

Randal H. Cave
Irish Immigrant
Georgic
July of 1952



The Cunard Line's MV

Georgic docked at Halifax on a hot, steamy day in July 1952 where, carrying my worldly possessions in a single large blue suitcase, I approached the Canadian immigration Officer who was seated behind an unimposing desk, in a quite barren and somewhat uninviting building which I have since come to know as Pier 21 terminal. For the first time since leaving my home in Country Down, Northern Ireland, I was quite terrified. It was only then that I realized the enormity of the step I had taken in leaving my wife and newborn child to follow me as soon as I had established a home for them to come to and could afford the money, not only to pay their passage to Canada but to keep all of us in reasonable level of comfort.

Although the Cunard Line had me sign a release form acknowledging that the Georgic had not yet been restored to their normal high standards for Trans Atlantic vessels, I had found the voyage from Southampton to have been a sheer delight. Only those who have experienced six days at sea, isolated from the rest of the world, with a group of compatible young men and women who share similar hopes and dreams for a new and better life, realize how quickly deep friendships can develop. I had come to know eight or nine dining companions aboard the 'Georgic', at a level of intimacy closer than was the case with many of my friends of long standing. But Pier 21 was in sharp contrast with the comfort, pampering, cuisine, and camaraderie of shipboard life - it was the place of parting. My new found friends were about to disperse to various destinations in Canada although sincere promises were exchanged to keep in touch, the means of doing so were almost non-existent since most of us did not have a Canadian home address.

I was alone in a new country, with no job, very little money, and facing an uncertain future. Back in 1952 the U.K. were experiencing severe financial difficulties and no one was permitted to leave the country with more than 20 pounds sterling (in those days this was somewhat under \$100). Fortunately the cost of my passage from Southampton included the train portion to my final destination in Montreal so I boarded the CNR train, which had been drawn up alongside Pier 21, to commence my new life in Canada.

As a former railway employee I was interested in the train itself and how it was operated. I was horrified to find that the coaches were old, not air conditioned, and with unbelievably uncomfortable seating. (I believe they were known, either officially or unofficially, as 'Colonial' cars and were used only on the special trains to carry immigrants from Halifax to Montreal – undoubtedly at a fraction of the normal train fare). In any event, this was not a pleasant trip and I was happy to arrive at Central Station, Montreal.

My happiness was short lived as I ascended from the train to the upper concourse to find a veritable multitude of people bustling about, most of them speaking in a language which was foreign to me, but all of them obviously knowing where they were going and where they would spend the night. Either at Pier 21, or on board the train from Halifax, I had been given a special 'Traveler's Aid' name tag to identify me as a landed immigrant who may require some assistance. Of course I had been too proud to wear such a badge of incompetence, but oh! How glad I was to find it still in my pocket. Now wearing my confession of need, I sought direction to the nearest Traveler's Aid office. I will be eternally grateful for the friendly, efficient way the volunteer there fixed me up with affordable overnight accommodation at a near-by rooming house. In fact, since Montreal was in the middle of a blistering heat wave I spent much of my first night in an air-conditioned all-night restaurant.

Before leaving Northern Ireland I had considerable experience with railways having worked in several positions, had been selected as a Management Trainee, completed an intensive training program at British Railways' school of Transport; and had passed my final exams to qualify for membership in the British Institute of Transport. Having been advised by the CP Railway that they would be happy to see me at their personal office on my arrival in Montreal, I was looking forward to seeing what kind of job I would be offered so first thing in the morning I made my way to Windsor Station. I was considerably disappointed on finding that my wonderful railway qualifications could only earn me a position as 'Assistant File Clerk' in their Transportation Department, at a monthly salary of \$180. However, I was somewhat comfortable on finding out that N.R. Crump, then President of CPR, had joined the company 32 years earlier as a railway laborer at a wage of 40 cent per hour. I took the job.

Since the CPR paid their salaried employees on a monthly basis I was obliged to ask for a salary advance to cover my first month's expenses in Canada.

However, by the month of November 1952, I was able to earn enough so that, with the help of our relatives back home, I was able to bring my wife

Patricia and our four-month-old son Stewart to Canada. They arrived in Quebec City aboard the Greek Line 'Columbia' on November 10th 1952.

My progress with the CPR was far from meteoric so that Buck Crump's job was never really in jeopardy, one event did have a decisive impact on my overall business career. In 1955 I learned that the CPR had signed a contract with IBM to purchase a dramatic new machine known colloquially as an 'Electronic Brain' but which was in fact an IBM 705 computer - the first sold by IBM in Canada and perhaps the first sold by them outside the USA. I was fortunate to be able to join the group who were preparing for the computer and thus to be one of the first Programmers in Canada. It is somewhat ironic that my unusually broad knowledge of railway operations, which never really earned me a significant position in railway management, should launch me on a brand new career in computer and data communications technology.

I was pirated away to the CNR in 1958 and was in charge of their introduction of information technology until 1963, when I left to build Canadian General Electric's first computer service bureau. In 1966 I joined INCO Ltd. And continued with them until my retirement in 1990 as Director, Computer Services.

I often question in my mind if I did the right thing in abandoning my first career love railways in favor of my second career - computers. I guess I'm still really a railway man at heart.

In September of this year my wife and I returned to Halifax aboard Holland America's Maasdam. It is difficult to describe my feeling as I disembarked and, for the first time since 1952, again entered Pier 21. The end of the building where I had first arrived remains virtually untouched and I felt, once more, the mixed emotions of 53 years ago - the inexplicable emptiness on saying farewell to bosom friends whose names I can no longer remember - the nagging doubts on having left my wife and my baby back home in Ireland. Now, though, there was the assurance that our decision to leave Northern Ireland was the right one, since nepotism and a pronounced bias against railways on the part of the then newly formed Ulster Transport Authority had made my career prospects uncertain at best.

Canada has been very good to my family and me.

Randal H. Cave