

Upper Canada Railway Society

NEWSLETTER

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A HISTORY OF THE UPPER CANADA RAILWAY SOCIETY

by the Editor

Although the banquet that is being held this month in place of the Society's regular meeting marks the tenth anniversary of the Society's founding, the beginnings of the group may be traced back almost twenty years. Grenadier Road, a street in Toronto's west end may be said to be the birthplace of the Society, for in 1932, Douglas W. Knowles and James H. Allen who lived next door to each other on this street, called a meeting of all persons in the Toronto area whose names had appeared in Railroad Magazine, or as it was then called "Railroad Stories" magazine.

A surprisingly large turnout rewarded the enterprise of Messrs. Knowles and Allen, as Toronto's first general meeting of railfans took place; unfortunately the exact date of this meeting is not known. Of the many who appeared at this first gathering, only a handful remained with the newly formed group, but the purpose of the meeting had been fulfilled. The nucleus of what is to-day the Upper Canada Railway Society, now an organization with an increasingly important place among the railroad fan clubs of the continent, had been formed.

Membership increase was very small during the years that ensued; indeed, those who did come in were mostly "accidental discoveries" as no advertising was done and no publicity was enjoyed by the little group. The organization was at this time simply a handful of railfans who met every second week at their respective homes to talk railroads, look at photo albums, etc. It was not a club, as there were no formalities, no officers and no constitution.

By 1934 the group had grown to eight regular participants, in this year Mr. John W. Griffin, the UCRS president of to-day and member number 8, became associated with the group. Growth continued at a very small rate until January 1940, when the first move was made to form an organized club out of the 13 men who formed the Toronto railfan group at this time.

Accordingly, application was made to the Canadian Railroad Historical Association of Montreal for the right to form a Toronto chapter of that organization. The arrangements were concluded successfully, and the newly organized chapter was launched on its career with Albert S. Olver as President and John Griffin as Secretary.

By this time, the interval between meetings had been lengthened from two weeks to three, but members' homes were still used as places of meeting. Plans for excursions and bulletins were drawn up but for various reasons, during the relatively short life of the Toronto Chapter of the CRHA, only one modest bulletin was produced, and no excursions materialized.

By mid-1941, it was felt that the organization could function more efficiently as an independent unit, and with this in mind, a special meeting was called on October 3rd, 1941. Seven members of the Toronto Chap-

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ter of the CRHA were in attendance at this meeting and they constituted themselves as an organizing committee for a railroad society. Member Robert S. Brown proposed that this new organization be called the "Upper Canada Railway Society" and submitted a constitution. The principal details were worked out at this special meeting, and then they were presented to the membership-at-large two weeks later on October 17th. On this date, the Toronto Chapter of the CRHA was dissolved and the Upper Canada Railway Society was formed. A separate Directors' Meeting was held this same evening and the following officers were appointed, each being the first man in the history of the UCRS to hold the particular office:

President	- Albert Oliver
1st Vice-President	- John Griffin
2nd Vice-President	- Douglas Knowles
Secretary	- Maurice Winston
Asst. Secretary	- John Knowles
Treasurer	- John MacNab
Curator	- Robert Brown

The first months of life of the new Society were ones of vigorous activity. From October 1941 until May, 1942, the meetings were well attended and the UCRS was off to a flying start. Twenty six members made up the UCRS as of its date of formation, and members 27 and 28 (the writer and George Horner) were the first to join the new Society after its inception.

The second meeting of the Society was held on November 7th, which date coincided with the 56th anniversary of the driving of the last spike of the Canadian Pacific Railway at Craigellachie, B.C. in 1885. Accordingly, the first of what was intended to be a series of "special interest nights" was held, with the CPR as its theme, and three interesting papers were read on CPR subjects. Unfortunately, in the opinion of the writer, these "interest nights" did not last; however, to-day's Society with its well organized and varied programmes at meetings offers much the same as was intended in the idea of "special interest nights" in the earliest days of the UCRS.

The first excursion of the Society was held on November 23rd, 1941, and though a very modest affair was considered a success, and was followed by others shortly thereafter. Seven members travelled by automobile to Waterford, Ont., and made a return trip on the Lake Erie and Northern Railway from Waterford to Port Dover. Several stops were made on the road portion of the trip to observe steam operations.

With the inception of the Upper Canada Railway Society, a mimeographed bulletin was published, edited by John Griffin. This continued on a generally monthly basis for almost a year. Bulletins #1 to #11 were published in this period - these were not equipment bulletins but rather resembled the present UCRS Newsletter in context.

The new Society was given handsome writeups in the February and March 1942 issues of Railroad Magazine, with a full representation of the Society's crest (which, regrettably, has never again since been used in that publication). This resulted in a modest burst of new applications for membership, and attendance grew during the winter and spring of 1942.

However, the happy state of affairs was short-lived. As the 1942-43 season got under way, it became increasingly apparent that the activities of the Society would have to be curtailed greatly, owing to the continued loss of members to the armed forces. A resolution was passed granting all active service members automatic membership until

the end of the war, and that any officer going on active service should retain his position until the time of his return. By this resolution, President Albert Olver, who was already away at the time of the formation of the Society and did not attend his first meeting as president of the group until January 18th, 1946.

