

# "IN THE DRINK" FOR OVER 100 YEARS

BY SANDY WORTHEN AND RAY CORLEY

Prefacing the following account, here is a part of the introduction to an article titled "The Trent River Ore Cars", by Arthur D. Dunn, P. Eng., of Ottawa, printed in the Bulletin of the Metallurgical Society of the Canadian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy (CIM), May, 1981:

"There is often a desire to follow some of the more outrageous leads in any investigation, even though they might in the first place appear to be somewhat in variance to the original intent of the enquiry: at times the lead takes one along a path that at first appears to be quite separate, but is indeed a part of the story that is to be followed. Such a case was the case of the lost ore cars of the Blairton Iron Mine at Trent River".

In the early part of Queen Victoria's reign (1834), eight landowners in the district of Newcastle, now part of Northumberland County, incorporated the Cobourg Rail Road Company. This charter was one of the two earliest railway charters in Upper Canada, today's Province of Ontario. This railway, with 27 miles opened in 1856 as the Cobourg and Peterborough Ry., and its successors, were never profitable enterprises. By 1865, the owners thought that a merger with the Marmora Iron Works would provide increased revenues from the iron ore shipments from the mines in the district.

So, in 1866, the Cobourg, Peterborough and Marmora Ry. and Mining Co. was formed and in Canada's Confederation Year (1867) a railway was completed from Trent Bridge ("The Narrows") on the Trent River eight and a half miles north-east to the Blairton Mine. The first shipment of iron ore went out by rail that autumn.

A special pier had been built at Trent Bridge so that the loaded ore cars could be run out on it and their contents dumped onto barges for the trip up the river to the outlet of Rice Lake at Hastings, where the locks between the river and the lake had been widened to accommodate the tugboat "Isaac Butts". The barges were towed up the lake to Harwood where they were off-loaded into hopper cars for the rail journey to Cobourg and thence by lake steamer to Charlotte, New York.

It was obvious by 1883 that the iron ore traffic had not and would not develop, and ore shipments ceased when trains were taken off the Blairton Branch. The Company's bondholders took the expected action and auctioned off the whole operation in April, 1886 to one T.P. Pearce for \$30,200. A year later a new company, the Cobourg, Blairton and Marmora Ry. and Mining Co. emerged to assume the residual assets.

When the Canadian Pacific was building its Ontario and Quebec Ry. through the county in the late 1880's, a Mr. E.C. Garlick, mining engineer and metallurgist of Cleveland, Ohio, intervened on behalf of Mr. T.D. Ledyard of Toronto, who owned deposits of iron ore located just north of Blairton near Crow Lake. Mr. Garlick advocated the connection of the northern portion of the Blairton Ry. to the Ontario and Quebec line and the continuation of the former to Crow Lake. It was obvious that the part of the isolated mine railway from the O&Q crossing to Trent River would be of no further use. W.C. (later Sir William) Van Horne did not respond to these recommendations.

The portion of the mine railway from Trent River to the O&Q crossing was removed in 1887 and the Grand Trunk Railway Company of Canada took control on April 1, 1893, officially abandoning and lifting the remaining three miles of the derelict route.

The Cobourgers, undaunted, tried to raise money from the Municipality, predictably without success. After the Company disappeared in the general amalgamation of Grand Trunk short lines, the latter abandoned the 15 remaining miles of the original Cobourg and Peterborough route from Cobourg to Rice Lake on Dec. 31, 1895.

At the time, it seemed as though this was the last of the physical assets of the Cobourg and Peterborough enterprise and the Blairton mining railway, but it wasn't. In his article, mentioned previously, Mr. Arthur Dunn described how the Blairton-Trent Bridge-Hastings-Harwood-Cobourg route was used from 1868 to 1879. After that, there was an anonymous newspaper account dated Aug. 9, 1881 which read as follows:

"The third and last victim (at the Blairton Mine) was Samuel Bray, an old pensioner of the British Army, who took pride in showing many scars received in fierce engagements in six years, his last being in the taking of Alma Heights in the Crimean War. Bray was drowned at the dumping ground at Trent Bridge. The track over the piers and dump openings was raised to allow the scows to go under and so receive the ore dumped from the cars. The train in question was nearly unloaded, and the boy, who was firing, made

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several useless attempts to push the remaining loaded cars to the dumping. The engineer, who was amusing himself a few rods away, became angered at the necessity of being disturbed, took charge of the engine and, with language too unsavoury for your columns prefacing the expression 'I'll put them up', put on fearful speed, knocking away the guard construction and plunging five empty cars over the outer pier".

