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# A Second Look at Canada's First Railway Timetable

by Herb MacDonald

	
<b>THE CHAMPLAIN AND ST. LAWRENCE RAILROAD COMPANY.</b>	
<b>I</b> N connection with the Steamer PRINCESS VICTORIA, will be prepared to convey Passengers between MONTREAL and ST. JOHNS, on MONDAY, the 25th inst., as follows:—	
<b>Steamer.</b> FROM MONTREAL. 8 o'clock, A. M. 2 do P. M. 4 do P. M.	<b>Locomotive.</b> FROM LAPRAIRIE. 9 o'clock, A. M. 5 do P. M.
<b>Locomotive.</b> FROM ST. JOHNS. 8 o'clock, A. M. 2 do P. M.	<b>Steamer</b> FROM LAPRAIRIE. 6 o'clock, A. M. 9 do A. M. 3 do P. M.
July 23, 1836.	103

	
<b>THE CHAMPLAIN AND ST. LAWRENCE RAILROAD COMPANY,</b>	
<b>I</b> N connection with the Steamer PRINCESS VICTORIA, is now prepared to convey Passengers between MONTREAL and ST. JOHNS, as follows:—	
<b>Steamer from Montreal.</b> 8 o'clock A. M. 3 do P. M. 5 do P. M.	<b>Cars from Laprairie.</b> 9 o'clock, A. M. 6 do P. M.
<b>Cars from St. Johns.</b> 7 o'clock, A. M. 2 do P. M.	<b>Steamer from Laprairie.</b> 6 o'clock, A. M. 9 do A. M. 4 do P. M.
Fare to St. Johns, 5s, including baggage not exceeding 60 lbs. Passengers leaving Montreal at eight o'clock, will be in time for the Lake Champlain boats.	
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The "Morning Courier", Saturday, July 23 and Monday, July 25 1836. At that time the "Courier" published daily except Sunday.

The "Morning Courier", Tuesday, July 26, Wednesday, July 27, Thursday, July 28, 1836. Five time changes had been made since the first published timetable.

The introduction of public service by the Champlain & St. Lawrence in 1836 marked the beginning of the railway revolution in Canada. For passengers, the C&SL introduced all the obvious new experiences for people who had never seen a train in operation let alone traveled on one. In addition, it also seems likely that on the first day or two of service some adventurous traveler had the dubious distinction of becoming the first person in Canada to miss a train or a ferry because of an inaccurate railway timetable. Unheralded and unsung in the annals of our railway history, it is probable that at least one frustrated individual must have stood in amazement on either a C&SL station platform or one of the docks for the Laprairie-Montreal steamer after being told, "Sorry, it left an hour ago."

How could there have been any doubt about departure times for the C&SL service? The line's "first timetable" has been widely reproduced in both general surveys<sup>1</sup> and specialized works about the C&SL<sup>2</sup> over the last 65 years. This timetable is almost as well known an image as the famous photo of Donald Smith and friends at Craigellachie in 1885. This timetable, which I will refer to

as the "traditional" version, first appeared in the Montreal *Morning Courier* on Saturday, July 23 and again on the morning of Monday, July 25, the day when C&SL public service started. The Montreal *Gazette* of the 23rd also carried a timetable with the same departure times as those appearing in that day's *Courier* though I have seen no example of the *Gazette* printing being reproduced<sup>3</sup>. There is no doubt that these were Canada's first published timetables but it is uncertain if they actually reflected the C&SL schedule for the introduction of public service.

Problems regarding the times shown in those first published timetables appeared very quickly. On Tuesday, July 26, the second day of regular C&SL service, the *Courier* and the *Gazette* hit the streets of Montreal with timetables containing a number of changes. That day's *Courier* altered five of the original ten departure times. The *Gazette* of the 26th showed four of those changes in its printing. On Friday, July 29, the *Courier* reversed one of its changes and brought the two papers into agreement. The evolution of the sets of advertisements is shown in the reproductions from the two papers.





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<b>Steamer from Montreal.</b>	<b>Cars from Laprairie.</b>
8 o'clock, A. M.	9 o'clock, A. M.
2 do P. M.	
5 do P. M.	6 do P. M.
<b>Cars from St. Johns.</b>	<b>Steamer from Laprairie.</b>
	6 o'clock, A. M.
7 o'clock, A. M.	9 do A. M.
9 do P. M.	4 do P. M.

