

HERITAGE CORNER

The tale of *Jigger*, the rusty relic

In 1886, when the railways played an important part in the transportation of freight and people along the Erie and Huron Railroad between Chatham and Sarnia, there was a happy little railroad speeder called *Jigger*. The little rail car was very fast for his size and he used his speed to carry rail inspectors and repair crews to places on the railway that needed repair.

As time passed, other forms of transportation were developed. People started to travel in cars and trucks, and as these vehicles became increasingly popular, *Jigger's* service was needed less and less. With every day that passed, *Jigger's* body rusted a little more and his engine began to seize up; there came a time when he didn't work at all. He was fired from his job and left to decay in a lonely field by the railway tracks.

One spring day, the sad little speeder, whose body was now thick with rust except for a tiny bright yellow paint chip that clung to his roof, was noticed in the high grass by two people walking along the railway tracks. They began to point at *Jigger* and speak excitedly, and *Jigger's* rusty wheels began to tremble with expectation. He wondered if they would take him to a place where he could be helpful again.

But instead, they turned and ran away, leaving him alone again.

A tiny drop of oily rainwater fell from *Jigger's* rusty oil pan as he watched the people quickly become silhouettes that disappeared into the distance.

Several months passed, spring turned to summer, and *Jigger's* metal body rusted even faster in the summer rains.

Jigger could feel it happening and his sadness grew. He wondered if he would ever know another minute of happiness. His life seemed to have no point and with his body hidden in the tall grass, it seemed that his lot in life was to disappear into the mud; a rusty relic, invisible and unloved.

As he pondered his fate, a distant murmur of curiously familiar voices interrupted his train of thought. He turned his attention to the top of the railway track and in the distance, several fast-moving silhouettes were growing bigger as he watched.

Soon, he recognized the silhouettes; they were the people who had left him behind in the spring. *Jigger* decided they were probably just passing by and he resumed his contemplation of the fate that awaited him in the future.

"Hey Lyle, is the truck here yet?" said a voice from the top of the railway track. After a brief pause, another voice called, "Leo's got the truck on the other side of the track. We'll use its chasis winch to lift this poor thing out of the ditch." The two men came into view, then descended into the grassy ditch where *Jigger* sat. They set about inspecting *Jigger's* rusty body until they found a length of the speeder's frame that was only lightly rusted. "This should be strong enough to bear its weight when it's lifted from the ditch," said one of the men. The other nodded in agreement. "We'll have it back to the museum in no time," he said.

Jigger was liberated from the ditch with a minimum of fuss, loaded into the back of a well-used pickup truck, and secured with chains the men had brought with them.

When the truck was on the gravel road leading back

to the museum, *Jigger* marvelled at the number of motor vehicles he saw. No matter where the truck was taking him, he was sure it had nothing to do with the railway. He was frightened at first, but his fear was short-lived.

When the truck reached its destination, *Jigger* could see a small railway station and a beautiful red caboose that made him feel at home.

When work began on his body, there were welding sparks flying, sand paper rubbing away the rust, and discussions being held about what colour should be used to paint the speeder. *Jigger* came to know the name of the museum and appreciate the people who volunteered at the Moore Museum, especially the men who were giving him a new life. *Jigger* repeated all of the men's names as if they were a prayer to be spoken in thanks for his new life. When he was rust-free and his restoration was complete, he silently recited with thanks, "Jim and Louis Townsend, Jay Chipman, John Shymko, "Tuesday Guys" Dave Pattenden, Phil Pattenden, Dave Taylor, John Richardson, Dan Hayward, Paul Mitchell, Joe Doherty, Tom Walter, Lyle Gander and Leo Griffiths."

The time finally came to move *Jigger* out of the workshop building and over to his new location on the rails in front of the railway station. As the men moved him out of the building, *Jigger* caught a glimpse of himself in a pane of window glass.

The sight made his running lights glow with joy. His new coat of paint was bright yellow! His friends had painted him the same colour he wore when he was a working speeder.

He was beyond happy and even more, he wasn't a rusty relic anymore.

~Bonnie Stevenson



Jigger the rusty relic before restoration



At the celebration of *Jigger's* new life, the restored railway speeder is joined by, from left: St. Clair Township Mayor Jeff Agar; Deputy Mayor Steve Miller; Volunteer Lyle Gander; Councillor Pat Brown; Volunteers Joe Doherty; Paul Mitchell; Dave Taylor John Richardson, and Dave Pattenden.

Fiona Doherty photo