Thereafter, the five empty ore cars lay in and on the bottom of the river at Trent Bridge until Canada's Centennial of Confederation in 1967. In that centennial summer, some scuba divers, exploring the river bottom near the remains of the old railway pier, came upon some wheeled objects in the mud. As no one in the town seemed to know anything about them, inquiries were made in Peterborough; the artifacts apparently being of railway origin, Mr. Ray Corley was contacted and invited to the site and his opinion was requested. The remains of the "vehicles" could not be examined and so only conjectures were possible. Unfortunately, in the preoccupation with the country's centennial, no funds or volunteer manpower were available to raise one or all of the objects from the river.

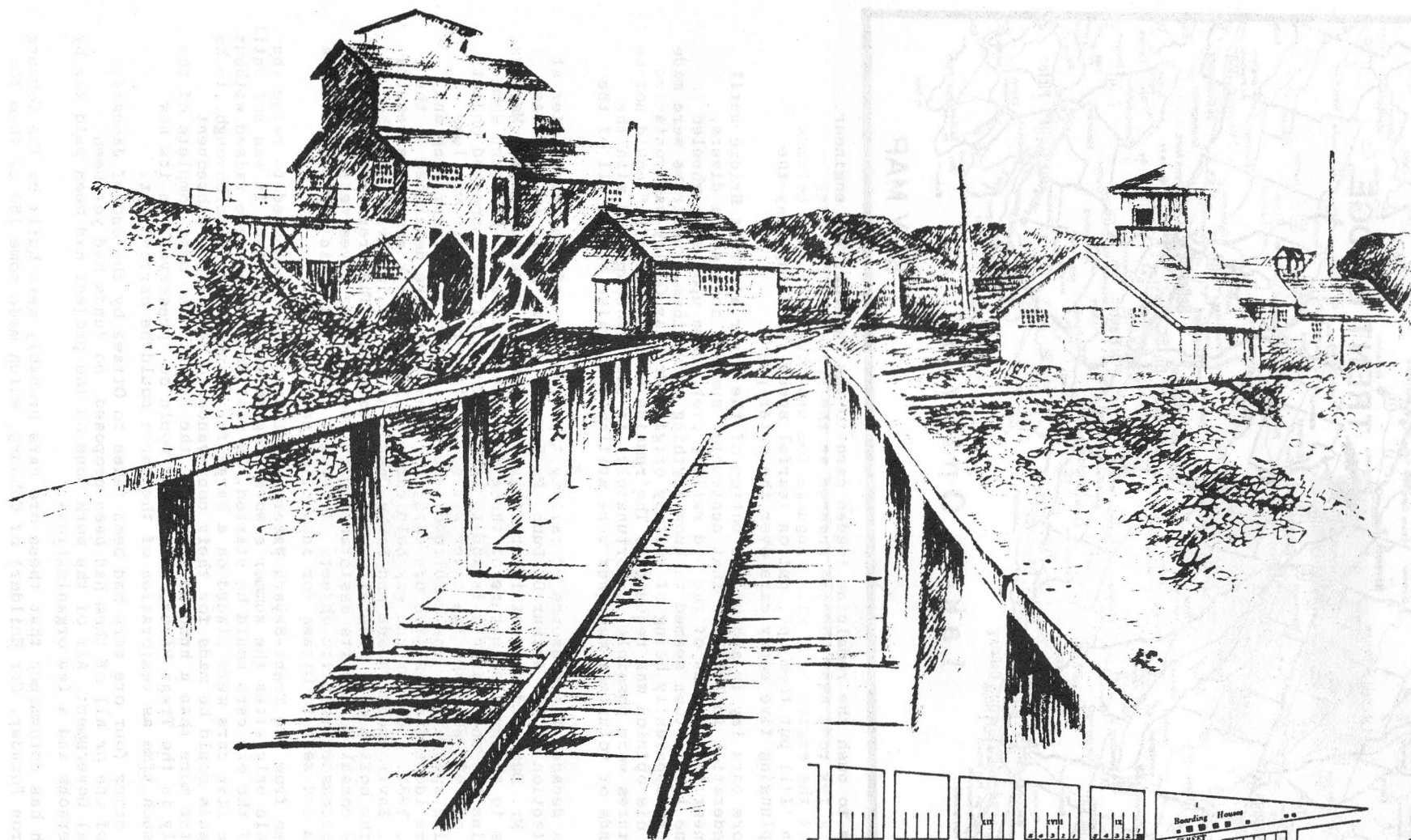
After a lapse of more than a decade, the presence of railway type vehicles off the river pier at Trent Bridge came to the attention of Mr. Arthur D. Dunn, P. Eng. of Ottawa early in 1979. As an industrial archeologist, Mr. Dunn had a great interest in the iron ore workings in the Marmora region and he was curious as to the precise nature of these submerged artifacts. He asked some scuba diver friends to examine the underwater site and to take pictures of any submerged objects. This was done in the winter of 1979-80, when the river water was clearer and there was less interference from well-meaning spectators. The results of the examination were surprising and encouraging. The objects were identified as five ore cars, the ones that were described in the newspaper account of August, 1881. A conference was held early in 1980 to talk about the results and to plan future strategy. Environment Canada and Parks Canada had to be involved, for the submerged ore cars were at the bottom of a Federally controlled waterway. The Trent-Severn Waterway Authority had to be consulted and its assistance obtained. Further dives were necessary to retrieve samples of any accessory metallic objects. A wrought iron link chain and a piece of a brass bearing were recovered and sent to Ottawa for inspection and analysis.

