

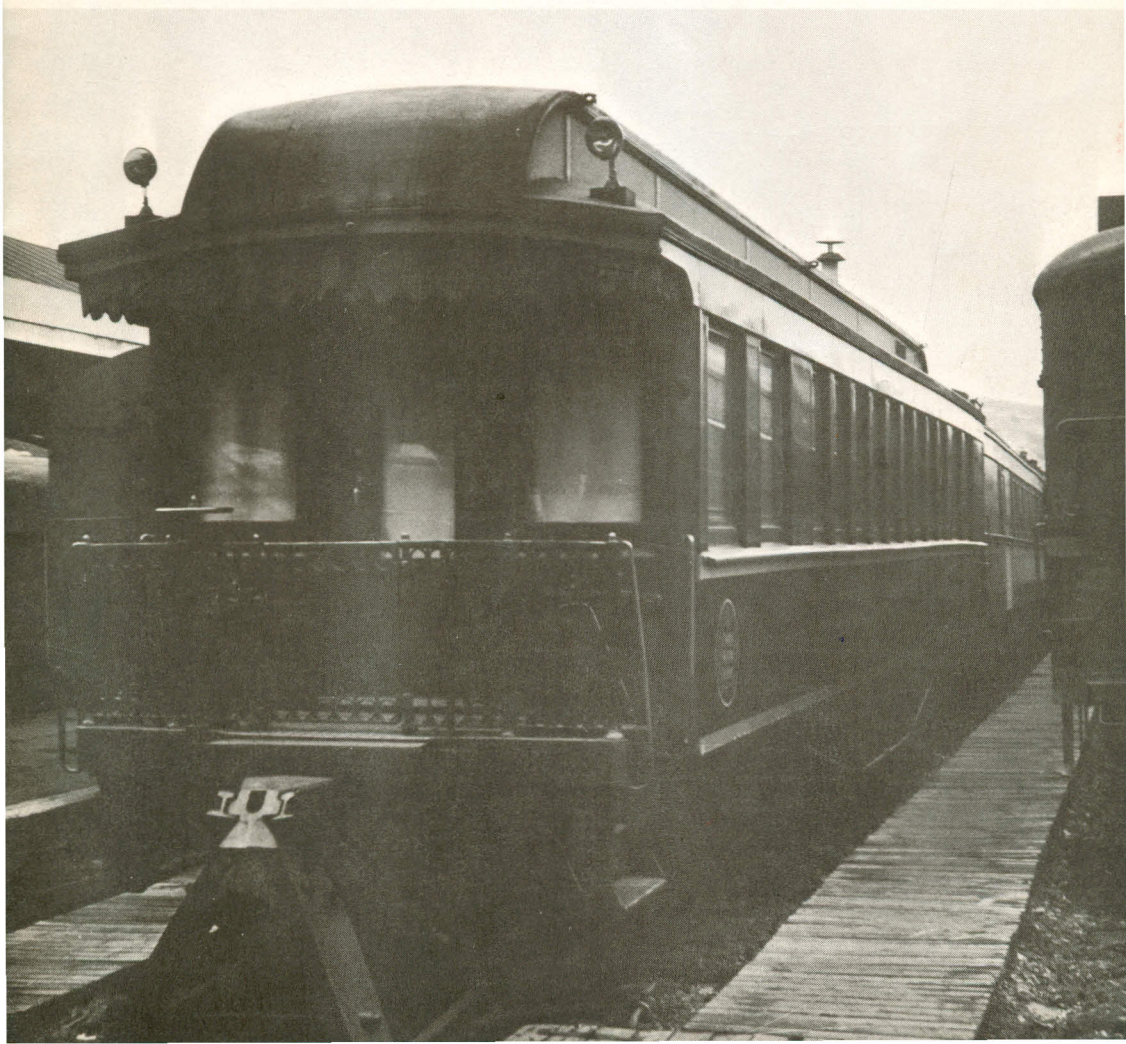
# Canadian Rail



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NEWFOUNDLAND ISSUE









# THE DEATH OF THE NEWFIE BULLET

Photographs by the Author.

Douglas E. Stoltz

**A**fter two years of impending withdrawal, Newfoundland's narrow-gauge passenger trains survived to appear in yet another issue of Canadian National's system timetable. However, the temporary stay of execution was short-lived and on July 3, 1969, 71 years of trans-Island service came to an end with the arrival in St. John's of Train 102, the eastbound "Caribou".