Fare to St. Johns, 5s, including baggage not exceeding 60 lbs.  
 Passengers leaving Montreal at eight o'clock, will be in time for the Lake Champlain boats.  
**July 23, 1836. 103**

The "Morning Courier", Friday, July 29, 1836 and following. One time change has been reversed. The times shown here were retained through August.

After July 29, the times advertised for Monday-Saturday service stayed the same in both the *Courier* and the *Gazette* till the beginning of September though alterations regarding fares and Sunday service were made in August printings of the timetable<sup>4</sup>.

Could the changes which appeared over the period July 26-29 have affected travelers? Most definitely! The alterations were not great, only an hour in each case, but showing up to catch a train or ferry an hour after departure time was probably as high risk an activity in 1836 as it is in 2002.

I have been unable to locate original C&SL documents to shed light on the schedule(s) actually followed during the first week of service. As a result, we have to assess what the available newspaper evidence tells us. Since the advertised departure times remained the same for over a month following the confusion of the first week of service, two alternate conclusions can be drawn.

One possibility is that the schedule followed on the first day or two of service was that advertised prior to July 26 with changes being made over the next few days. If that schedule had been followed on even the second day of service, however, someone depending on the times printed in the *Courier* and the *Gazette* on the 26th would have been an hour early for the morning train from St. Johns. At the end of the day, however, the real problems would have appeared. A *Courier* reader would have been an hour late for the last three ferry runs and the last train south from Laprairie. A *Gazette* reader would have fared slightly better, missing only the last two ferries or the afternoon train from Laprairie.

The other possibility is that the first published set of times was in fact incorrect, presumably a result of an error by the C&SL since the likelihood of the *Gazette* and *Courier* making almost identical typographical mistakes seems remote. If this had been the case, passengers depending on the times shown prior to the 26<sup>th</sup> in the *Gazette* or the *Courier* would have arrived too early for departures at the end of the day and too late for the morning train from St. Johns.

Which was the case? As a point of historical detail, it doesn't matter at all. Even in a worst case scenario, few people would have been affected during those first few days of service. The problem would surely have been considered as just one of the minor birth pangs of the railway and blame would probably have been attributed to whichever newspaper had provided affected passengers with the incorrect information. In perspective, the contradictions among the timetables over that first week are little more than amusing sidebars about the beginning of railway operations in Canada.

At another level, however, one could suggest that this confusion has some significance – as an indicator of the pitfalls awaiting the reader or writer of railway history.

The written history of the origins and opening of the C&SL has six core components, the five works identified in footnote # 2 plus the chapter on the C&SL in GJJ Tulchinsky's *The River Barons*<sup>5</sup>. In all except Tulchinsky (who did not use any illustrations), the "traditional" timetable, as originally printed in the *Courier*, was reproduced and identified as Canada's "first timetable" without recognition of the fact that it had an "in print" life of only 72 hours.

Four of the five works (Brown, Gillam, Cinq-Mars, and the Mikas) credit "CN" or "CN Archives" as the immediate source of the timetable reproduced. But when the question of where the timetable originally appeared arises, we find considerable uncertainty. Angus, Brown, Gillam, and Cinq-Mars all provide an "original source" in imprecise ways rather than by identifying the timetable as from the *Courier*. Angus, for example, notes it on page 11 as having been "published in the newspapers starting on July 23, 1836." Brown's earlier attribution had been similar, describing the illustration as having been "in the various newspapers." The Mikas, however, on page 35 opposite their illustration, state that "the company placed in the Montreal *Gazette* a timetable, the first ever published in Canada." While it is true that the Mikas do not explicitly state that the illustration they offered actually came from the *Gazette*, the reader is certainly left with this incorrect impression.

The fact that the illustration of the "traditional" first timetable has reigned almost supreme since 1936 points out the risks inherent in accepting secondary works that have not been checked against the primary sources. One could also suggest that any writer working on the C&SL really should have been looking at both the *Gazette* and the *Courier* as obvious critical sources for the subject matter. Had any done so, the original source of the "CN" copy of the timetable, the printing of another copy of that timetable in the *Gazette* of July 23, and the appearance of the post-July 25 revisions with their changes to the schedule should have all emerged as points to deal with.





### The Champlain & St. Lawrence Railroad Company,

**I**N connection with the Steamer *Princess Victoria* will be prepared to convey Passengers between MONTREAL and ST. JOHNS' on MONDAY, the 25th inst., as follows :—

STEAMER.	LOCOMOTIVE.
From Montreal.	From Laprairie.
8 o'clock, A. M.	9 o'clock, A. M.
2 o'clock, P. M.	
4 o'clock, P. M.	5 o'clock, P. M.

