CANADIAN RAILROAD HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION
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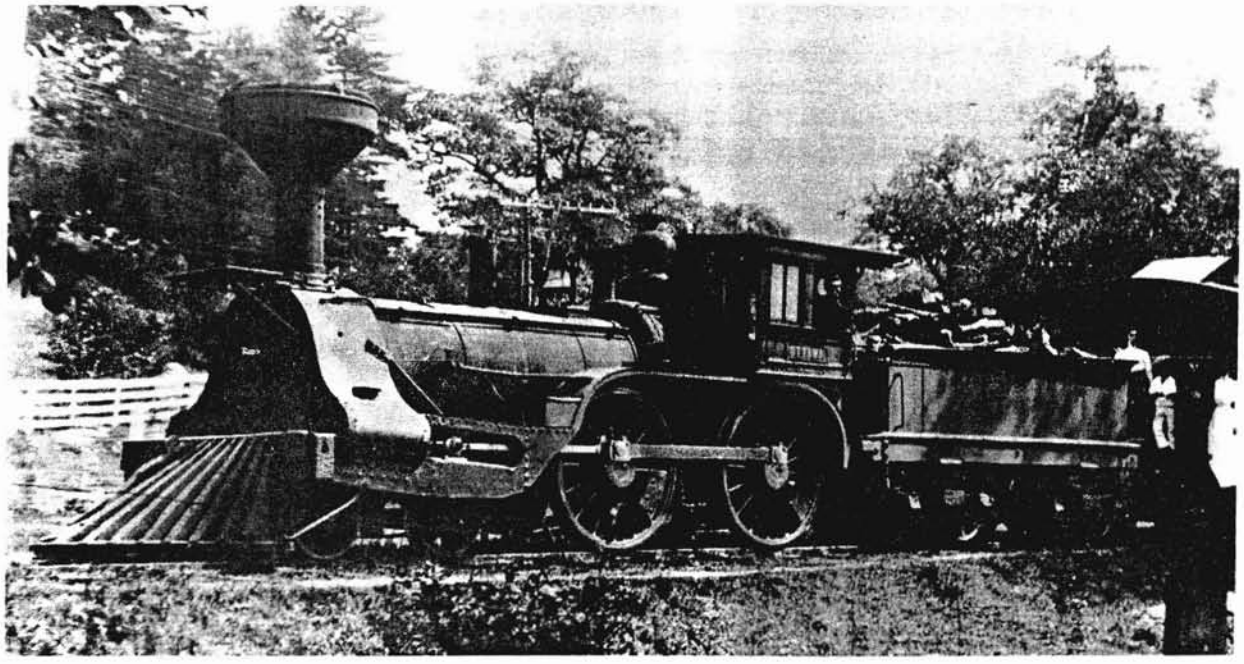
THE LAST BROAD GAUGE



The "Ottawa" in its declining years. When scrapped in 1914, at the age of fifty-eight, it carried the distinction of being Canada's last 'Birkenhead'.

by Robert R. Brown

Since the dawn of Canadian history the Ottawa River has been one of the principal highways to the interior. The early fur traders found it a convenient and relatively easy route to the far Northwest; later, for many years during the Nineteenth Century, great rafts of timber were floated down the river destined for the coves at Quebec, and export to England. Regular passenger service began in 1841 when H.& S. Jones organized a steamboat line which in time became known as the Ottawa Steamers Company. Eventually, it was replaced by the Ottawa River Navigation Company, organized by Captain R. W. Shepherd.

While there were long stretches of calm water in the Ottawa River, navigation was impeded by rapids at Ste. Anne de Bellevue and at Vaudreuil, and by a series of rapids extending about twelve miles from Carillon to Grenville. The old locks between those points were intended for barges and they were too small to accomodate the large steamboats which then operated above and below the rapids. Consequently, passengers from Montreal to Bytown had to take one steamer from Lachine to Carillon, cross the portage in a stagecoach over execrable roads, and then take another steamer from Grenville to Bytown.

Even before there was a regular steamboat service, there was talk of building a portage railway and, on July 26, 1840 a charter was granted to the Upper and Lower Ottawa Railway. This charter lapsed and seven years later, on June 24, 1847, the Carillon & Grenville Railway was chartered but it, too, failed to materialize. Then, a more ambitious project developed. At mid-century, Canada was in the midst of a railway mania and the newspapers were filled with discussions, mostly by people who knew little or nothing about railways. The "Railway to the Sea" (Saint Lawrence & Atlantic) was nearly half finished and public attention was focussed on a proposed line which was to run westward from Montreal to the navigable waters of Lake Ontario and to service the many towns in Canada West (Ontario). The proposed "grand trunk" line was to follow the Saint Lawrence River from Montreal to Kingston and eventually to Toronto. Many Canadians, remembering 1812-14, thought that this route would be too vulnerable in case of hostilities with the United States and that it would be much safer to have the railway located up the Ottawa valley to Bytown, and then parallel the Rideau Canal to Kingston.