COVER PHOTO: In the hey-day of narrow-gauge operation in Newfoundland, former Newfoundland Railway's private car TERRA NOVA stands wistfully in the passenger car siding at St. John's Nfld. The historic car has gone to Ottawa, and the tracks have been lifted to make room for an express terminal for trucks.

Photo courtesy F.A.Kemp.

PHOTO ABOVE: Tilted wafer insignia of the Nfld. Railway from the tender of a rotary snow-plow in the yards at St. John's Nfld. in October, 1954.

E.A.Toohy Collection.

PHOTO OPPOSITE: Running eastward down the Humber River valley, the "Bullet" approaches Corner Brook, Nfld. February 22, 1969.

### Background events

The demise of Trains 101-102, known affectionately to many as the "Newfie Bullet", is an almost direct consequence of improvements in the Island's formerly primitive system of roads. In 1965, the Newfoundland leg of the Trans-Canada Highway, built to national standards, was completed, reducing driving time between St. John's and Port aux Basques to about half that required by the train. Although rail and highway routes are roughly parallel and the distances are about the same, the speed of the trains was severely restricted by the combination of 42-inch gauge and the line's famous roller-coaster right-of-way. While passengers on the mainland were flocking back to CN's trains, Newfoundlanders were largely deserting the rails. By switching to buses, which can provide more frequent as well as faster service over the new highway, the Railway hoped to win back some of the lost traffic, or at least to eliminate the excessive operating deficits incurred by the trains.

CN first announced its intentions to drop the "Caribou" in May, 1967. The changeover to buses was to take place the following spring. However, the withdrawal of the trains required the concurrence of the Canadian Transport Commission's Railway Transport Committee. Formal application was made in the fall of 1967 and approval was finally given on July 3, 1968. The railway was ordered to discontinue trans-island passenger train service by April 15, 1969; prior to that date, it was free to stop running its trains as soon as the C.T.C. indicated its satisfaction with the bus service (although the equipment was to be kept ready for use in "emergencies").

On October 28, 1968, the Province's Public Utilities Commission opened hearings on the railway's application to operate a bus service between St. John's and Port aux Basques. Permission was quickly granted. Two earlier applications by private firms had been rejected and a third withdrawn in anticipation of CN's bid. Sixteen new busses, equipped with two-way radio, recorded music, air-conditioning, reclining seats and chemical toilets had already been ordered from Prévost Car Company of St-Clare, Québec.

CN's new ROADCRUISERS (to use the railway's euphemism for "bus"), began regular service on December 2, 1968, with schedules 501-502, 507-508 and 511-512 (see CN timetable). The remaining local runs were to commence December 30 but, due apparently to delays in delivery of the vehicles, only schedules 509-510 actually became effective at that time; 515-516 and 517-518 finally followed on April 7. Schedules 503-504, intended as summer-only runs, were added at the change of time on April 27, 1969. On May 18, adjustments were made in the times of several of the locals. (CN's summer system timetable gives the schedules effective on that date.)

The buses proved successful beyond everyone's expectations, including the railway's. In the first month of operation, twice as many people road by bus as by train and, by May, the ratio was five to one. It was not merely a case of passengers switching from train to bus; overall traffic, train and bus, more than doubled.





↑ The Death of the Bullet is attended by the official 'mourners' of St. John's Nfld., on February 21, 1969.



Obviously, CN was attracting back many of the customers it had previously lost to other modes of travel and, moreover, the availability of fast and frequent transportation was to some extent generating its own market.

Nevertheless, the deadling for the termination of train service, April 15, came and went and still the "Bullet" could be seen making its way unobtrusively over the hills and around the bends of the "Newfoundland Air Line", blithely ignoring events on the neighbouring highway. Ironically, it was the overwhelming popularity of the ROADCRUISERS which had extended the train's life this time. CN was uncertain whether its buses could alone handle the normal proportional increase in summer traffic; although it had ordered four additional vehicles, these would not be delivered before June, 1969. Thus, the railway had found itself applying to the Canadian Transport Commission again, - now for permission to keep its trains running.

