The Ferrophiliac Column
Conducted by Just A. Ferronut

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Well another year of rambling is drawing to a fast close. First I want to thank all the folks out there who has taken the time to send in material to the column. And yes, this includes those who send along corrections. I am looking forward to next year and hopefully, I will be able to spend more time on this column. I ask everyone to keep the material flowing.

Back in the October Newsletter, No. 504 we asked if anyone knew some of the facts about CP Britt. Well, George Horner, has sent along some material that was originally published in 1945 concerning this community near the navigational head of the Magnetawan River at the junction of the Still River, on the north shore of what is known as Byng Inlet.

This material indicates that the first industrial activity in this area was lumbering that started in earnest during the 1869-70 season. For the next thirty years this activity was the prime one in this area that was definitely an isolated pioneer community especially in the winter. Supplies, travel, etc. could be handled by boat to and from Collingwood in the summer season. However, winters were a different story, the area was a two day dog team trip from Parry Sound over a rough forest trail. It was not uncommon for supplies to be very low by the time the ice broke up in the spring.

Things changed in June 1908 when the CPR line was opened from Parry Sound to Sudbury, passing within a mile of Byng Inlet North. The first station in the area was a small wooden structure just south of the present station at CP Mile 65.0 Parry Sound Subdivision. This first station was called "Dunlop" in honour of Mr. A. N. Dunlop who at the time was a resident engineer.

Steam locomotives have a large appetite for coal. The supply of this commodity to the various locations on the CPR's lines across the northern part of Ontario had been an ongoing problem. The construction of this rail line northward provided a new route to assist in the supply of coal.

Two years later, in 1910, the CPR taking advantage of the navigability of the Magnetawan built a huge coal dock and terminal at the junction of the Magnetawan and Still Rivers. This location was chosen due to the closeness of deep water to the main rail line. The Magnetawan River at this location is wide and was capable of handling ships up to 7,000 ton capacity. The relatively flat terrain provided a good terminal where Great Lakes ships could unload their cargoes of Pennyslvania coal for transhipment by rail to the northern railway coal towers as well as supplying the needs of various northern mines and pulp mills. This operation started during the 1911 season and lasted until the end of the steam era. During the peak years of operations as much as 500,000 tons of coal were handled per year.

In 1927, a Post Office was opened in the community. The village was still known as Dunlop, but since there was another Dunlop in Huron County, a new name had to be found to avoid confusion in the postal system. The naming was left to CPR officials who named it Britt, in honour of Thomas Britt who at that time was the general fuel superintendent of the CPR eastern lines.

During the peak years there were in the order of a dozen or more siding on the wharf area to facilitate the storage and loading of the coal. There was also four lines of overhead gantries at right angles to the dock which apparently handed the overhead conveyance of the coal from the ships.

Jack MacLean in a recent conversation told me he could recall travelling on the nearby CPR mainline and noting the piles and piles of coal stacked on the south side of the inlet. There were a considerable number of rail siding going in and around the piles of coal. Jack went on to say there were what looked like a couple of steam powered clam shell cranes operating loading lines of hopper cars. Coal was also sometimes shipped in stubby ore cars, if there were a surplus number available.

While we are verbally roaming the railways north of Toronto, let's look at the replacement of a bridge on CP's MacTier Subdivision at Bala as reported in the Muskoka Sun and sent along by Dr. Gerald D. Hart.

This north-south CP Rail line was constructed as the Sudbury ! Kleinburg Branch starting in 1903 to join the company's rail lines near Toronto to its transcontinental line near Sudbury. By 1905, construction was well underway in the Bala area. There were two sub-contractors with construction camps in the area. At the north end of Long Lake, south of Bala, Richie and Osborne, of Beamsville, Ontario, the contractor for work to south, had their camp. Keefe and Bradshaw of Butte, Montana, who were working to the north had their camp and office on Burgess's Bay (near the present site of Weismiller and Sons lumber mill). Mr. Fred Sutton in his History of Bala wrote of an interesting day at the camp and construction site Richie and Osborne. A log cabin at the Long Lake site stocked with dynamite and blasting powder caught fire one March day. A young unnamed Italian boy was the hero of the day. He warned the workmen in a nearby rock cut of the fire and pending danger. This warning enabled the workmen to clear the work site in the rock cut before the explosion filled it with derricks, drills, boilers and other miscellaneous items. This explosion also shattered all the windows in the area, tore off many doors, etc., but the miracle of the day was that no one was killed.