When it was learned definitely that the Grand

Trunk Railway had decided to follow the river route, an influential group of Montrealers and residents of the Ottawa valley organized a projected system of railways to be known as the "Great Montreal and Ottawa Valley Trunk Line". It was to comprise the Montreal & Bytown Railway, the Brockville and Ottawa Railway, and, to tap the resources of the upper Ottawa valley, there was to be a branch line operated by the Bytown & Pembroke Railway.

It was to have been a very stylish affair, too. Like the earlier Canterbury & Whitstable Railway in England, the directors believed that a couple of tunnels would make their line much more interesting and so they decided to have one in Montreal, and another in Brockville -- utterly unnecessary and expensive to build but the directors were like children wanting a new toy, they just had to have their tunnels. The one in Brockville was built and it is still used occasionally but fortunately the one in Montreal never materialized.

By the terms of the charter, granted in August 1853, the Montreal & Bytown Railway was to start from a station in Montreal in Commissioners Street, at the foot of Jacques Cartier Square; then go through a tunnel under Notre Dame Street and then east of, and parallel to, Saint Denis Street, to the "Back River". Crossing the river about five hundred feet east of Vinet's Bridge (Pont Viau) it would then pass through Saint Martin, Saint Eustache, Belle Riviere, Saint Andrews, Carillon, Grenville and Hull, finally crossing the Ottawa River just above the Chaudiere Falls. At this point it would effect a junction with the Brockville & Ottawa Railway in the village of Bytown, where Broad Street station was built a few years later. In addition to the main line, there were to be two cheaply-constructed branch lines with wood and strap iron rails from Belle Riviere to Saint Jerome and to Lachute.

Canada had just completed a vast network of canals at a cost of about $200,000,000, an enormous sum for an impecunious province. There was practically no venture capital available in the country. Consequently, the Company had to submit to the common but very iniquitous practice, whereby the contractor, usually a trans-Atlantic transient or a southern entrepreneur, not only built the railway, but also found the necessary capital, usually through the sale of bonds issued by the railway Company. A contractor who could not make a profit at least four ways on such a deal was a dullard indeed.

In 1853, James Sykes, of Sheffield, came out to Canada and, on December 7th, signed a contract with the Montreal & Bytown Railway. He also contracted with the Brockville & Ottawa Railway and the Saint Andrews & Quebec Railway, down in New Brunswick, causing one to wonder if he had visions of a trunk line from the Bay of Fundy to the Great Lakes. Quien sabe ? These contracts were made under the name James Sykes & Company but he soon formed a partnership with his brothers William and Samuel and with Charles deBergue, of Manchester, and subsequently carried on business under the name Sykes, deBergue & Company, which later caused some confusion. James Sykes was an experienced engineer and contractor, his brothers were competent field superintendents and DeBergue was the financial backer of the firm.

No surveys had yet been made and exact distances were not known but, by the terms of the contract, Sykes, DeBergue & Co. were to receive, for 110 miles of main line and 23 miles of tramway to a cost of £870,000 stg., and in the event of the work exceeding the estimated lengths, then the contractors would receive £7,900 stg., per mile of excess on the main line, and £1,200 stg., per mile for extra length of tramway. Subsequent surveys showed that the actual length of the main line would be 119½ miles, giving a surplus of 9½ miles at £6,500 or a total, including the tramways of £83,750 ($404,044,305.00). Deducting from this the cost of 23 miles of tramway at £1,200 per mile leaves the sum of £804,150 ($3,806,270.00) for main line only, at a rate of £6,730 ($32,710) per mile. The contractors were to receive some cash, approximately $100,000 and, for the balance, were to receive twenty-year 6% bonds issued by the railway company. The contractors sold these bonds in England as best they could and the subsequent loss of the money, due to the lack of adequate banking facilities, brought the project to an untimely end.

As required by law, the gauge of the railway was 5'6", then the standard gauge in Canada; the track was to be of the very best quality with wrought iron rails of the "U" form, 56 pounds to the yard. Work was commenced immediately, surveys of the whole line were made and a large sawmill was erected at Saint Andrews to supply lumber for the railway.

