

SWEDES IN OSTERSUND

BY WALLY GUSTAFSON

My dad, Victor, was born in Ed, Sweden and arrived in Canada in 1911. His family traveled to Whitemouth, MB where they settled for a short time until they moved to Ingolf, ON and later moved to Ostersund, ON where he was promoted to section foreman for the C.P.R.

At that time there was a post office and a station on the main line of the C.P.R., about 10 miles west of Kenora or 125 miles east of Winnipeg. This area was named Ostersund which was changed to Laclu sometime in the 1930s. Ostersund was a flag stop for the mixed train or local, which it was sometimes called. This train was scheduled to run three times a week between Kenora and Winnipeg. A flag was placed close to the tracks which gave the engineman notice to stop for passengers or freight. The train consisted of some freight cars, a coach car, which was half for baggage or small freight shipments and the other half for passengers and at the end of each train was the caboose. The passenger portion was heated with a coal stove as no steam was available for that purpose. It was preferable to travel by train to Keewatin or Kenora for groceries as the usual travel was by horse and wagon in those days.

The section house was in a unique location between two railroad tracks; the eastbound was close to the home, the other westbound was located about a block away and was approximately 100 feet higher at that location. Section houses were heated with wood stoves in the kitchen and living rooms and kerosene lamps were utilized at night as there was no electricity. There was also no running water, only an outside biffy or outhouse. Section crews usually brought the water in barrels on a daily basis and filled a large container in the kitchen. This water would be used for drinking, cooking and washing.

At that time section crews were responsible for completely maintaining 4 miles of track. This was by no means an easy job with broken rails, washouts, changing of ties, cleaning of switches of snow and ice so the trains could take siding (get off the main track to allow another train to pass) or set off specified cars in siding or spur track. Switch lamps had to be filled with kerosene and lenses had to be cleaned. The section crews covered the territory with a hand car or jigger, as some called it. This was hard, hot work in the summer and cold exhausting work in the winter. One of these hand cars is located at Norman Railroad Museum; we also have one at our resort. The crews had to ride in the open with no heat in winter and no air conditioning in the summer; through rain, snow, stormy weather - they traveled it all in the open air.

The majority of tools were carried on the hand car including spike pullers, hammers, brooms and shovels. The section crew consisted of a foreman and two or three men. Winter was an extremely difficult time. They were called out for work many times at night or weekends to clean switches, replace broken rails or when there was a derailment and the track required repairs.

Later our family moved to Ingolf where my father was responsible for maintenance of the track along Ingolf to Cross Lake, now known as Caddy Lake. He had quite a flower garden alongside the railroad tracks and won many prizes for this from the C.P.R. At Ingolf we had no hydro as well. Several of the households had an ice house where ice blocks were harvested in winter and placed in these ice houses and then covered with sawdust which kept ice available for the summer season. Dad was fortunate to have a job during the depression years to support the large family. Besides myself and Dad, our family consisted of my Mom and my sisters and brothers, Esther, Margaret, Alfred and Oscar.

During this period there were 4 passenger trains in each direction and in the summer the Campers' Special ran out of Winnipeg Friday evenings and Saturday afternoons, with a Sunday Special returning from Kenora Sunday evening with all the campers. A lot of the passengers were C.P.R employees so they travelled free of charge. Later Dad and family moved to Kenora where he was section foreman and snow plow foreman for the area covering from Kenora to Molson, when snow plows were required to plow snow from the right of way. These were in the days of the steam engine. Dad worked hard and felt the CPR appreciated that loyalty.

Many Scandinavians settled in the Ostersund - Laclu - Pellat area. It was said that the lakes and countryside reminded them of their homeland. The Swedish, Norwegian and Finnish settlers had been encouraged to migrate to Canada by the Canadian government with offers of free land and employment opportunities. My summers as a youth were spent in Ostersund with my grandparents Andrew and Constance Adamson. They had a small farm located on the road north of Lake Lulu, Ostersund Road. They arrived in the area in 1907 while the property was virgin forest. They built a home with logs and the remainder of the material had to be shipped in from Kenora by the C.P.R., then taken across the lake to their property - no easy task.

The Adamson family endured a lot of hardship during their lifetime. They raised chickens, hogs and also milking cows where the milk was shipped to Kenora. They had a quota and any surplus was fed to the hogs. They had two barns, one for horses and the other for cattle, as well as a summer barn. Hay had to be cut and stored in a shed that was adjacent to the barn and a chicken coop was located close by. Grain crops were usually barley, oats and wheat. This had to be stored when ripe and then a threshing machine was hired to process the grain. They had a large garden so they grew potatoes and other vegetables to be stored for the winter in cellars. Pickling and preserving of fruits were done in the fall for winter use.

My grandfather was quite the carpenter and built a number of cottages for summer residents. He also built many flat bottom row boats which he sold. At that time milk and eggs were sold to cottagers on Lake Lulu. In the summer Grandfather would go to Webb's store by boat. He would row across Rice Bay for mail and groceries. Webb's handled a variety of groceries, housed the post office and sold gas. They also had a large dance hall where many dances were held on a regular basis. Webb's also had a water taxi service to meet the passenger trains and assist the guests to their cottages. I usually went with him as he always bought me an ice cream cone. The regattas were another great summer event and were well attended.

The area around Ostersund and Pellat was settled by many Scandinavians. Some of them who I remember were the Johnsons, Andersons, Gilbertsons, Hendricksons, Schrodgers, Pearsons, Olsons, Lunds, Carlsons, Cederwalls, Edisons and many other families. Scandinavians came here looking for a better life for themselves and their families. They endured many hardships, but they overcame the obstacles. They built friendships, but most importantly they built a community and legacy that lives to this day.

We cannot forget where we came from and what we owe to those who came before us. This allows us to reflect on who we are and realize the fact that each of us carries within us, the obligation to never forget our heritage and culture.

Tusen tack!