

The Ferrophiatic Column Conducted by Just A. Ferronut

March, 1992

It must be spring, each day has more daylight, but the length of the day hasn't changed! Anyway another month has passed, so it is time to windup the computer and see what is in there.

This is probably a good time to answer Pat Scrimgeour's question about the railway grades in the Goderich, Ontario harbour area that has been on the books for several months. A request to Chris Martin in London, brought a profile of the railway grade west of the CN Goderich station, down to the harbour area. A condensed version is **shown below**. It can be seen that the main grade varies between 2.0% and 2.78% with flatter grades of the ends to act as vertical curves. Chris points out that four man handcar enthusiasts wanting a little exercise for their muscles should find pushing their handcar up this one and half miles to fit the bill. The vertical drop in this 8318 feet is 147 feet. Beside the vertical drop, the track has more curves than tangent. There is a long left curve slightly over four degrees at the top of the hill. Other curves on the hill range from one degree to another four degree plus curve for the length of the 2.78% grade.

This piece of track has had problems for 140 years and it is continuing. The original construction was delayed for various reasons, however, the biggest, was money. The Brantford and Buffalo Joint Stock Railroad Company had a survey for a rail line from Brantford to Goderich completed in early 1852. That year saw their name changed to the Buffalo, Brantford and Goderich Railway. The BB&G obtained permission on November 10, 1852 to extend their line to Goderich. The next four years saw construction work on the line, and portions of it opened, but by 1856 the "financially embarrassed" company was leased by Messrs. Hazelton & Powell and renamed the Buffalo and Lake Huron Railway Company. With new capital the new railway was completed and opened as far west as Stratford in September of 1856.

The section from Stratford into Goderich was not opened until June 28, 1858. Part of the delay was the "procrastination by Government inspectors". It was another four years before the harbour was upgraded to accept lake freighters, so exactly when the track down Gloucester Terrace (present name for the hill) was completed and put in service is open to debate.

It is now 1992, and as pointed out elsewhere in the *Newsletter*, April 3, will see the end of CN rail operations into Goderich and the following day will see start of operations by the Ontario Southern Railway. How things have changed in 140 years. In May 1852, a meeting was held in Goderich where a goodly number of citizens of the district endorsed the rail line project. In 1992, the terms that the Ontario Southern Railway had to accept to operate their Goderich-Exeter Railway up and down the Gloucester Terrace section of track include the replacement of the present rail with welded rail of at least 115 pounds, exhaust noise arrestors on locomotives moving over this section. Until this work is completed, trains are limited to one locomotive and a maximum of five loaded rail cars. Need I say more.

Last month's *Column* carried some of Keith Pratt's comments about the status of Canadian National on Prince Edward Island. However, we didn't tell all about our man from Bloomfield Station, P.E.I. Bloomfield Station, for those who may not be familiar with the geography of Canada's red soiled island, is located in the north west. It is on the former Kensington Subdivision, about 9 miles east of Alberton or 22 miles from Tignish. Keith spent his early

years living a stone's throw from the island's railway's tracks. He probably got bitten by the 'train bug' at the age of five when Engineer Peter MacCarey lifted him up to the cab of a steam locomotive. Over the next dozen years Keith, like many of us, hung around the railway and got to know as many train crews as possible. Eventually, the train crews let him help in looking after the engine, including coaling and watering them at their stop at Bloomfield Station. These associations provided many offers for cab or caboose rides.

Keith started taking photographs of trains in 1925 with a 99 cent box camera purchased from Simpson's. In 1934 he started a list of all double headed trains passing over the line near his uncle's store where Keith was working. The *Column* has on occasions mentioned some problems that 'Island Trains' over the years had with snow including line blockages of up to a month. Plough trains working east out of Tignish would often have to return for additional water to keep them going in their battle. Double headers on the relatively flat terrain of the island were generally required to combat the hard going caused by winter storms.

August 1, 1923 is vividly recalled by Keith as the day when gangs changed the track gauge from the 3'-6" to the standard 4'-8½" in the western part of the island. Details on this change over was carried in the August 1990 *Newsletter*. Engine No. 1077 was the first standard gauge engine to run into Tignish.

Many know the story of Lauchie McDougall of Wreck House, Newfoundland! You may know him better as the "human wind gauge," who for over 30 years would advise the railway officials of the wind velocity coming from Table Mountain down the natural wind tunnel at Wreck House, a few miles north-west of Port aux Basques. The winds often reaching 140 kilometres per hour were well known for their ability to lift rail cars from the tracks. Well Keith recalls strong winds blowing on Prince Edward Island about 1919. The wind was so strong that the conductor got blown off his train as he passed between cars. Not quite Wreck House, but certainly would be a shock to the conductor.

Bloomfield Station was the site of an accident in either 1938 or 1939. While people at station were watching the night passenger train arrive, its headlight disappeared. The track had washed out and the engine dropped into it and overturned on its side, burning the engineer and fireman.

Another change that Keith writes about is the sterilisation of the train whistle. The electronically controlled horn of the diesel cannot give the individual personality of the steam whistle. Years ago many people along rail lines could tell who was the engineer on the passing train by the personal style he would use in blowing the whistle. Around 1926, Canadian National started using a motorised passenger coach 'Jitney' besides the regular passenger train through Bloomfield Station.

There is not much left of the Island Railway these days. Keith had planned to travel some of it following abandonment, but the vegetation had other plans. Based on a magazine article, he built a few attachments that would guide a bicycle on one rail with an outrigger to the other rail to form a tricycle-like vehicle. While the rail-bike was easy to use and move, the vegetation between the rails made it impossible to get beyond a few open spots.