To meet an urgent public demand, the company decided to complete first the section between Carillon and Grenville and thus eliminate the uncomfortable stagecoach journey. The laying of rails between the two points was completed on October 25th, 1854, and the locomotive "Ottawa" steamed into Grenville for the first time that day, but some ballasting remained to be done. On December 1st, the completed section and the rolling stock supplied by the contractor -- comprising one locomotive and tender, two first class coaches, four second class coaches, two box cars and four platform cars -- were delivered over to the railway company and this was confirmed, on May 12th, 1855, by a notarial deed authenticating the transfer.

The company had raised approximately $100,000 through the sale of shares in Canada and, of this, $98,761.00 had been turned over to the contractor, and spent on the construction of the line. This amounted to about $7,597.00 per mile and it would appear that the Montreal & Bytown Railway was unique in the history of North American railways in that its actual cost was much less than the estimates. For much of the matter was, however, many bills remained unpaid and some cash of the land taken for the right-of-way had not been paid for.

Early in December, 1854, James Sykes went to England to raise funds for the several contracts he had in progress. His mission successful, he returned to Canada in the spring with a large sum of money. This included £50,000 which had been raised by the sale of bonds of the Montreal & Bytown Railway and this money was urgently required to pay outstanding accounts and to pay off sub-contractors. Unfortunately, there occurred one of those disasters which change the course of history; nearing Portland, Maine, there was a terrific

storm, the ship foundered and all on board were lost. The railway company found itself in a very unfortunate position; its credit was so much impaired by the loss of the £50,000 that it could not raise money by other means and could not meet the contractors demands for funds. The contractor, too, was in a very embarassing position, being unable to cover his payrolls and pay for land and material already used; the sub-contractors also lost heavily. The money which would have prevented this unhappy condition lay on the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean.

At this critical juncture, Charles deBergue withdrew from the partnership and poor William Sykes found himself with a large assortment of liabilities but no assets. On August 1st, 1855, he took possession of the railway and the rolling stock and commenced to operate the road for his own benefit. However, he was not left long in undisputed possession, the railway company took legal action and on September 21st, the Superior Court issued a Writ of Attachment and Saisie Revendication. Robert Stuart, a Bailiff of the Superior Court, went up to Carillon and between September 22nd and 26th, 1855, seized the locomotive and cars, put them in the sheds at Carillon and appointed James Barclay as guardian. The railway company was bankrupt, and so too was James Sykes & Company, so William and Samuel Sykes abandoned the project and moved to Toronto where they were employed for many years in James Cood's foundry and machine shop.

For nearly a year following the seizure, the railway lay idle, but in 1856, the court turned it over in trust to the Wardens of Ottawa and Argenteuil Counties, and operation was resumed.

Meanwhile, the bondholders in England had been getting restless because of the default in the payment of interest on the bonds. None of the shares, which had been sold in Canada, had been paid up in full and legal action was taken by the bondholders to try to force the shareholders to pay up the balance of their subscriptions. Failing in this, the bondholders sought to take possession of the road, claiming the Company was insolvent and "en etat de disconfiture", but, the legal and financial difficulties had become so hopelessly involved, that the Court would not allow this course to be taken. Finally, the Court ordered that on January 5th, 1859, the railway be sold by the Sheriff and the proceeds be divided equitably among the various claimants.

If all bills had been paid, the cost of the line would have been about $400,000 but more than three-quarters of this remained unpaid. The road was bought by John J.C. Abbott, solicitor for the old Company, and a few associates, for the insignificant sum of $81,200 so it is obvious that a large amount of indebtedness was thus wiped out; as a result, the various classes of creditors lost heavily.

A new Company was incorporated on May 4th, 1859, under the name of Carillon & Grenville Railway; the line was rehabilitated and about 400 yards of additional trackage was laid to provide better connections with the steamboats at Carillon and Grenville.

The new Company had great plans; in 1860, it was given statutory authority to build eastward to a connection with the Grand Trunk Railway at Pointe Claire or Lachine and, if no other railway built to Ottawa within two years, it might extend westward to Ottawa as originally intended.

Bytown was renamed Ottawa on January 1st, 1855 and three years later, on December 31st, 1857, the Canadian Government was informed that Queen Victoria had chosen the little backwoods village to be the new capital. One American newspaper opined that it would be perfectly safe from attack, since any invading army would inevitably get lost in the woods hunting for it.

