



Chuck Guarino



What was it like, Papa?

“PAPA JOE”

My children and grandchildren frequently ask about the early days of Grand Beach. Indeed, they were wonderful golden years. In Italian families, the grandfather is usually called “Papa”, so when they ask me about my father, I refer to him as “Papa Joe”.

My father “Joseph Guarino (Papa Joe)” began his career with the Canadian Northern Railway (CNoR) in 1911 when he hired on, as a “call boy”. There were no telephones in that era, thus when the railway crew clerk wanted to call an engine crew to report for duty for a run (trip), they sent a “written order” with a young call boy, who used his bicycle (summer and winter) to go to the engineman’s home and present the written order to him. The engineman signed the order and it was returned by the call boy to the crew clerk in the round house office.

Papa Joe’s next job was as an “engine-wiper”. Every locomotive had to be thoroughly cleaned and wiped down with light oil, after each run to maintain a good appearance, but most importantly to prevent it from rusting.

His next job was that of “hostling” steam locomotives. When a locomotive came in off a run, it had to have its firebox and ash pans cleaned, and cleaned and oiled. Sometimes the locomotive had to be turned for its next run, in which case, the hostler moved the engine from the shop track onto a large

turntable in the center of the roundhouse, and brought it back out onto the outgoing track, ready for its next trip.

My dad was promoted to a locomotive fireman in 1913, and wrote his “B” book of operating rules, and became qualified as a locomotive fireman. This was quite an achievement for him because he only had a grade five education.

When the CNoR began construction of the railway line to Grand Beach and Victoria Beach, he bid and was successful in getting a locomotive fireman position on the work train building the new line. The line was completed in early 1917, and the trains began operating on May 24th. Of course Papa Joe was a fireman on the first trains running into Grand Beach.

In 1917 the CNoR was absorbed into the new Canadian National Railways, and their new president, Sir Henry Thornton personally visited the beach. One of the streets in Victoria Beach was named in his honour, i.e. Thornton Boulevard (now renamed to Bayview Blvd.

It was a wonderful era, and my children and grandchildren love the area, and never tire asking questions about it. Looking forward to writing the next story in the next issue of “what was it like Papa”.

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