

## 23b The Port Hope, Lindsay & Beaverton Railway (PHL&B)

### BACKGROUND

In 1849 the Province of Canada passed the Railway Guarantee Act for loan interest on the construction of railways not less than 75 miles in length. It was this legislation that triggered Canada's railway building boom. To obtain the financial benefits of the 1849 Railway Guarantee Act, any qualifying railway had to build to the 5' 6" "Broad" or "Provincial" gauge, rather than to the emerging 4'8½" Standard Gauge. This shortsighted requirement proved to have short-term consequences for the PHL&B, and long-term ones generally.

### THE RAILWAY

All of the emerging towns along the Lake Ontario shoreline had a steadfast belief in the superiority of their respective harbours, saw the benefits that were already accruing to Hamilton and Toronto, and were actively sizing up opportunities to develop their local economies from the "hinterland" that was ripe for tapping.

The PHL&B was originally chartered in 1846 as the Peterborough & Port Hope Railway (P&PH), with the same aims that neighbouring Cobourg had for its faltering project to Peterborough across Rice Lake. The Port Hope railway on the other hand called for a route via Bewdley at the southerly tip of Rice Lake. Port Hope's ambition got underway in 1854, when the P&PH re-incorporated as the PHL&B with a new focus on a portage railway from Lake Simcoe to Lake Ontario. Construction reached Reaboro in December 1856, and Cunningham Corners just southeast of Lindsay in August 1857. The first train arrived in Lindsay at the St. Paul and King Streets station on the east side of the Scugog River on October 16, 1857, and the line as far as Lindsay was officially opened on December 30, 1857.

The Port Hope promoters never lost sight of their original plan to make a connection to Peterborough. While that city had initially been served reasonably well by the rival Cobourg & Peterborough Railway (C&P), the difficulties with that line across Rice Lake had worsened, and every winter month increased the uncertainties. So, in 1857 Port Hope arranged to have a branch constructed into Peterborough, which was shrewdly advertised as "the reliable route to Peterborough". On May 12 1858, the first train from Millbrook Junction appeared in Peterborough, and this branch was officially opened for traffic eight days later. Thus, the PHL&B entrenched itself in the very heart of Peterborough with a large tract of land bounded by Charlotte, Bethune, Sherbrooke and Aylmer Streets. A station and yards were built in expectation of the business to be had.

With further extension already in mind, the PHL&B negotiated unsuccessfully with the C&P for its spur to Nassau as a continuum of a line to reach Lakefield. With an eventual parliamentary ruling in its favour, the PHL&B extended the spur it had already prepared at the northerly end of its Bethune St. terminus, to cross the Otonabee River at Auburn Mills and assume the needed portion of the C&P spur. (The line to Lakefield was eventually completed and opened for traffic in 1871.)

As for the mainline to Lindsay, it is not clear why there was such a long interval between arrival there in 1857, and continuation to Beaverton in 1871. The probable reasons are likely the financial and business uncertainties arising from the general rapid railway development of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, specifically the consequent need for financing, and innate civic caution instilled by mistakes that had already become evident. The increase in grain prices resulting from the Crimean War had been a stimulant for railway investment, but the challenges created by the Provincial Gauge were already starting to haunt the railway community.

Baron Adolph von Hugel was a late newcomer to Port Hope's interests. Born in Strasbourg France, in 1828, he emigrated to the United States of America, and came to Canada around 1863 to become a person of influence in Port Hope affairs. In 1872, he bought a controlling interest from D'Arcy Boulton, the Cobourg line's principal promoter, and became president of the PHL&B. then still a lucrative investment.

The Port Hope, Lindsay & Beaverton Railway became the Midland Railway of Canada in 1869 to reflect its broadening ambition to reach Georgian Bay. Still on the Provincial Gauge, the railway reached Beaverton in 1871, and Port Hope's expanded ambitions were consummated with extension to Orillia in 1873, to Wau-bashene in 1875, and on to Midland in 1879.

The timing of von Hugel's assumption of control at the Midland was unfortunate, as it was shortly followed by the major 1873 North American financial downturn, and the consequent erosion of the Midland's profitability, to which a major contributing factor was the inevitable cost of conversion to the standard gauge in 1874 that was propelled by the Grand Trunk Railway's conversion to the same gauge. If the mainline artery changes, can any branchline that wants to survive, be far behind? Von Hugel fought bravely on, but railway politics were no longer local, and by 1878 he was physically and financially exhausted.

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Around the time of the completion of the line to Midland, the ambitious interests under the directorship of several-times mayor of Peterborough, George A. Cox, had taken control.

In that age, railways exercised power, and power was certainly to be had with the right promotion of railways. George Cox understood that reality, and he learned quickly how to work those levers of power. He had had a humble beginning as a telegraph operator in Colborne, Ont., but he had business acumen, and on moving to Peterborough, he gained the confidence of influential area families. He had been a director of the Midland Railway for three years when he took over the reins from von Hugel. He went to work most energetically to consolidate the surrounding pioneer lines, and with the original Midland Railway as the nucleus, he brought about a unified regional railway system with its hub at Peterborough, which was accomplished in 1881/2.

There is some speculation, but uncertainty, as to Cox's exact relationship with the GTR, but Cox was an entrepreneur, not a professional railroad man. Certainly, he was on friendly terms with the GTR. While economic reasons were at play for the consolidation of the Midland Railway system, politically for the GTR the Midland was a strategic bulwark in its futile struggle to block the inevitable entry of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) into Ontario.

As it happened, the CPR succeeded brilliantly in its thrust into the heartland of Ontario in 1884 by means of its cat's-paw Ontario & Quebec Railway (O&Q). Whatever the exact nature of the Cox-GTR relationship, on September 22, 1883, the Midland system that Cox had so deftly and assiduously assembled, passed officially into the control of the GTR, and George Cox moved to Toronto to further his own ambitions.

**Abandonments:** Port Hope to Millbrook 1957 Millbrook to Peterborough 1964 Millbrook to Omemee 1927 Omemee (Peterborough) to Lindsay 1989 Lindsay to Orillia 1966 Orillia to Uthoff 1993 Uthoff to Midland 1992.

**Sources and recommendations for further reading:**

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