Approval came on April 14, the date on which the final train was to have departed from St. John's, westbound. A provision of the Railway Act limited the date of discontinuance to one year from the announcement of the original order; hence, the revised terminal date of July 2, 1969 (this was interpreted to mean the date of the final departure) was the latest allowable by law, precluding any further reprieves, had they been thought desirable. However, the C.T.C. did add a stipulation that the railway must maintain passenger equipment ready for operation until September 30, 1970, for use in case of emergency. So there remains the possibility that sometime during the coming winter, a ghost of the "Bullet" may appear from the depths of a Newfoundland blizzard.

### The ROADCRUISER Service

The main attraction of the buses, over the long haul, at least, has been the greatly accelerated schedules and consequent elimination of night-time travel. The express bus crosses the Island in 14 hours 15 minutes, including two 45-minute meal stops. The best train time was 21 hours 35 minutes, of which 50 minutes was consumed at division points. As a further inducement to travellers, CN has taken full advantage of the inherent flexibility of bus op-



eration, to provide frequent local services, in addition to the through runs.

Two reserved-seat express buses (501-502, 503-504) run daily each way between St. John's and Port aux Basques, stopping only at Gander, Grand Falls and Corner Brook, the first and last for meals. Dubbed EXPEDO, these may be North America's first "Name" buses. Another bus, 507-508, makes local stops and detours from the Trans Canada Highway to reach Stephenville, completing the trip in seventeen hours. Four other intermediate local runs round out the slate, giving each bus stop a total of three local schedules in each direction, daily, comparing rather favourably with the train's thrice-weekly frequency. Most stops are at railway stations or centrally located commercial establishments.

Fares under the "Red, White and Blue" scheme have remained identical for the bus as for the train. The extra cost of overnight accommodation, however, is avoided on the bus, although meals are extra. CN competed to one degree or another with several independent bus or taxi firms operating local shuttles as follows: St. John's-Clareville; Gander-Grand Falls; Deer Lake-Corner Brook; Corner Brook-Stephenville.

#### Review of Train Services

The service provided by Trains 101-102, formerly nos. 1 & 2, was augmented on certain days of the week by the addition of a passenger coach to otherwise-freight trains 203 & 204, which run daily. Until the fall of 1962, both services operated 6 or 7 days a week. Subsequently, 101-102 ran 6 days a week, during the summer months only and thrice-weekly the rest of the year. The frequency of mixed service varied, being once per week at the end, - though it did not appear at all in the last timetable. The last trip was the eastbound of June 30-July 1. The arrival may actually have been on the morning of July 2, as the trains were invariably late, often by several hours. The frequent delays, added to what was already a painfully slow schedule (31 hours westbound), made travel on the mixed a singular test of patience and endurance.

In addition to the trans-Island mixed service, a coach was always present on Trains 203-204, between Bishops Falls and Corner Brook, on the days the "Caribou" did not run, for the benefit of Howley and Millertown Junction residents. These communities lie along the 80-mile section of the railway, between Badger and Deer Lake, which is isolated from the Trans-Canada Highway. In its decision, the C.T.C. ruled that CN must continue to provide coach service between Corner Brook and Bishops Falls and on a daily basis. This vestige of trans-Island service will disappear as soon as a passable road reaches Howley.

Railway Post Office service ended in Newfoundland on October 1, 1968. Handled on Trains 203-204, it was the last narrow-gauge R.P.O. run, on the continent. The mail was reassigned to container trucks (CN had become the first trans-Island trucking operator in 1961), a move which reportedly saved CN its post office contract. Now, except between Bishops Falls and Corner Brook, only the express cars ahead of the caboose distinguish 203-204 from the

other main line freights, nos. 400-401. In recent years, despite the difference in class, the two have differed little in their function as freight trains, each handling through cars and performing road-switching. "Extra" freights, incidentally, are seldom seen on CN's Newfoundland lines.

Mainline freight traffic is healthier than ever, so that total abandonment of the railway is not yet in sight. Particularly reassuring is CN's substantial investment in providing for the transfer of mainland freight cars to the Island. Unfortunately, the picture on the Island's branch is less encouraging. The railway has applied to abandon both the Argentinia and Bonavista Subdivisions as soon as new "highroads" are completed to the areas involved. The present service on both lines consists of a thrice-weekly mixed turn; the Argentinia train is based at St. John's and calls in at Carbonear on the return trip. Both the Carbonear and Lewisporte Subdivisions are to be retained for the time being. Though not shown in the timetable, the five-days-a-week Gander-Lewisporte train (209-210), essentially a fuel-supply shuttle for Gander Airport, will still accommodate passengers in the van.