LOCOMOTIVE.	STEAMER.
From St. Johns.	From Laprairie.
8 o'clock, A. M.	6 o'clock, A. M.
2 o'clock, P. M.	9 o'clock, A. M.
	3 o'clock, P. M.

Fare to St. Johns, Sa. including baggage not exceeding 60 lbs.

Passengers leaving MONTREAL at eight o'clock, will be in time for the *Lake Champlain* boats at Ten.  
July 23.



### The Champlain & St. Lawrence Railroad Company,

**I**N connection with the Steamer *Princess Victoria* will be prepared to convey Passengers between MONTREAL and ST. JOHNS' on MONDAY, the 25th inst., as follows :—

STEAMER.	CARS.
From Montreal.	From Laprairie.
8 o'clock, A. M.	9 o'clock, A. M.
2 o'clock, P. M.	
5 o'clock, P. M.	6 o'clock, P. M.

CARS.	STEAMER.
From St. Johns.	From Laprairie.
7 o'clock, A. M.	6 o'clock, A. M.
2 o'clock, P. M.	9 o'clock, A. M.
	4 o'clock, P. M.

Fare to St. Johns, Sa. including baggage not exceeding 60 lbs.

Passengers leaving MONTREAL at eight o'clock, will be in time for the *Lake Champlain* boats at Ten.  
July 23.

The "Montreal Gazette", Saturday, July 23, 1836. At that time the "Gazette" published on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. Note the mis-spelling of "Lawrence".

This observation is supplemented by the fact that the final form of the post-July 25 "revised" timetable was identified as the original schedule in JB Thomson's 1971 study of Jason Pierce<sup>6</sup>. Thompson, however, presented his timetable details (covering the full period 1836-51) as a data table and we must recall the old adage about the power of illustrations over text or tables. Angus, Gillam, Cinq-Mars, and the Mikas all went to press without noticing that their "first timetable" didn't match the "first" times identified in Thompson's paper.

Which timetable was actually followed by the C&SL on opening day? We don't know. I personally believe that the odds are in favour of the final "revised" version with its four changes, primarily because of the fact that once those changes appear, starting with the *Gazette* on the second day of service on the 26<sup>th</sup>, they remained in all the known advertisements till the beginning of September<sup>7</sup>. The fact that the *Gazette* printing of July 26 made changes to the times without fixing the "Lawrence" typographical error also seems to say something about the relative importance of the times being shown. It is conjecture but it does not seem likely that the "traditional" schedule's times would have been used on opening day and changed by the company within a day or two<sup>8</sup>. Thompson's 1971 data table ignored the times shown in the "traditional" timetable, presumably a result of a similar conclusion. It seems to me quite likely that Thompson got it right in 1971 and those who reproduced the "traditional" timetable since then got it wrong, a result of ignoring Thompson's details and not reviewing the available newspapers.

The "Montreal Gazette", Tuesday, July 26, 1836. Four time changes were made but the mis-spelling remained. These times were retained through August.

As noted previously, the question of which schedule was actually followed by the C&SL on opening day is of little consequence. But the fact that the question has never been raised has implications for the methodology often used in recording the history of Canadian railways.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See for example, N & H Mika, *Railways of Canada: A Pictorial History*, Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1972, p 19.

<sup>2</sup> See RR Brown, "The Champlain & St. Lawrence," *Bulletin of the Railway & Locomotive Historical Society*, # 39, 1936, p 8b; N & H Mika, *Canada's First Railway*, Belleville: Mika, 1985, p 34; LF Gillam, *The Champlain & St. Lawrence Railroad*, Rotherham, Yorkshire: undated, (c 1986), p 31; F Cinq-Mars, *L'Avenement du Premier Chemin de Fer au Canada*, St Jean sur Richelieu: Editions Mille Roches, 1986, p 155; FF Angus, ed., *1836-1986: A Tribute to Canada's First Railway on its Sesquicentennial*, St. Constant: CRHA, 1986, p 21. (The Angus volume includes a collection of papers from several decades of *Canadian Rail*. Only one of these papers is directly relevant to the timetable affair. It will be referred to below while the rest of the *Canadian Rail* papers are consolidated for the purpose of this note in the Angus collection.)



<sup>3</sup> This may be a result of the fact that a copy of the July 23rd *Gazette* containing the timetable is hard to come by. The readily available microfilm copy (as filmed by the Canadian Library Association in 1958) has the issue of July 23 but the copy used had the timetable neatly removed prior to filming. A complete original copy has been located in the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec in Montreal and was the source of the first of the three timetables reproduced here from the *Gazette*.


