

# Avondale Railway Station



Heritage NL

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By Emlyn Tuck

## Introduction

The Avondale Railway Station is located on Costello's Road in Avondale, NL - about forty minutes (65 kilometers) south-west of St. John's. The community was called Salmon Cove until 1897 when it was changed to Avondale (Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1981). The Railway Station is a two storey Second Empire style building with an attached warehouse. It was designated a Registered Heritage Structure by Heritage NL in 1988. The designation is confined to the footprint of the building.



**Fig #1. Photo of the Avondale Railway Station.**  
(Heritage NL, 2022)

## Building Description

The Avondale Railway Station has many character defining features. Some of its features that speak to its use as a railway station include the exterior

painted in the colours of the Reid Newfoundland Company (i.e. green and yellow), the positioning of the windows and the door on the front facade, the overhang on the front facade, the warehouse and platform, and the location of the building relative to the railway bed. Some features that are reflective of the Second Empire style include its mansard roof, wooden roof shingles, dormer windows, bay window, pronounced roof and eave trims, narrow wooden clapboard, and its two storey massing.

## Historical Context

### Telegraph Repeater Station (1865-1881)

It is believed that in the early 1860s, a telegraph repeater station was built near the site of the current railway station, although which telegraph company built it is unknown. The Avondale Railway Station is believed to have been the second building on the property, built after and a little ways down from the repeater station.

After a failed attempt by the New York, Newfoundland, and London Telegraph Company to lay a transatlantic telegraph cable in 1865, a new company called the Anglo-American Telegraph Company (AATC), took over the former company's assets (Glover, 2000). It could be assumed that the Avondale repeater station was owned by the New York, Newfoundland, and London Telegraph Company, and that when the AATC took over the company's assets they received the Avondale repeater station and moved into the area. In 1877, a telegraph line was laid to connect Avondale to Trinity, Catalina, and Bonavista (Cuff, 2023).

It is possible that the Avondale Railway Station was built as a telegraph station and later converted to a railway station, as its design differs from other contemporaneous railway stations. Based upon the Second Empire style, which was popular during this time, it could have been built by the company J. & J.T. Southcott, Architects, Carpenters and Builders. This company was run by the Southcott brothers and they had a working relationship with the Anglo-American Telegraph Company (O'Dea, 1990), who could have possibly had the building constructed as part of their telegraph network. However, the massing of the building, the placement of dormers and windows, and the lack of symmetry on the exterior may suggest that it was a vernacular build meant to copy Southcott projects.

### The Newfoundland Railway (1881-1898)

In 1881, the Newfoundland Railway Company conducted a survey of possible rail routes and planning preparations were started for constructing a line out to Harbour Grace. Avondale (still called Salmon Cove at that time) was seen as a convenient place for a station (The Evening Telegram, 1881) (The Harbour Grace Standard, 1881).

The Newfoundland Railway Company have constructed about forty-five miles of their Railroad, reaching at the close of last season as far as Salmon Cove in Conception Bay. This improved means of internal communication obtained very prompt and general favor, as was evidenced by its constant use for purposes of travel and traffic, while the employment afforded on the line formed a chief element of support for a large number of our people, and thus yielded a very appreciable contribution to the public revenue. The close of the pre-

Fig #2. Confirmation of rail line reaching Salmon Cove in 1883. (Harbour Grace Standard, February 17th, 1883)

In 1883, the rail line had been completed up to Avondale and trains were running frequently to the community (Journal of the House of Assembly

of Newfoundland, 1883). Newspaper advertisements from the same year detailed the schedules of excursion trains running to Avondale (Salmon Cove) from St. John's. If the station building had not previously existed, it could have been built during the early to mid 1880s - following the completion of the rail line to Avondale - to accommodate expanded traffic to the community. If it was built following the completion of the Conception Bay branch line, it shows a departure from the style of station built by the Newfoundland Railway Company (and later Reid Newfoundland Company) in other communities along the line.

**SPECIAL NOTICE.**

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**EXCURSION Train**

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**COMMENCING Thursday, Aug. 2d,**  
and on each **THURSDAY** thereafter, till  
—further notice, an—

**EXCURSION TRAIN**

will run from St. John's to Holyrood, and return, as follows:—Leave St. John's at 10 a.m. Leave Holyrood 4 p.m.; arrive at St. John's 6 p.m.