In passing, it is worth mentioning CN's contemplated acquisition of a 10-mile branch, built by the United States Army during World War II, connecting Harmon Air Force Base at Stephenville, with the then-Newfoundland Railway at Whites Road. Although the line is apparently not in use, the tracks have never been taken up. Since Harmon A.F.B. was vacated in 1966, the Provincial Government has been successful in attracting new industry to the area, creating the need for a direct rail link.

Of the two other railways in Newfoundland (see map), the Grand Falls Central still carries passengers. Five or six unscheduled trains run every 24 hours, offering "limited passenger accommodations" in the caboose.



The 'morning after' at Cruisers, west of Bishops Falls, Nfld. The stray placard refers to the earlier loss of the 'Bullet's' first class dining service, February 22, 1968.





"Save the Bullet"

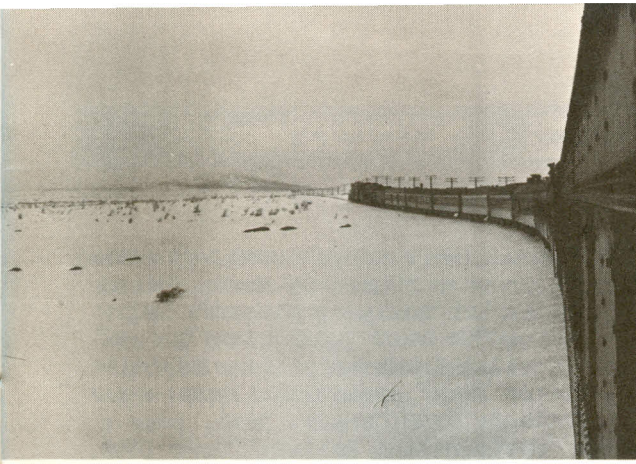
The proposal to discontinue the Island's rail passenger service at first met with much well-publicised opposition. The "Bullet" was, after all, a Newfoundland institution, along with codfish and Joey Smallwood. When the Island's roads were muddy tracks and most Newfoundlanders were still strangers to one another, let alone the rest of the world, the slender thread of the railway had sustained what unity and national identity the isolated colony could muster. It was therefore not unnatural that when the trains became threatened by decisions being made in Ottawa and Montreal, a reservoir of sentiment should have arisen in their defense. Moreover, in Newfoundland as elsewhere, the public made little distinction between the cessation of passenger service and the outright abandonment of the railway. To many an Islander, the loss of the "Bullet" signified the death of the Newfoundland Railway; letters to the Editor left the impression that the tracks were already all but torn up!.

Throughout the controversy, the Provincial Government voiced only token opposition to CN's plans. (Interestingly, it had been Premier Joey Smallwood who, as far back as 1940, first envisioned complete abandonment of the railway.) The opportunity to exploit public sentiment was not lost on the Island's conservatives, whose platform in the 1968 general election campaign included a "Save the Bullet" plank. Realistically, all they could hope for was a more gradual replacement of the trains by buses. This much has in fact been achieved, but without the interference of the politicians, unless one chooses to believe that their criticism put CN on the defensive, which would perhaps explain the Railway's reluctance to drop the trains while there remained any possibility of inadequacies in the bus service. In any event, the Tories, on the strength of this and other issues, did manage to capture 6 out of 7 seats in the traditionally Liberal province. On their way to Ottawa in September 1968, four of the M.P.'s staged a protest ride as far as Stephenville Crossing. There, in an appropriately symbolic gesture, they abandoned the train for an AIR CANADA flight.

Many of those opposed to the bus service had been counting on the Newfoundland winter to put CN's ROADCRUISERS off the road, thereby demonstrating a continuing need for rail service. However, the combination of diesel bus, first-class highway and modern snow-clearing equipment proved an effective match for all but the severest storms and delays were few. On one occasion, buses even came to the rescue of rail passengers. It had been hoped that individual Islanders would do their bit to save the "Bullet" by actually riding on it. But, for the most part, travellers continued to avoid the train in droves. The final blow was the immediate and widespread public acceptance of the buses, which effectively sealed the "Bullet's" fate once and for all. On June 30, Transport Minister Donald Jamieson (a Newfoundlander) announced that the Federal Cabinet had decided not to interfere in the matter.

Destination Holyrood





Low clouds accentuate the bleakness of the barren heights of Gaff Topsails near Summit, the highest point on the trans-island line.



