

WALTON
Staff

Mitton,
conduct-
his job
he'll
old dog-
log book
the Broth-
and Com-
and of Har-

to run the

low,
how far
can go.
shoot off steam
hell.

track
hell.

sums, it up,"
ing. "I'm what
responsible par-

of those brittle
when fine mist
like a sheer cur-
ter collars are
Harold Mitton
ties as the re-

and already he's
master's tower at
street yards. There
up his journal
found he's hauling
mammoth and tin-
ber at Rymal and
grills for Villano-
empty cars for a
in Simcoe.

also picked up his
which inform him
Hamilton-to-Jarvis
No. 535 or the Ha-
ston, will be free
train alone until

know. Harold, all
gals, quickly makes

Malgo, a tail-end
works frequently
really makes a
work with on
aroid, it's a steady
are. Harold knows
it's his railroad,
s got a lot of pride
ing. He's one of
figures if a job's
it's worth doing

joined up with
wardmaster's office
of them clamber
1262, hitched in
engine 1244, to pass
assignments to engi-
ney and front end
henderson.

back to the caboose
railroaders prefer
which serves as the
ie of the train.
to the rear plat-
two red kerosene

out his journal on
desk, then takes a
radio transceiver
and tells Vince at
pull out.

radio? You want to
tones.

days," says Ha-
to use hand signals
Things was a lot
Hell, these guys
plain when they
ain. Really, working
these days is a

what trainmen call
eran, a man who's
years on the CN.
echoed, Harold is
who claims to be
bobcat and vine-

told him about his
call him Twiggy
face) and repeat
about how someone

threw him around three times "be-
fore they realized he wasn't a
switch."

Harold can take that kind of
guff. He's a feisty, down-to-earth
fellow who calls Stoney Creek
"Stoney Crick" and cusses some.

"I'm one of the most outspo-
ken people you could ever meet,"
he says. "There's only one person I
fear and he's in heaven. I don't tell
lies. I don't believe in beating
around the bush."

The train is sliding out of the
freight yards now, trundling into
the traffic on Ferguson Avenue
North, halting cars at Barton and
King and Main streets. There are a
few early-morning sour pussies in
the stopped automobiles. Harold
waved and Johnny just waved. They wave
at pretty girls, too. And kids. Espe-
cially kids.

"As a courtesy to the younger
folks, we always wave," says Ha-
rold, and it gets to be a habit so
that we're looking for kids and
they're looking for us and if we see
them, we have to wave or we'll
disappoint them. Kind of a pleasant
duty, you might say."

True. And one reason for the
romance of trains and trainmen.
There's no denying they're a friend-
ly bunch. After all, when was the
last time a busdriver gave you a
wave? Or a trucker? A lakeboat
captain? Or when did the pilot of a
747 last respond in kind to a wave
or even just acknowledge you with
a slight dipping of his wings? Nev-
er.

Soon another component of
the mystique that is in trains be-
comes apparent. A trainman sees
familiar things in an unfamiliar
way. From the cab of a locomotive
or the second-storey cupola of a
caboose, there are panoramas de-
vined a motorist or pedestrian.

Maple corridor

As No. 535 climbs the side of
the escarpment, it cuts through a
thick corridor of maples and sum-
acs and chestnuts and oaks, all
shedding their rusty coats before
winter.

Below, in Gage Park, the
vacant lawn-bowling green, still
verdant, looks like a cast-off post-
age stamp. Beside it, the Rosedale
tennis courts are empty, abandoned
by their white-suited players until
the spring.

Past the old Hamilton reser-
voir the train goes. Past the Ottawa
Street dump, its hundreds of gulls
virtually indistinguishable from its
white, blown-about garbage. Past
Highway 53.

Rymal — that's No. 535's first
stop. It's 10.35 and for the next 25
minutes Harold Mitton, conductor
and responsible party, orchestrates
the shuffling back and forth of the
train as it releases, then shoves, a
loaded boxcar into the Penn Lum-
ber siding.

The job done, Harold climbs
back aboard and notes in his jour-
nal which car was left off, its loca-
tion, time, contents. This informa-
tion will be fed into a computer in

Montreal, a "brain" as Harold
refers to it, which can provide per-
tinent information on any CN car
anywhere in Canada within 10 sec-
onds of being asked.