A 85 foot long bridge at CP Mile 114.789 MacTier Subdivision was placed in 1906 as part of the construction of this line. June 14, 1908 saw the start of operation of CP passenger trains over this line that was referred as the "Muskoka Route".

Bridge inspections in 1987 showed that this bridge, a half-deck plate girder was in need of replacement. Both of Canada's major railways regularly replace a number of similar aging bridges each year. These bridge replacements are usually ballasted deck structures designed not only to take the heavier rail loading but the design also provides a smoother ride. This bridge replacement would have just been another routine job except that the bridge had a mind of its own and wanted to become a legend early in life. The replacement was to be undertaken starting on Sunday, September 15, 1991. Preliminary work had been previously completed.

The Sunday was spent placing temporary supports near the old bridge so that the new span could be placed on them ready for its final placement on Monday. All appeared ready as the two large on-track cranes started to lift and place the new span on its temporary supports. As the span was being lowered, the bridge decided it was time to show everyone who is boss. The Toronto end didn't stop for the temporary supports but continued a downward journey until it was visiting the rock bass and sunfish in Bala Bay. A railway employee on the bridge during its downward trip made a hasty trip to keep above the rising water line. This unscheduled bath did not hurt this wayward bridge. Monday saw it placed in its place of work on the concrete abutments where the railway expects it will carry their trains for most of the next century. So the residents of Bala

now have a story of a bridge and the fishes that they can embellish and past on for many generations.

Our column in the Newsletter for August and September, Nos. 502 & 503 carried material on Heritage Stations protected under the Heritage Railway Stations Protection Act. Well, the Governor General In Council added an additional 12 stations to the previous 42, on October 24, 1991. These stations include: in British Columbia, CNR/VIA Vancouver; in Alberta, CPR Medicine Hat, CPR Strathcona (South Edmonton), CPR Banff, and former Canadian Northern Railway station (now CN) Hanna; in Saskatchewan, CPR Swift Current and former CPR (now VIA) Regina and CPR Wynyard; the CPR station at Ignace, Ontario; in Québec, CNR Sherbrooke; CNR St-Hyacinthe and former Napierville Junction station (now CPR) at Lacolle.

There are now 54 railway stations across Canada that the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada have seen fit to have the Governor In Council designate as Heritage Stations. This form of forced preservation is doubt a good move to ensure that some of these unique stations will be restored and preserved. I use the word forced, since many of the larger unique stations in the smaller communities could not be restored on the basis of voluntary funding alone. Based on the cost of the recent restoration of St. Thomas's City Hall, I can see a figure of over $10 million to fully restore a station like the Canada Southern structure in that city.

With this federal act in place we will probably see more railway stations declared heritage structures. Reflecting on this subject, it is interesting to realise that here in the early 1990s there are still enough railway stations existing in Canada to warrant a federal act and related procedures to protect prime examples of these earlier architectural gems. However, this method will account for only a small percentage of stations that are being preserved.

For every station that gains fame under this federal act, how many others survive standing and functioning thanks to others? In this day with the buzz word on "recycling", such action has been common for railways for the better part of a century. Former stations have become comfortable homes, efficient places for businesses, and yes, lowly farm sheds. In this group are also the stations that have become libraries, townhalls, community and information centres. Some in this group have lost their identity, but others have kept some of it.

More stations have been preserved in a functional sense. This group includes those that have been restored by historical groups, provincial heritage legislation, etc. for various uses including museums. Then there are the stations still in use by the railways. Some have been modified to the horror of the purists, but they survive, even if they are painted in shocking pink or chartreuse.

So no matter what your view, one must ask, what other industry can show more or better examples of structures than the stations of the railways.

The Moncton Daily Transcript reported 80 years ago that the first NTR train from Edmundston arrived in Moncton at 4:30 p.m. on Wednesday, November 29, 1911. The train led by 3 locomotives of Kennedy and McDonald, the contractors had encountered much snow on its trip. These locomotives were enroute to Robb's in Amherst, Nova Scotia for repairs. This announced stated that the NTR track was complete and in good shape but that the stations and terminals were still to be completed.

While doing some research on the Tillson Spur Line Railway, one interesting tidbit relating to the Tillsonburg, Lake Erie and Pacific Railway came to light. This small line that struggled to operate between Port Burwell and Tillsonburg still had only one locomotive some three years after its opening. The comment in April 1899 was that they were running Grand Trunk's locomotive No. 164 while their own locomotive was being overhauled.