A meet with Mixed Train No. 203 at Northern, east of Deer Lake, Nfld. The 'mixed' still runs over this line. February 19, 1969.



While the initial storm of protest eventually gave way to resignation on the part of most Islanders, the pro-train forces managed to organize a colorful demonstration in St. John's as recently as last February 21. The occasion was the visit to the City of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Transportation and Communications. The twenty M.P.'s were touring the Atlantic Provinces to gather briefs on local transportation problems. As might be expected, the abandonment of rail passenger service was at the centre of attention at the St. John's hearings.

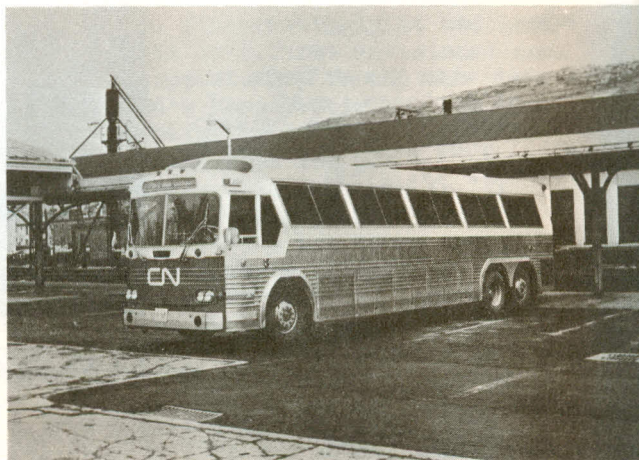
In the evening, the Committee was scheduled to ride Train 101 as far as Holyrood, - all of 30 miles, then to return by ROADCRUISER to St. John's. Their aim was ostensibly to compare the two modes of travel and determine whether the bus service was really as inferior as its opponents claimed. The exercise was a concession to Committee members James McGrath and Walter Carter, who happen to represent the two St. John's ridings in the House of Commons. Their pre-election pledge to try to save the "Bullet" obliged them at least to go through the motions. The Committee did subsequently recommend a review of the C.T.C.'s decision, but their re-



port was never adopted by Parliament.

Well before train departure time, a large crowd had gathered at the great stone station, which also houses CN Newfoundland Area offices. Soon 30 or 40 demonstrators carrying placards began marching around the building, chanting "We want the Bullet!", encouraged by a film crew from the local television station. At the head of the procession waved a "Union Jack", paradoxically a symbol of the Island's former "independence" from Canada. Next, came a "coffin" bearing the inscription "Newfoundland Railway" "Born 1898, murdered by Canada, 1969". The marchers who followed, - everyone from school children to well-preserved old-timers, carried signs proclaiming "Train plus Bus equals Just Society", "Stop the Great Train Robbery", even "Save Lives - Keep the Bullet".

Around the station, up and down the long platform and in front of departing Prévost buses they marched singing "We shall Overcome". A carnival atmosphere attended the whole production. At



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One of the larger of the two models of ROADCRUISER, at the CN station in St. John's Nfld. February 21, 1969.



←  
The 'New Look' of transportation in Newfoundland. On February 22, train 900 derailed near Spruce Brook. Passengers were transferred to regular bus runs. Here No. 511 stands ready for loading. Extra bus at the rear was not required.



one point, the sleeping car porter entered one of the vestibules, peered out at the milling throng, then clutched your reporter elatedly. "Isn't it wonderful!" he exclaimed, - but then reflected, "Ah, but you know, I don't think it'll change a thing. No." He was right, of course, but the mood of the moment tended to obscure the unpleasant reality.

When the Commons Committee members arrived, they were faced with a noisy welcome on their way to the first of the usual three coaches. Jim McGrath and Walt Carter were the heroes of the day and beamed their broadest political smiles. Unfortunately, the commotion prevented an on-time departure. At 2340, 10 minutes late, the doors finally slammed shut and the trip began. Most of the placards and not a few placard-bearers had found their way aboard and some of each dangled from the vestibules, as the train moved into the city's suburbs, quickly gaining speed.