**Round Trip to St. Ann's \$0.40; Topsail \$0.60; Squires', \$0.70; Kelligrews, \$0.80; Holyrood, \$1.20.**

N.B.—The usual Tuesday Evening Excursion Train, July 31st, will not return same night, but will return next a.m. from Salmon Cove, as follows:—Leave Salmon Cove 6.30 a.m., Holyrood 7.00 a.m., Kelligrews 7.40, Squires' 7.58 a.m., Topsail 8.08 a.m., St. Ann's 8.33 a.m.; arrive at St. John's 9.10 a.m.

**H. B. SMITH,**  
jy25 Superintendent.

Fig #3. Newfoundland Railway advertising a new excursion train going to Salmon Cove. (The Evening Telegram, July 25th, 1883)

Based on old newspapers and copies of the McAlpine's Newfoundland Directories, we can see

that some of the individuals who worked for the train station also worked as telegraphers, which points to the telegraph station being located in the railway station (McAlpine's Directory Co., 1898) (The Telegrapher, 1904). An example of this would be John Meany who was both a telegrapher and station agent around the same time in the 1890s (McAlpine's Directory Co., 1898) (The Telegrapher, 1904). Also, by looking at late 19th and early 20th century Newfoundland Yearbook and Almanacs, we can see that the Post Telegrapher Operator and the Post Officer Operator positions were, at some points in time, managed by the same individual (Yearbook and Almanac of Newfoundland, 1911, 1930). For example, in 1911, Bertha Moore was recorded as both the Post Telegraph Operator and the Post Officer Operator (Yearbook and Almanac of Newfoundland, 1911, 1930). This allows the assumption that both departments were within the same building, i.e. the train station, by at least 1911 (Yearbook and Almanac of Newfoundland, 1911). At this moment we are currently looking for further information to build upon this idea.

### **The Reid Newfoundland Company (1898-1923)**

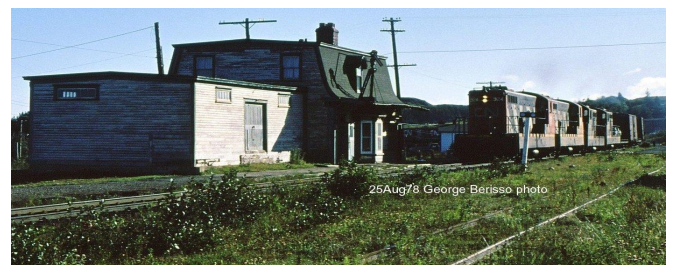
Upon completion of the main railway line in 1898 and the signing of a contract, the Reid Newfoundland Company took over the existing railway, including the Avondale Railway Station. This contract gave them a lot of power in the transportation industry (Cuff, 2001). It allowed them to operate the railway for 50 years then "own it outright" - along with acquiring lands, buying the St. John's drydocks, operating coastal passenger and freight steamers, operating the government telegraph for 50 years, and many other perks that led to them becoming a "permanent and substantial presence" in Newfoundland (Cuff, 2001). They used the Avondale Railway Station as a passenger and freight station with trains coming and going multiple times a day.



*Fig #4. Change in postal and telegraph services. (Newfoundland Weekly, December 26, 1931)*

### **The Newfoundland Railway (1923-1949)**

In 1923, the Railway Settlement Act resulted in the Newfoundland government acquiring the railway, coastal boats, and dry docks from the Reid Newfoundland Company for \$2 million (Cuff, 2001). The Avondale Railway Station then became a part of the government-run Newfoundland Railway. In 1931, the management of some post offices and telegraph stations was taken over by Newfoundland Railway agents; the Avondale office was taken over on December 15th of that year (The Newfoundland Weekly, 1931).



*Fig #5. Train 203, Avondale, August 25, 1978. (From The Newfoundland Railway Facebook Group)*

### **Canadian National Railway (1949-1984)**

The Canadian National Railway took over the Newfoundland Railway in 1949 when Newfoundland joined Canada. The Avondale Railway Station was managed by CN until 1984, when the branch line serving Conception Bay was closed. Tracks at the Avondale Railway Station were torn up in 1984, which caused much discontent in the community (Mullaly, 2000). The Avondale Heritage Foundation applied to keep a



section of the track next to the railway station (Mullaly, 2000). They had not received any sort of reply to their application when workers came to tear up the tracks (Mullaly, 2000). The former president of the Avondale Heritage Foundation, Mary Lyon Hicks, recounts what happened:

We decided that when they came there to remove the track, we were going to protest it... We were sitting on the tracks, and the dozers were lifting the rails along side of us... It was difficult and we had a principle. We knew it was good for the people and the people really needed it - we weren't doing it for ourselves, we were all volunteers (Mullaly, 2000).