On the station scene this month it is noted that the former CN (GTR) station at Palmerston, Ontario has NOT received a heritage designation under the Heritage Railway Stations Protection Act. Palmerston is at the junction of CN's Newton and Owen Sound Subdivisions. However, for

those keeping score, the CN Station in Richmond, Quebec has been declared a Heritage Station. Richmond is at the east end of CN's St-Hyacinthe Subdivision where it joins the Danville and Sherbrooke Subdivisions.

Doug Brown sent us some information on another Québec station in the news, VIA's Lévis station. This is a fine old station near the edge of the St. Lawrence River is conveniently located a few metres away from the ferry dock that provides service to and from Québec City. The station building was modernised six years ago at a cost of \$3 million. This upgrade was not only for VIA passengers, but also for bus riders and others who use the ferry to cross the river to Quebec. For sheer convenience to the travelling public, few facilities can match this one.

The problem is that CN's has two rail lines for about 17 miles (27 kilometres) between St-Charles and West Junction. Today, only passenger trains continue to follow the 22 mile (35 kilometre) route of Montmagny Subdivision that curves and descends into Lévis and climbs back out. Freight trains use the shorter Diamond Subdivision that avoid the penalties of the Lévis route. Last year CN obtained authority to abandon about 15 kilometres the Lévis route east of Charny and will take effect this April. It is presently planned to build a new station near the dreary CN freight yard about 10 kilometres inland or south of the present waterfront station.

It appears that all the parties are standing and staring at each other waiting to see who will blink first over the Lévis station. Most parties consider railways are a federal responsibility and noting that the federal cabinet rescinded the rail abandonment in the Gaspé area last fall, to protect VIA's Montreal-Gaspé Via passenger service are not doubt expecting the same at Lévis.

This *Column* has carried a couple of items about 'Rails to Trails' projects. Well, Doug Page, tells us that the Hamilton Region Conservation Authority has acquired 18 kilometres of the former Toronto Hamilton & Buffalo Railway's line between Hamilton to Jerseyville for conversion to a trail. Doug's material points out that this line had 3% grades on it – sounds like Gloucester Terrace. Doug also sent along an article on the Hamilton TH&B station. This Art-Deco station from the 1930's still awaits final word when it may expect the arrival of the first train from the long talked about GO Transit service. Meantime, the station has a caretaker, who tries to slow the deterioration from leaking roofs, etc. While many things have been removed from the building, it does still have the leather covered high-backed benches in the Ladies lounge. The old medical office still has the Doctor's name painted on the frosted glass in the door and the eye chart on the wall.

While a long way from its heyday or even the long weekends crowds of the 1950's and early 1960's when the station would be filled with people waiting for the train to places like New York City, it patiently waits for GO.

This station did see a few people last November when a movie crew used it as a stand-in for the Baltimore station of the 1930s. So if you see the movie "Sex and the Locomotive", you can now tell your friends that you know the station is the Hamilton TH&B station.

Denis Taylor has sent along a photograph of the CN (ex-GTR) Trenton Junction station taken in the fall of 1939. The photograph taken from a train on CN's Kingston Subdivision shows the frame station in the north east quadrant between the high level Grand Trunk Montréal – Toronto line and the low level Central Ontario line that passes under the GTR. The station had a two storey section at the east end and a single storey to the west. At the west end was a long covered, open sided stairway paralleling the CN/GTR line that provided a passage way leading down to the track level of the CN Maynooth Subdivision (nee-Central

Ontario Railway).

The restoration of the CPR Peterborough, Ontario station was mentioned a few months ago in the *Column*. Well Denis has sent along a couple of photographs of this structure taken a few days before Christmas 1991. The brick have been cleaned back to their original buff colour with the limestone base nicely restored. The gables are painted green and the fascia boards, window trim, etc. are in a chocolate brown. Looks like an A-1 job.

The other restoration job that Denis has been following is the period restoration of the VIA station in Cobourg. This is a substantial undertaking and has been progressing fairly slowly.

Denis, who I think of as Mr. Canadian Northern has been doing a tremendous amount of research on this railway, especially in the area east of Toronto. He has been keeping me snowed under with material that is building in the data banks. While we are trying to finish a couple of other projects for the next couple of months, this one is on the list.

If you are a Canadian Northern fan and are planning a trip to western Canada this summer, maybe you can make your plans include Big Valley, Alberta. The Canadian Northern Society of that town is planning an event called "Dominion Railway Day" on August 1, 1992. It will have several railway related displays and events. The Alberta Prairie Railway Excursion Train pulled by steam locomotive will operate from Stettler and return as part of the celebrations. The Canadian Northern Society is a non-profit organisation dedicated to the study, preservation and promotion of the heritage and historic buildings of the Canadian Northern and Canadian National in western Canada. If you would like to know more about their society or their celebration, drop them a line at P.O. Box 142, Big Valley Alberta T0J 0G0.

Need an update on your Canadian history wove around a train journey across Canada? If so, there is a new book for you. This book *Last Train to Toronto* by Terry Pindell has been published by Douglas & McIntyre Limited, 1615 Venables Street, Vancouver, British Columbia V5L 2H1. I haven't completed reading this book yet, so to date I have a mixed opinion on it. It relates to the experiences of Mr. Pindell, an American who rode passenger trains over most of Canada prior to the service cuts in January 1990. This book follows his similar endeavour on American railways. It is a book for general reading and no doubt is more suited to be read in large segments, rather than my brief snatches while waiting for a computer to warm up. I say this since details of the train trip are given in segments between a Canadian history lesson. The detail of the history indicates a considerable amount of work has gone into this works. To date a couple of small errors, but at this point, I would say it is worthwhile for anyone interested in Canadian history, especially as it relates to the development of the railways. I will give a further opinion after I finish reading it. I haven't seen it on the local market as yet but is available at the west above west coast address at \$26.95 plus all the good Canadian taxes and shipping costs.