Then, only five minutes out of St. John's, to everyone's dismay, the "Bullet" suddenly slowed to a halt. Apparently those who had been "carried away" during the excitement of the demonstration were now being politely discharged. Once resumed, the journey continued without event the rest of the way to Holyrood. Some of the M.P.'s mingled with the passengers in the Club Car; others huddled in their coach for mutual protection. Onetime railwayman Jack Sko-berg, NDP M.P. for Moose Jaw, rode the cab. At Holyrood, another crowd and more newsmen were waiting, along with two special CN buses, to return the Committee and reporters to St. John's. Committee members appear to have found the ROADCRUISERS comfortable enough--- most of them reportedly slept all the way back.

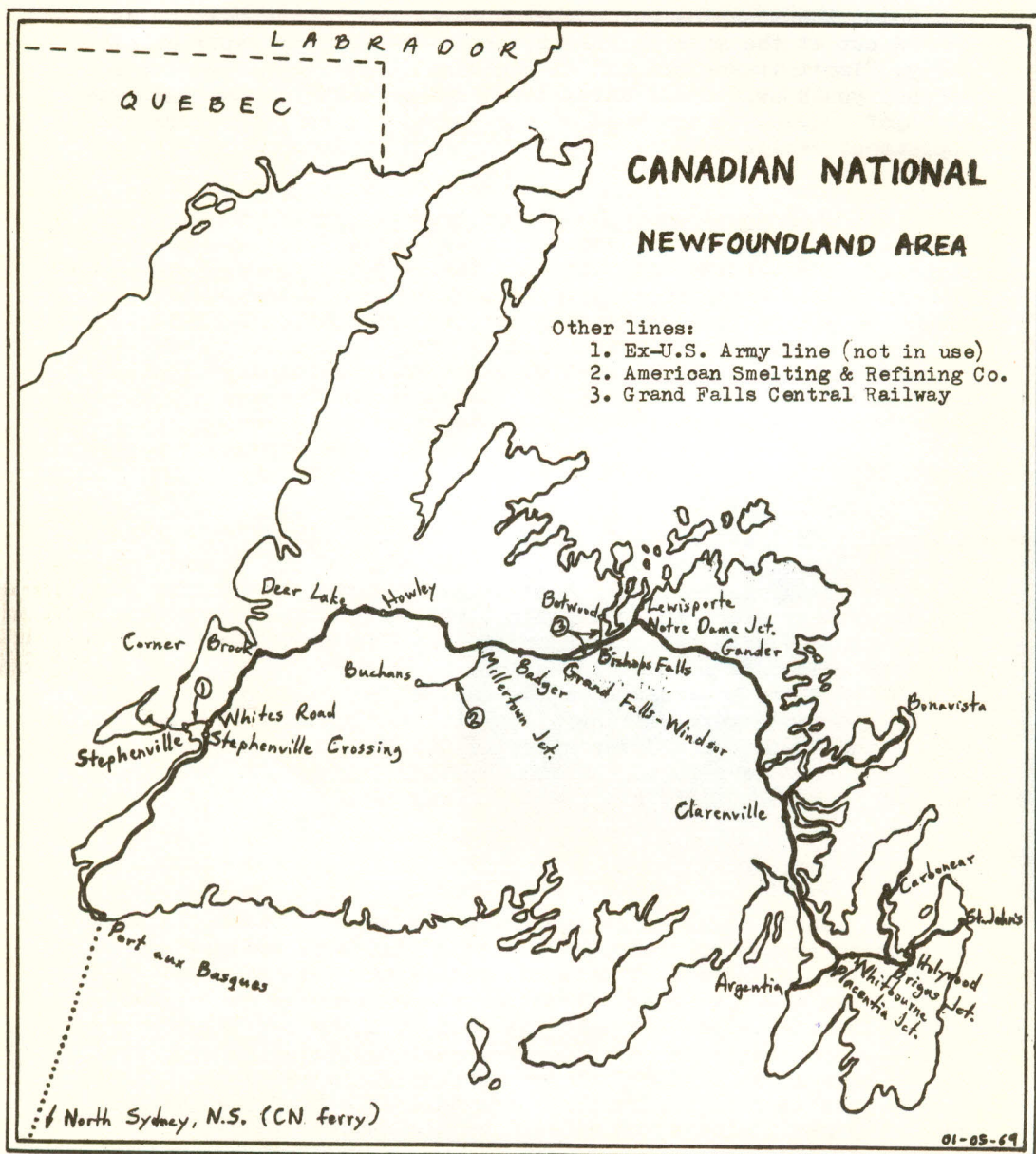
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Just twenty years ago, a new era of rail passenger service began in Newfoundland, when Canadian National assumed operation of the Island's rail network. Today, that era has ended and another has begun, as public transportation takes to the highways. While mixed-train service lasts, it will still be possible to ride narrow-gauge trains in parts of Newfoundland, including segments of the main line. However, the long trans-Island passenger trains, in the tradition of the Newfoundland Railway's "Foreign Express" and "Overland Limited", now belong to history.