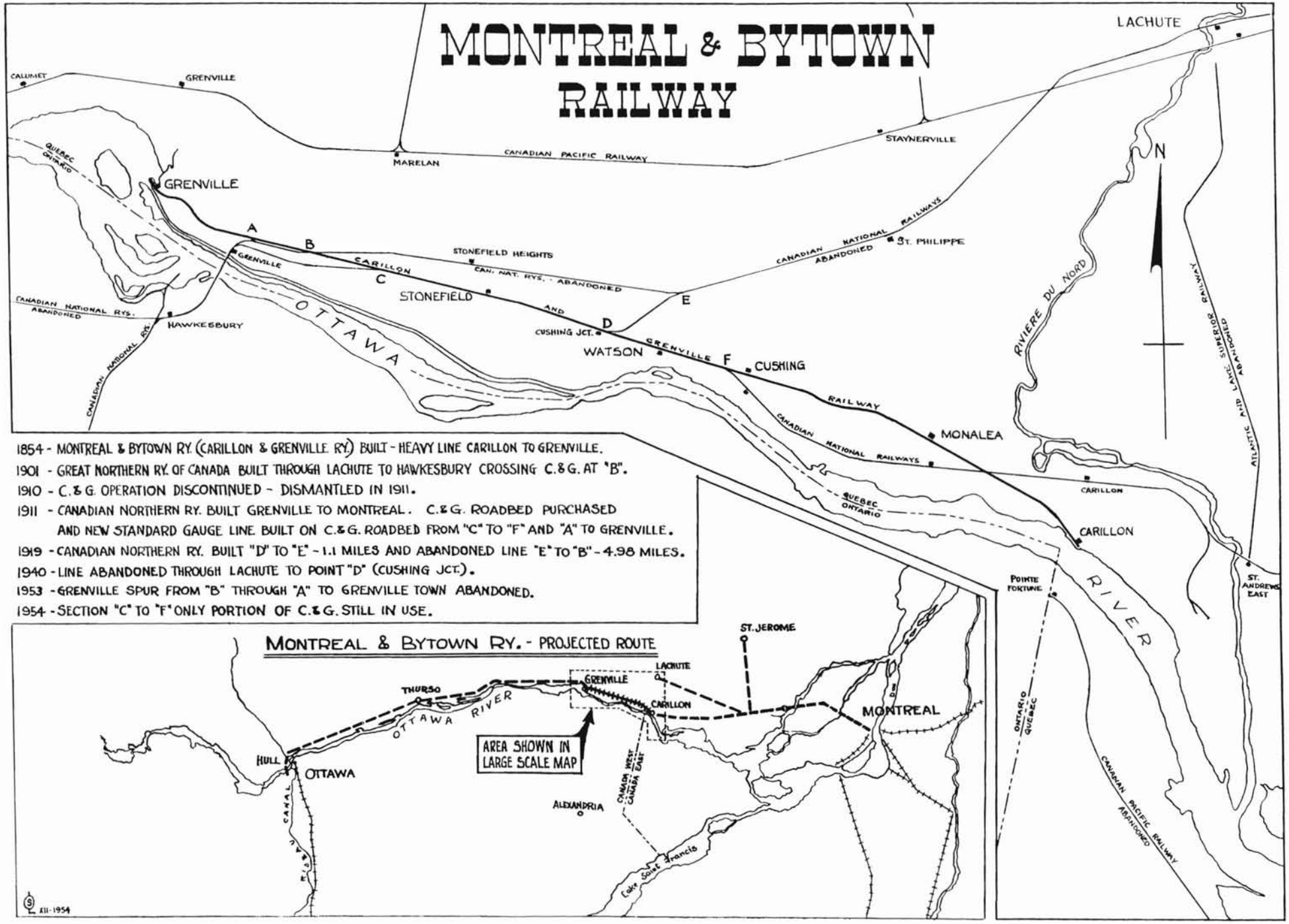
During ensuing years, passenger traffic on the Ottawa River increased enormously. The steamboats were large, fast and comfortable -- even luxurious -- and they competed with the railways for many years. The little portage railway should have prospered too but it had little freight traffic and its share of the through passenger fares was so small that it could do little more than pay operating expenses.

In 1864, Captain R. W. Shepherd, an employee of the Ottawa Steamers Company and a few associates, organized the Ottawa River Navigation Company, and, at the same time, they purchased the Carillon & Grenville Railway. The railway formed part of this route for nearly half a century; it was never modernized, and the antiquated broad-gauge locomotives and cars, built between 1854 and 1859 were a source of great interest to travellers. There were railway enthusiasts fifty, and even one hundred, years ago. The introduction of improved rail service by the Canada Atlantic Railway, and, a little later by the Canadian Pacific Railway, marked the beginning of the end and by the turn of the century, the heyday of steamboating was over. The destruction by fire of the beautiful steamer "Sovereign" in 1906 seemed to be the last straw.