By mid-1943 the President and the supply of Vice-Presidents, including the "Acting 3rd Vice-President" were unable to attend the Society's meetings and the Acting Secretary found himself with the responsibility of calling and presiding at meetings, in addition to his secretarial duties. The attendance at meetings fell to a low level, and a mere five turned up on one occasion. Because of this emergency, the necessity of having a quorum to do business was abolished for the time being.

A bright spot in this otherwise gloomy situation was an excursion held in conjunction with the Buffalo Chapter, N.R.H.S. on June 13th, 1943. The then newly renovated car 83 of the Niagara, St. Catharines and Toronto Railway (which had been long dormant in the yards as Toronto Suburban Railway 107) was chartered for a day's excursion (car 130 was used part of the time). This excursion was attended by about 70 persons in all, and was definitely a great success - there were not many like it held anywhere during those days when the war was at its height.

The Society remained essentially static during 1944, with a slight growth in membership offset by a continued loss of other members to the services. Sporadic publication of the bulletin was carried on and two fairly extensive issues, containing car rosters, were produced.

The first half of 1945 was generally uneventful, and meetings continued to be held at members' homes on a three-week schedule. However, by the summer of that year, with hostilities brought to a conclusion overseas, it was evident that the Upper Canada Railway Society would very soon receive a new impetus with the returning active service members in addition to a general quickening tempo of railfan activities with the relaxation of excursion restrictions, etc.

A directors' Meeting held on July 3rd, 1945 produced two significant decisions - one was that meetings be held monthly, on the third Friday, instead of at three week intervals as had been the practice since 1940. This is, of course, the system which the Society follows at the present time. The other decision was that a monthly newsletter be published to supplement the Society's bulletin, and in some respects to replace it. The first issue of the Newsletter was issued in September, 1945 and it has continued for the most part on a monthly basis since that time. The Bulletin, since the inauguration of the Newsletter has served purely as a "record" publication issued at irregular intervals. John Griffin handled the Bulletin as editor from 1945 to 1948, and this post was assumed by William C. Bailey, who now holds it, in 1949.

The earliest issues of the Newsletter and most of the mimeographed issues of the Bulletin since 1941 had their duplicating handled by Robert S. Brown, who deserves much credit for performing this arduous duty over such a long period of time.

As expected, the attendance at meetings surged upwards during the season 1945-46 as nearly every meeting saw one or more returning active service members. Along with this there was a healthy natural increase in membership - at the March 15, 1946 meeting, 26 persons were present. This is not an outstanding total compared to present day standards, but it was decidedly a record at the time.

An extensive excursion to Buffalo was held on June 23rd, 1946 in co-operation with several other societies. This was a forerunner of the C.O.T.T.C. excursions of the past few years.

The greatest single forward step taken by the Society in its ten-year history was made in the summer of 1946, when by courtesy of Mr. Aiken Walker of the CPR Freight Department, arrangements were concluded with the Toronto Terminals Railway Company for the use of Room 486, Toronto Union Station as a place of meeting free of charge. The long treks to distant members' homes and the crowded conditions of some of the well-attended meetings automatically became things of the past. The fall of 1946 also saw Society pins on sale for the first time.

With meetings being held in the Union Station, programs for meetings soon became the rule rather than the exception, as the room was well adapted for speakers, quizzes or the showing of films. The Program and Excursion Committee now does an excellent job of providing the membership with entertainment at each meeting.

The latter portion of 1946 saw another milestone of progress as photo-offset printing was used for the first time in the Society's bulletin (no. 21). From no. 24 onwards, the policy has been to have bulletins completely lithographed, using mimco for the Newsletter only.

The most recent five years of the Society's existence have been in all respects very successful and in definite contrast to the rather struggling career of the first five years, most of which covered the latter portion of the war. The Society's membership has increased to the point where it stands at nearly 200, contrasted to a mere 26 in October, 1941. The meetings improve constantly in attendance and excellence of programme. Although the Society has not sponsored many excursions of recent years, it has been an active participant in the Central Ontario Train Trip Committee, which sponsors the big annual June excursion - these trips are becoming a Toronto railfan institution.

At a time when several of the leading railroad fan publications are experiencing difficulty in continuing, the U.C.R.S. Bulletin and Newsletter are thus far unhampered by any such troubles, and should so continue indefinitely. The Society has come to put an increasing amount of its time and finances into publications, but this is as it should be with a large subscribing (associate) membership.

In summary, it can be concluded that the first ten years have been a decade of outstanding success and progress for the Upper Canada Railway Society, a leading organization in the railfan movement of Canada. The writer confidently expects that the second twenty years will show an equal amount of progress.

LOCOMOTIVE NOTES

The Canada and Gulf Terminal Railway has ordered a 1200 h.p. switcher from General Motors Diesel Ltd., to be assigned the number 356.

The C.N. R. ordered three 1200 h.p. road diesel locomotives during July for the narrow gauge Newfoundland lines.

All of the 28 GMD road diesels ordered by the CNR a year ago have now been received. They carry road numbers 9028-9055 and are operated in A-B combinations on the CNR main line.

The Essex Terminal Railway has purchased an 800 h.p. switcher from GMD numbered 102.

The Quebec, North Shore & Labrador Railway placed a large order with GMD in August - this calls for 50 GP-7 units, and will provide the new railway with most, if not all of the power it requires for its operation. Also ordered were two 600 h.p. switchers from GE at Erie, Pa.