The use of the floating crane from the Trent-Severn Waterway Authority was requested to raise the ore cars, but it was available only after the summer's work program was completed. It was not until Oct. 8, 1980 that lifting of the ore cars could be started. On that date, they were raised without much difficulty. Four of the five cars were placed on a barge for transport to Peterborough, to be stored there until arrangements could be made for their conveyance to Ottawa for subsequent restoration and display, after more than a hundred years "in the drink". The most complete of the five cars was replaced gently in the Trent River, so that it would be "preserved" in its now natural surroundings until such time as restoration of the parts could be carried out.

The remains of three of the other four ore cars had been taken to Ottawa by the end of January, 1983. While reconstruction of one or all of them had been proposed, no funds had yet been allocated by Canada's Federal Government. All of the work done on the project had been paid for by donations from interested persons and a few organizations.

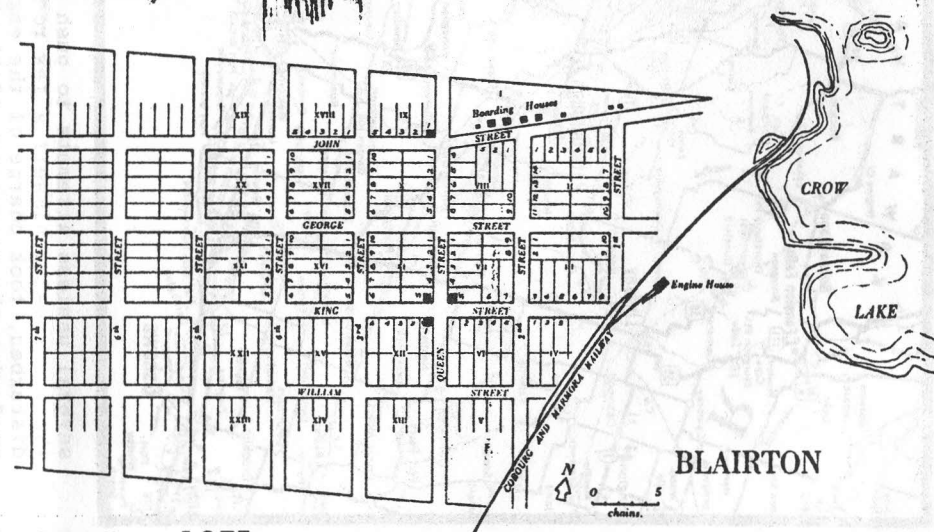
To date, Mr. Dunn's research has determined that these ore cars probably were built by the Cobourg Car Works (James Crossen, Iron Founder, Car Builder) of Cobourg, which made some 150 of them for