<sup>4</sup> The *Gazette* revision with these additional changes, first printed on August 6, has also been inaccurately reproduced as "our first rail timetable." See Via Rail Canada, *Rails Across Canada: 150 Years of Passenger Train History*, 1986, p 19.

<sup>5</sup> Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977, chapter 7, pp 107-125

<sup>6</sup> "Jason C. Pierce: The Man and the Machine," *Canadian Rail*, 229, February, 1971; see Appendix IV, p 52, for Thompson's details regarding C&SL schedules drawn from the *Gazette*. See Angus, 1986, p 21, for the schedules within his reprint of Thompson's paper.

<sup>7</sup> In addition to the *Gazette* and the *Courier* from June to September, the only other paper I have been able to fully review was *The Vindicator*. It is not surprising that this "radical" paper did not receive any advertising revenue from the C&SL. I have been able to locate only partial runs of the *Herald* and the *Transcript* and can't say with certainty that those papers could not make additional contributions to interpreting the timetable affair. Given the fact, however, that the *Gazette* and *Courier* appear to have been the dominant English-language papers of the day and carried much more in the way of business news and advertising, I feel confident that they provide the critical evidence needed to assess the case of the "first timetable." The French-language papers, I should note, have not been reviewed in a comprehensive way but those examined have not brought any additional light to bear on the subject.

<sup>8</sup> This assumption rejects the possibility of the timetable changes made after July 25 being triggered by the fact that



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**I**N connection with the Steamer *Princess Victoria* will be prepared to convey passengers between MONTREAL, and ST. JOHNS on MONDAY, the 25th inst., as follows:

STEAMER.	CARR.
<i>From Montreal.</i> 8 o'clock, A. M. 2 o'clock, P. M. 5 o'clock, P. M.	<i>From Liverpool.</i> 9 o'clock, A. M. 6 o'clock, P. M.

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CARR.	STEAMER.
<i>From St. Johns.</i> 7 o'clock, A. M. 2 o'clock, P. M.	<i>From Liverpool.</i> 6 o'clock, A. M. 9 o'clock, A. M. 4 o'clock, P. M.

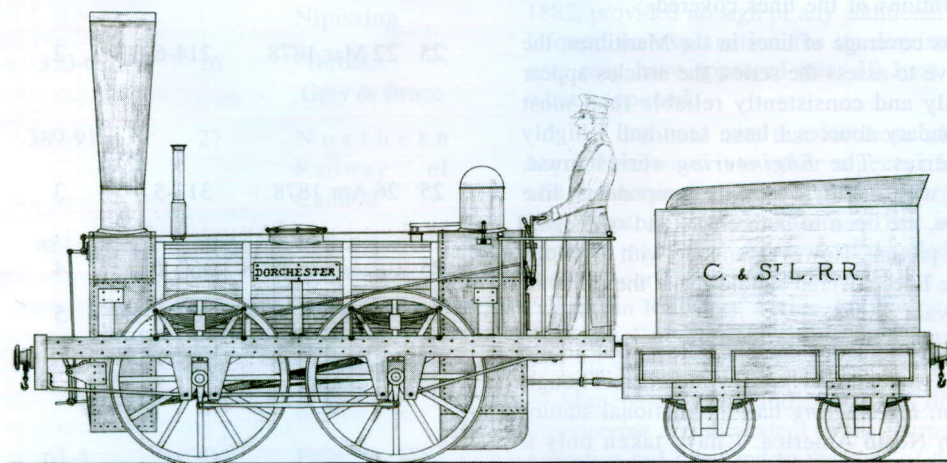
Fare to St. Johns, &c. including baggage not exceeding 60 lbs.

Passengers leaving MONTREAL at eight o'clock, will be in time for the *Lake Champlain* boats at Ten.

July 25.

The "Montreal Gazette", July 28, 1836 and following. The "Larwence" typo has been corrected.

the locomotive was out of service for an undetermined period after July 25. The *Gazette* of July 28 seems to indicate the engine went to the shop on the 26<sup>th</sup>. The return date is uncertain. It could have been as early as August 3 (see WD Lindsay's report to C&SL Annual Meeting in the *Gazette* of December 13) or as late as August 9 (see the *Gazette* of August 9). Regardless of the date, however, the "revised" timetable remained in effect when the engine returned. This makes me suspect that the revisions of July 26-29 did not have anything to do with the problems with the locomotive.



CHAMPLAIN AND ST. LAWRENCE RAILROAD  
LOCOMOTIVE "DORCHESTER"  
1836