Says Harold: "We like to
think now — and this is no slight
against those who came before us
— that we're running a business.
Our product is transportation, eh?
And we're in a highly competitive
market."

"It's been proven that a train
is cheaper to fuel than any other
mode of transportation — trucks,
buses, planes, no matter what. Yet
we've lost the predominant spot we
had years ago."

"Still I think in the future
that it's going to be the primary
means of transportation, the same
one that our forefathers sweated
and died for."

If Harold sounds melodramat-
ic or jingoistic, he's easy to forgive.
He's a born-again railwayman, you
understand. His family has been in
railroading for years — helped
build the old Parrsboro Railroad in
Nova Scotia.

Harold himself didn't get into
railroading until after 30 and after
10 years working in the open hearth
at Stelco. Hence, the fervor of the
late convert.

The train is moving on toward
Glanford now, passing through
peaceful woods and fields greening
with winter wheat, and Harold is
getting chatty.

"We've got a brakeman bur-
ied along here, you know," Harold
states matter of factly. "Yep,
Brakeman Gates. Harold Gates,
was his name. This is what he
wanted when he died. 'Pick out a
nice spot along the Hagersville
run,' he said, 'and spread out my
ashes there.' We did. We — his two
sons and us — come up here one
day with the ashes and distributed
them just like he wanted."

There must be something in
the Glanford air that does strange
things. For years, perhaps as many
as 30 Harold thinks, there's been a
young crippled boy, now a man,
who's come to the door of his farm
home near the Glanford CN tracks
and flicked the porch light on as
the trains roll by. And for years,
No. 535's engineer would blow an
answering whistle to acknowledge
the solitary beacon.

"That fellow's always there,
morning or night, whatever time
we go by," says Harold.

This day as we go by, engi-
neer Downey toots his whistle, but
there's no porch light. A rarity.

By 11.20 the train is in Ca-
ledonina, leaving a boxcar at the
Domtar plant. Harold picks up
some new instructions from the
Caledonia station master. And then
the entire crew beelines over to the
nearby Riverside Restaurant for a
quick coffee and some lively banter
with Edna and Betty and Dale.

At 12.30, it's off to Hagers-
ville where the four carloads of
newsprint are interchanged and the
crew breaks for lunch.

Harold puts some tomato soup
on the caboose's oil stove and con-
tinues talking about his career.

During his years with CN, he's
worked on both passenger and
freight trains and he prefers the
freight, he says. Why?

"Box cars don't talk back or
give you a hard time or a hassle,"
he says. "With passengers, you got
to be on your best behavior all the
time and always spotless with a
shirt and tie."

Get Harold onto the topic of
railroad lore and he'll really open
up, maybe even tell you some of
his personal misadventures.

"I was more or less responsi-
ble for a tail end collision in Paris,
if you care to put that in your sto-
ry," says Harold, "although I don't
know that you would."

Seems Harold was conductor
on a freight shoving eight hoppers
of stone. Busy with his work on a
siding, he didn't notice another
train passing on the main line and
slowing down for a coal and water
stop at the Paris station.

Came the time for Harold's
train to use the main line and for
some reason — forgetfulness or
what have you — Harold, the re-
sponsible party, didn't contact the
dispatcher to determine whether it
was all clear on the line at the
Paris station.

"We come around the bend at
Paris and all I can see is this big
tail end of this big freight train. We

went right through its caboose,

smashed it to smithereens.

"Luckily the two brakemen
got off in time and the conductor
was somewhere else. Well, this
hopper of stone doesn't just stop
there; it rams through the caboose
and into the next car — a load of
clay pipe. Ruined that, too."

"And all this is just after I'm
classed as a conductor. I told the
brakeman that if the railroad didn't
know I was working for them be-
fore, they knew now. I had left my
footprints on the sands of time, you
might say."

"Oh, yeah, the company knew
about me all right. Gave me 45
demerit points and 10 days off."

He's warming to the story —
telling now. But he has to break off
for the 15-minute trip to Jarvis to
pick up a carload of stone.

Cereal boxes

Finally, the carload of stone
arrived and it's time to head back
to Hamilton. On the way, No. 535
picks up five box cars of cereal
that will eventually find their way
to New Westminster, B.C., and four
empty flat cars in Hagersville.
Harold's conversation takes a more
serious turn.