NOTE: I proposed to shorten the following or it could be a separate stand alone. It is also on Montreal.dec.

– Doug Brown has forwarded an interesting article by Eve McBride from the Montréal Gazette concerning train travel between Montréal and Toronto:!

"What a delightful ritual is the train trip between Toronto and Montréal. It is a transforming passageway, the connecting ethos between those two diverse, great cities.

"Why do I view railroads as symbols of unity and freeways as disconnective, disfiguring scars? Why doesn't the same mellow sense of intimacy I feel on the train happen to me when I travel in a car on that long tedious stretch of highway joining my two homes?

"It's the booze, you say. The scotch or the Bloody Mary, depending on the time of day. Well, yes, sure. Alcohol lubricates mood. I love those first few sips of my drink as the train pulls away from the dark station into the gleaming light of downtown, enhancing all that I am leaving and infusing me with excitement for what's ahead. But drinking in the passenger seat of our car would not make that trip along the 401 any less grim.

"Some pleasures are obvious. In a train there's more leg room. You can get up and walk around. You don't have to stop and park; face mobs of people if you want to use the WC. I feel much safer on a train. There are no macho lane-hoppers, no manic 18-wheel truck drivers, no fearful, poky shoulder-huggers – the ones whose wheel slips off onto the gravel and they panic and lose control – to contend with.

"But my love for train travel, in particular, the distance between Montréal and Toronto, goes beyond mere amenities. It is always a meaningful journey and I use the word journey deliberately, to imply time and experience. For me, as well, there is the kind of solitude, of tranquillity that comes from being suspended between two realities. The suspension itself has its own import; it offers something exclusive.

"I feel as if I've spent most of my life living between two lovers, if cities can be compared to lovers (and I think they can). I'm always surmounting the divisiveness that inevitably exists between rivals. In a way, it has been like a commuting of the spirit. Former attachments linger; new ones tug like children at hemlines. Once, the balance for me was between Vancouver/Toronto. Then it was Whitehorse/Toronto. Now I face the most precarious juxtaposition of them all.

"How well the train assuages that precariousness. It goes deep into the landscape, touches back yards with lines full of flapping white sheets, children standing on fences with fat arms waving bouquets of wild flowers, stately golf courses, vast and bountiful fields and orchards and shimmery ponds where cosy clusters of guernseys drink.

"I feel so privileged to be part of the closeness the train affords. I mean closeness to people and productivity, to the heritage that is part of this country and certainly the complex connection between Montréal and Toronto. The wonderful thing about the train is there is no boundary. You are not first in one place, then in the other. There is no rift, no separation. The transition is gradual, mesmerizing. Mystical.

"So often along the route the train courts the shoreline of the waterway linking the two cities. You see it, sometimes slim and silvery in the distance, sometimes expansive, beckoning and as turquoise as a tropical sea. The towns embedded close by

seem like havens; their elegant gables, prim spires and red-brick uniformity provoke visions of 19th. century stolidness. Charming stations offer rural refuge. From one, my parents pick me up to go to their farm. From another, I can walk up a hill to the big Victorian house of a sister.

"I look out from my not-unpleasant meal with its accompanying not-unpleasant wine to see two hawks gliding high on thermals in the clear air. I can see a stag dash anxiously into a sunny woods or a fox move like a red wave over a smooth sea of granite. I can watch a trio of horses, tails alight, race across a velvety pasture. I can think again of years of gruelling labour it took the pioneers to make and keep it green.

"It's not all bliss, this voyage, of course. There are blights. This is not a Disney adventure. More and more of what I call "Monopoly towns" – sprawling suburbs that have the appearance of plastic houses on a Monopoly board – are taking over the wild meadows, the graceful fields. There are two nuclear plants and several other futuristic, effluent-spewing monstrosities along the way, each having to do with economic prosperity, near and far. A major car manufacturer destroyed one of the most magnificent farms and its spectacular vista with a garish new office building. The sight of abandoned farm houses, windows gaping like the eye sockets of a skull, strikes a mournful chord. Even more ominous are billboards shouting "No Industrial Dumpsite For Our County!"

"Still, I feel renewed, delivered in a sense, when I arrive at my destination. The way has usually been smooth – a comforting, embellished period of transition. For me, the trip is an invaluable mediation between two demanding focuses.