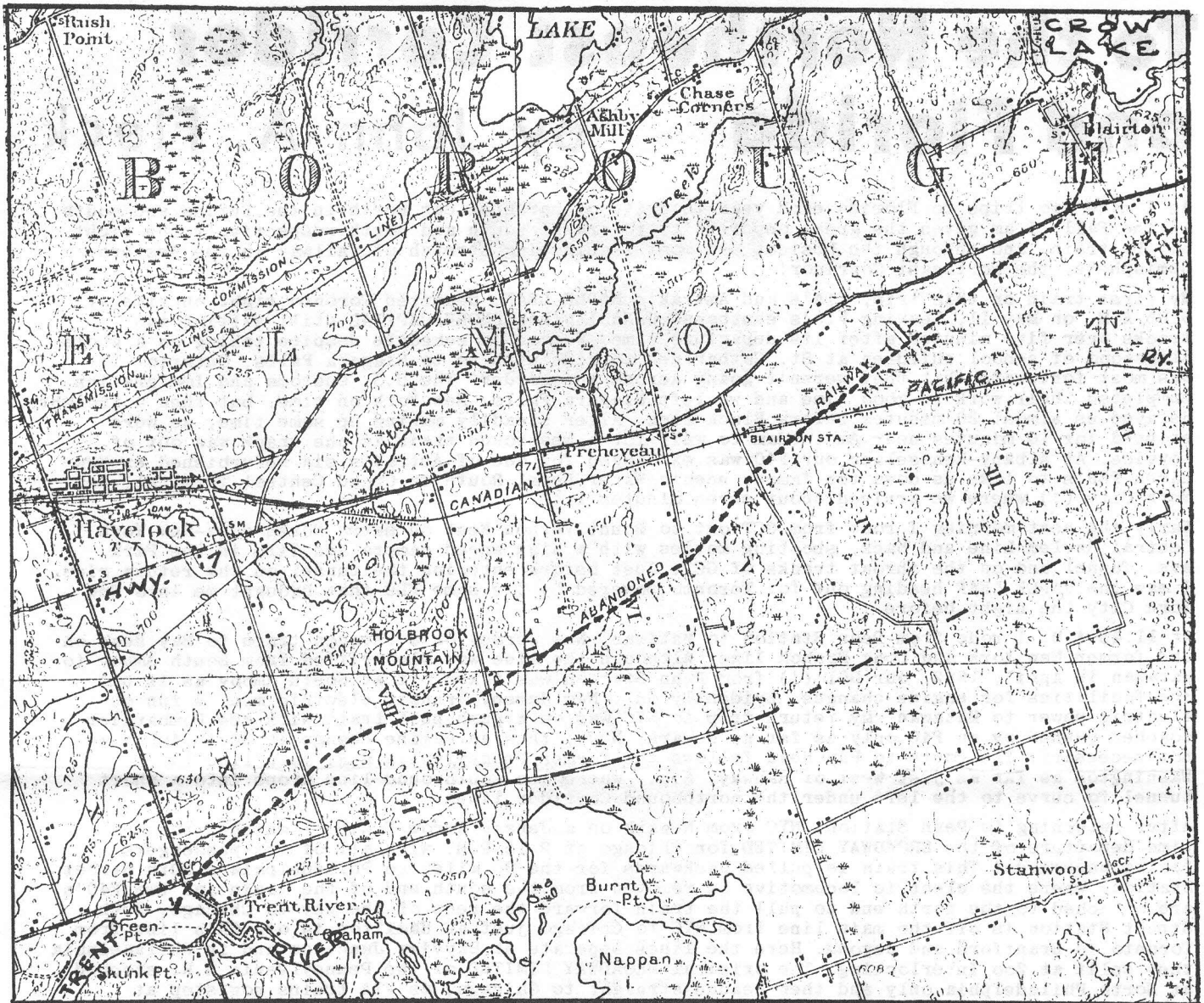


Above: Sketch of the shaft house at Blairton Mine. Trackage of the Cobourg, Peterborough and Marmora Ry. shows in the foreground.

Right: Town plot of Blairton, showing the alignment of the CP&M to the terminus on Crow Lake. Note the "Engine House" indicated near the east end of King St.



Both items from Historical Atlas of Peterborough County, 1875



Section of National Topographic Series Map Sheet 31C-5 showing the route of the Cobourg, Peterborough and Marmora Ry. ("Abandoned Railway") from Trent Bridge (Trent River) to Crow Lake.

the Cobourg, Peterborough and Marmora Ry. and Mining Co. of 1866. Some of the castings may have been made at the Helm Foundry, Port Hope, Ontario, but some of the wheel castings were made by the McDougall Co. of Montreal. Pig iron for these castings most probably came from Les Forges du St-Maurice, north of Trois-Rivieres, Quebec.

When the remains of the ore cars were raised, with all the attendant mud and rust, the measured distance between the wheel flanges was six feet, three inches, according to Mr. Dunn. This is greater than the gauge of the original Cobourg and Peterborough Ry., which was five feet, six inches. The newspaper account cited by Mr. Dunn also speaks of an engine. Where did it come from and where did it go?

It is hoped that one of these ore cars, when reconstructed, can be displayed in the Museum of Science and Technology, National Museums of Canada, in Ottawa. In the meantime, perhaps additional information about the Blairton mining railway, its motive power and its hundred year old ore cars, may come to light.

The assistance of Mr. Arthur D. Dunn, P. Eng., in the preparation of this report is acknowledged.

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