Meanwhile, about 1890, a railway promoter named C.N.Armstrong conceived the idea of acquiring small existing lines, building missing links, and welding them into a through trunk line from Cæspe to Sault Ste. Marie. Known as the Atlantic & Lake Superior Railway -- and many other names -- it lacked sufficient capital and was foredoomed to failure. The link between Montreal and Ottawa (and it was to have been a high-speed electric line) was the Central Railway of Canada, incorporated in 1905. It bought the Ottawa River & Navigation Company and the Carillon & Grenville Ry. in 1907 and continued to operate them until the end of the 1910 season. However, having by then become involved in financial and legal difficulties, service on the last broad gauge line was abandoned. The railway lay idle until 1914, when it was bought by the Canadian Northern Railway, which modernized and reconditioned it as part of the new Montreal-Ottawa line.

An effort was made to preserve the old locomotives and rolling stock but the cost was excessive and the outbreak of World War I prevented further action. The engines and cars were sold to a junk dealer named Diamond, loaded on a barge and brought down to Montreal, where they were scrapped.

MONTREAL & BYTOWN RAILWAY



1854 - MONTREAL & BYTOWN RY. (CARILLON & GRENVILLE RY.) BUILT - HEAVY LINE CARILLON TO GRENVILLE.
1901 - GREAT NORTHERN RY. OF CANADA BUILT THROUGH LACHUTE TO HAWKESBURY CROSSING C.&G. AT "B".
1910 - C.&G. OPERATION DISCONTINUED - DISMANTLED IN 1911.
1911 - CANADIAN NORTHERN RY. BUILT GRENVILLE TO MONTREAL. C.&G. ROADBED PURCHASED AND NEW STANDARD GAUGE LINE BUILT ON C.&G. ROADBED FROM "C" TO "F" AND "A" TO GRENVILLE.
1919 - CANADIAN NORTHERN RY. BUILT "D" TO "E" - 1.1 MILES AND ABANDONED LINE "E" TO "B" - 4.98 MILES.
1940 - LINE ABANDONED THROUGH LACHUTE TO POINT "D" (CUSHING JCT.).
1953 - GRENVILLE SPUR FROM "B" THROUGH "A" TO GRENVILLE TOWN ABANDONED.
1954 - SECTION "C" TO "F" ONLY PORTION OF C.&G. STILL IN USE.

ROLLING STOCK

The first locomotive was the "Ottawa" built in 1854 by Kinmond Brothers of Montreal. It was 4-4-0 type, with 15x24" cylinders and 69" drivers. Badly damaged when the Carillon engine house was burned in 1895, it was not repaired and was broken up a few years later.

The "Grenville" was built in 1859 by Dan. C. Gunn of Hamilton, C.W. It was 4-4-0 type with 12x18" cylinders and 57" drivers. Its leading wheels did not swivel but were rigidly attached to the main frame. It was in regular service until September 1910.

The "Firefly" was a very small 0-4-0 inspection engine, with an upright boiler; it was not much bigger than a handcar. It was acquired in 1867 and scrapped in 1880 and it must have been a useless piece of equipment. It could not pull anything and presumably was used to carry distinguished passengers ahead of the regular train.

The"Carillon" was a Birkenhead built about 1856 by Peto & Co. Canada Works, Birkenhead, England. It was purchased from the Grand Trunk Railway about 1870. Originally 2-4-0, it was converted to 4-4-0 type in 1858-59. It had 16x20" cylinders and 60" drivers. After the Kinmond "Ottawa" was retired in 1895, the "Carillon" was renamed "Ottawa" and it continued running until 1910.

The original cars, built in 1854 probably by McLean and Wright of Montreal, continued in use until 1910. About 1858, one passenger car and one platform car were converted into baggage cars.

For many years the road was "owned" by John Halsey, who functioned as General Manager, Superintendent, Master Mechanic, Road Master and engine driver. He was one of those old-fashioned mechanical geniuses who, with a hammer, a cold chisel and a file, could almost build a locomotive. He was well-known at the GTR's Pointe St. Charles shops, which he visited two or three times a year to "borrow" salvage parts from scrapped locomotives to be used to keep his own engines in running order.

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