

EMERALD — WHERE THE TRAINS MET

As indicated in my last column, Emerald was one of the places in which I spent many summer days as a boy. This was quite a different experience from Kinkora because at Emerald I visited relatives who lived in the village rather than on a farm as was the case in Kinkora. Also they ran the local post office which made their home a sort of gathering place for the community.

Emerald was a particularly interesting place for a boy in the 20s because it was a railway junction and twice a day three trains met there. Those trains were of course drawn by steam locomotives so there was a great deal of noise and hissing of steam as they pulled into the station. Immediately there would be tremendous activity as passengers moved from one train to another and trainmen transferred baggage and express parcels.

Of the three trains the superior one was the express between Charlottetown and Borden. It was the only one that didn't carry freight cars and it was always the last to arrive. It had the middle and what I considered to be the prestige track and it came rushing into the station with the air of a company president bustling into a meeting of associates and saying, "is everybody here? Then let's get on with the business." It was also always the first train to leave, the other two trains respectfully waiting for it to depart before themselves moving out.

In a day of fierce political partisanship my granduncle who ran the post office must have been one of the first persons in the province never to divulge his politics. He was so successful at this that he managed to retain the post office for years and years—perhaps until he died—in spite of it being a patronage position. In all other centers the postmaster would be changed with a change in government but my granduncle went on and on, neither party daring to interfere with him.

Emerald being a village there were other children to get to know and to enjoy oneself with. When not at the station watching the trains and the passengers there was always the river. This is actually the headwater of the Dunk River, a small stream at this point but one in which you could both fish and swim. I don't think any of us could actually swim but it didn't matter because only in one or two places was the water over our heads. So you could really enjoy a dip in that clear fresh water with little danger.

There were, and probably still are, trout in that river but I don't think I ever caught any.

In those days it was common for homes in a village to have animals, as in fact it was for many homes in town. At this home there were hens, a cow and a beautiful collie dog. In the daytime the cow was pastured along the river a short distance from the house and it was often my task, accompanied by the dog, to drive the cow home to be milked. At night it was pastured in a field next to the house.

Most villages are a mix of rural and urban but the railway junction in those days of train travel gave Emerald a special atmosphere. At times it had an air of great hustle and bustle and then it would settle into the quiet of a normal Island village. But you always knew that the trains would be coming again to stir the village into life. It was a good place for a youngster to spend a summer vacation.