**Fig #6. The Avondale Railway Station in 1988 before restoration. (Unknown, 1988)**

Determination won in the end and the Avondale Heritage Foundation came to an agreement to officially keep a small part of the tracks, which they still use to this day (Mullaly, 2000). They also received 3 train cars and an engine with a snowplow to display beside the building when CN was trying to downsize their inventory of rolling stock.

The last train to run in Newfoundland was on September 20, 1988 and less than a month later CN started tearing up the tracks, finishing in 1990 (Collier, 2010). The rails were sold for scrap and the rolling stock was retired, scrapped, or sold (Collier, 2010).

## Post Railway (1984-Today)

The first few years following the protest the station building began to fall into disrepair from the elements and vandalism. Up until 1987 the building was rat infested, windows were smashed and broken, and it was essentially abandoned. But with the help of volunteers and grants, the building was starting to return to its former glory (Mullaly, 2000).



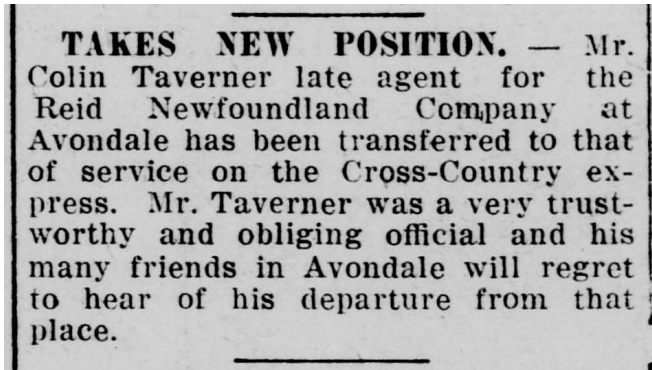
**Fig #7. The train cars and engine on the Avondale Railway Station Museum site. (Heritage NL, 2023)**

In 1988 it was designated a Registered Heritage Structure by the Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador and in August of 1990 the Avondale Railway Station Museum opened (Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1993). In the 1990s the museum even received the Manning Award for the “Public Presentation of Historic Places in Newfoundland and Labrador” (Heritage Newfoundland and Labrador, 2023). Today when you visit you can enjoy the small portion of track still there, riding a miniature train received by the museum from the Trinity Loop.

## People of the Station

A main goal when researching this building was to find more information about the people who worked in and out of the station. Many people worked there throughout the years, with jobs that ranged from working with the railway (i.e. station foremen, station agents, relief agents, station masters, etc.), to jobs with the telegraph company (i.e. telegrapher, post telegraph operator, etc.),

and jobs with the post office (i.e. post office operator). We were able to come up with a list of 52 names, from archival research and submissions from the public, but there are definitely many more names of people who have walked through the station's doors.



**Fig #8. Reid Agent Taverner leaves Avondale.**  
(*Evening Telegram*, October 10, 1913)

Some of the more frequent names we came across were Kennedy, Moore, Costello, and Sullivan. Often people from the same family worked in the station, as once one person was employed it was easier for someone from the same family to be hired. So it was common in our research to find multiple people with the same last name working during and around a similar time period.

It was also not uncommon for teenagers to be hired to work there (Newman, 2023). For example, Anne (née Costello) Doyle, when she was in her later teens, worked in the snack bar (Newman, 2023). She worked there from 1939 to 1941 (Newman, 2023). Dorothy, Anne's daughter, reminisced about her mother's time at the station when we spoke with her. When Anne was on duty she would sleep in one of the rooms in the upstairs apartment of the station to be able to open the snack bar for passengers of the early morning and late evening trains coming in (Newman, 2023). The snack bar had candy bars, fruit, and drinks for train passengers to buy (Newman, 2023). Anne's father and brother also worked at the station (Newman, 2023). Thomas, her father, was a section foreman (1920s - 1950s)

and her brother Daniel was a telegrapher (1942 - 1945) (Newman, 2023). The station was a hub in the community, as it was where lots of people met, worked, and connected. It was, and still is, a place of importance for the community of Avondale.

We only have a few stories like the one above from the time the station was open and running, but we are still more than happy to learn of new ones!

## Conclusion

Although the history of the Avondale Railway Station has been left unexplored for some time, with this recent research and update, the story of the building and the people who moved throughout it is becoming whole. If you have any information pertaining to Avondale Railway Station, please contact us.

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