The author is indebted to W.J.O'Leary and H.F. Howe of the Canadian National at St. John's for their assistance in preparing this article.









Appendix ICANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS

## Newfoundland Area.

Passenger Equipment Roster as of December 31, 1967.

<u>Type</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Road Numbers</u>	<u>Builder</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Note</u>
Steam Generator	5	2950-53 2956	CNR-Moncton	1956	-
Box Baggage	10	1590-1594	Eastern Car Company	1954	A
		1595-1599	Eastern Car Company	1954	B
Baggage	10	1300-1302	Canadian Car & Foundry	1943	-
		1303-1305	Canadian Car & Foundry	1950	-
		1306-1307	National Steel Car	1958	-
		1308-1309	CNR-Moncton	1956	C
Express	4	1600-1603	Canadian Car & Foundry	1943	-
Express- Refrigerator	5	1900 1904	Eastern Car Company	1951	-
Insulated Box	5	1950-1954	Eastern Car Company	1951	D
Mail	7	1702	Newfoundland Railway	1924	E
		1800-1802	Canadian Car & Foundry	1943	-
		1803-1805	Canadian Car & Foundry	1952	-
Coach	22	750-752	Canadian Car & Foundry	1943	-
		754-757	Canadian Car & Foundry	1943	-
		758-765	Canadian Car & Foundry	1949	-
		766-770	Canadian Car & Foundry	1955	-
		771-772	National Steel Car	1958	-
Dining	7	170	National Steel Car	1930	-
		171	National Steel Car	1938	-
		172-174	Canadian Car & Foundry	1943	-
		175	Canadian Car & Foundry (?)		F
		176	National Steel Car	1958	-
Sleeping	17	300 BURGEO	Nat. Steel Car	1930	-
		301 BOTWOOD	C.C. & F.	1943	-
		302 BUCHANS	C.C. & F.	1943	-
		303 FOGO	C.C. & F.	1943	-
		304 GANDER	C.C. & F.	1943	-
		305 GRAND FALLS	Nat. Steel Car	1928	-
		306 HUMBER	Nat. Steel Car	1928	-
		307 LEWISPORTE	Nat. Steel Car	1930	-
		308 ST. GEORGE'S	C.C. & F.	1938	-
		309 TWILLINGATE	C.C. & F.	1938	-
		311 CLARENVILLE	C.C. & F.	1952	-
		312 FLOWER'S COVE	C.C. & F.	1952	-
		313 CORNER BROOK	C.C. & F.	1952	-
		314 PRINCETON	C.C. & F.	1952	-
		315 BISHOP'S FALLS	C.C. & F.	1952	-



		316	WHITBOURNE	C.C.& F.	1952	-
		317	BONAVISTA	C.C.& F.	1955	-
Business	3	1	TERRA NOVA	(?)	(?)	G
		2	AVALON	(?)	(?)	
		3	(Inspection Car)	(?)	(?)	

### Notes:

A Converted in 1961 from 8100-series box cars.

B Converted in 1957 from 8100-series box cars.

C Converted in 1964 from Steam Generator cars 2954-2955.

D Converted in 1961-62 from Express Refrigerator cars 1908-9-5-7-6.

E This wooden relic was the oldest piece of non-work equipment on the Island, except for a number of wooden vans, built mostly for the Reid Newfoundland Company, which date back to 1900.

F Converted in 1953 from Coach no. 36.

G Officially presented to the National Museum of Science and Technology, Ottawa, Canada, in June, 1969.

Total number of passenger train cars-----, 92 .

Passenger cars are non-air-conditioned.

Sleeping cars are 8-section 1 drawing-room.

The so-called Club Cars or "Beer Parlour Cars", a standard feature on the "Caribou", were drawn from the dining car fleet.



Canadian National's 'Caribou' 1956 style, doubleheaded with engine No. 317 a 2-8-2 type in the lead position. Photograph taken at the west end of St. Johns yard, five hundred and forty seven miles East of the train's destination of Port aux Basques Nfld.

